NAVIGATING INDUSTRIAL ACTION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACADEMIC STAFF AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Industrial Action, Academic Staff, Student Performance, Tertiary Institutions, Adamawa State

Abstract

Research problem: *Industrial action is a perennial concern in Nigerian public tertiary institutions. It disrupts academic calendars, impedes staff productivity and affects students learning outcomes. The situation in Adamawa State is tied to poor funding, low salary, failure to implement agreements and lack of institutional autonomy, creating questions about the stability of higher education.*
Methods/theory: *The study was informed by Equity Theory and Tripartism framework. The descriptive survey design was adopted with a population of 43007 workers and students. A sample of 396 respondents was drawn using Taro Yamane algorithm and proportionate random selection. Data were acquired via questionnaire and interview and evaluated using descriptive statistics and chi-square.*
Results: *The results indicate that causes of industrial conflicts include bad salary, inadequate funding, failure to implement agreements, poor working conditions and lack institutional autonomy. Industrial action seriously affects staff productivity, interrupts research, delays academic calendars, undermines motivation and decreases service efficiency.*
Conclusion: *The study indicates that governance difficulties are the cause of the industrial action in Adamawa State tertiary institutions and that it*

has detrimental effects on the performance of academic staff and the stability of institutions.
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The study offers empirical evidence of the relationship between governance problems and labour issues to the continuous strikes and poor academic achievement.*
Recommendations: *The study recommends more financing, fair remuneration, stronger institutional autonomy and consistent implementation of agreements through effective engagement with stakeholders.*

Introduction

Throughout history, human societies have relied on social groups to organise work and safeguard members. These organisations have included guilds and communal employment arrangements, often regulated by cultural norms rather than official structures (Benson, 2002; De Ste. The structure of workplace relations was modified by Industrialisation and this led to the formation of modern trade unions in Europe and North America to fight for good wages, safe conditions and workers' rights through collective bargaining, strikes and political campaigning (Hobsbawm, 2021; Cole, 2021). Unions are faced with numerous challenges globally and even during post industrial economy requires collective respond from a broader social issue in contemporary society (Standing, 2023; Munck, 2020). Organize labour in Nigeria can be trace back to colonial period (Yesufu, 2023). Unions such as Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and TUC operate within a fragile and politically motivated environment characterized by unemployment and insecurity in Nigeria (Fajana, 2020). More so, union such as ASSU, ASUP and ASUCA have resorted to industrial actions to draw the attention of government to address the problems of their members (Ajetomobi&Ayanwale, 2009; Ajayi, 2000). Since the return of democracy in 1999 it has been characterize by terrible pay, terrible working conditions, inadequate funding and lack of autonomy are among the causes of industrial crises at Federal Polytechnic Mubi, College of Agriculture Ganye and Modibbo Adama University Yola, among others. Unions say these problems impair teaching and research, while the administration generally describes the disagreements as politically driven. This study is on the consequence of Industrial Action on Academic Staff and Students' performance in selected Adamawa State institutions. The disputes are set within the larger social, economic and political backdrop of the Nigerian tertiary education.

Statement of the Problem

The challenges of industrial action to Nigeria's higher education system are not new as the country's public tertiary institutions has seen numerous strikes over the years due to staff welfare requests that have not been addressed, bad working conditions, financial issues and unimplemented agreements (Akinwale, 2011; Otobo, 2016). These disputes are sometimes instigated by unions like ASUU, ASUP and COEASU and while they are a valid bargaining tactic, they undermine institutional stability, academic output and the quality of education (Yesufu, 1982; Fajana, 2000).

Institutions in Adamawa State such as Modibbo Adama University Yola, Federal Polytechnic Mubi and the College of Agriculture Ganye have gone on strike several times, including the eight-months ASUU nationwide strike in 2022, which has greatly disrupted

academic activities (Leadership News, 2025; Daily Trust, 2024). These disturbances have a profound impact on worker morale, teaching and research. Students have extended hours of study, less desire and less competitiveness in the employment market (Otobo, 2016; Okolie, 2010).

Studies have been conducted on industrial disputes at the national level, but specialised studies on Adamawa State are still rare. Most of the previous research ignore the peculiar institutional, socio-economic and regional elements that influence strikes in this environment. This study therefore seeks to fill this vacuum by investigating the causes, impacts and mitigation methods of industrial action at Federal Polytechnic Mubi, Modibbo Adama University Yola and the College of Agriculture Ganye. The research takes a comparative, multi-institutional approach to inform conflict management practices, restore institutional stability, promote staff productivity and improve student results in tertiary institutions in Adamawa State.

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to Navigate Industrial Action: Challenges and Opportunities for Academic Staff and Student Performance at Public Tertiary Institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The precise aims are:

i. To find out the reasons of industrial disputes in selected public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State.

ii. To study the impact of industrial disputes on the performance of academic personnel in these institutions.

Conceptual Clarification

Industrial Action

Industrial action is an important concept in labour relations. It refers to collective activities by employees (typically via unions) to voice concerns or demand better working conditions. The ILO (2018) describes it as "a concerted withdrawal of labour in order to improve terms of employment." In Nigeria, it is often regarded as strikes or other disruptive acts used by workers to compel employers or government to adhere to their demands (Yesufu, 1984; Fajana, 2000). It is consequently generally regarded as a consequence of stressed employer-employee relations with weak or inefficient negotiation procedures.Scholars further extend the idea to include activities like go-slows, work-to-rule, boycotts and partial withdrawal of services besides strikes (Otobo, 2016; Adewumi&Adenugba, 2010). In the education sector, particularly in Nigerian tertiary institutions, industrial action can take the form of refusal to teach, boycotting of examinations and suspension of administrative tasks.

But much of the work that does exist tends to focus narrowly on economic problems such as salaries, and to ignore the wider political, institutional and governance elements that contribute to industrial action. It also tends to portray industrial action as being mainly strikes, neglecting alternative kinds of resistance, and rarely analyses the wider impact on stakeholders such as students who are indirectly affected. Therefore, in this study industrial action means a collective withdrawal or change of employment by employees, through unions, with the aim to influence negotiations with employers or the state. It is influenced by economic and institutional issues and has broader effects on staff performance, student learning and

institutional stability in public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Labour Disputes and Collective Bargaining

Industrial Disputes are a major part of industrial relations and are typically a precursor to industrial action. The ILO (2003) describes them as "disagreements between employers and workers or their organisations over employment terms and conditions, including wages, job security and working conditions". In Nigeria, labour disputes develop primarily when conflicts of interest between employers and employees cannot be resolved through existing channels of negotiation, especially where institutional procedures are weak or inadequate (Yesufu, 1984). The principal method of handling and resolving such disagreements is collective bargaining. It is a formal process of negotiation through which employers and trade unions negotiate terms of employment and share benefits and obligations (Flanders, 1970; Otobo, 2016). This process is carried out by the government and unions like ASUU, ASUP and COEASU in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The effectiveness is sometimes however compromised by government inability to follow agreements, poor institutions and political intervention resulting to frequent strikes and lack of confidence amongst parties (Fajana, 2000; Adewumi&Adenugba, 2010).

The existing literature contains key omissions, including a lack of attention to the power imbalance between government and unions, the propensity of collective bargaining failures to exacerbate rather than to resolve conflicts, and the omission of students who are directly affected by industrial activities. A dearth of empirical focus also exists on how frequent breaches of agreements fuel strike cycles, particularly in environments like Adamawa State. The study thus conceives of labour disputes as systemic failures in collective bargaining processes stemming from weak institutions, political and economic pressures and uneven power relations between government and unions that explain the prevalence of industrial action in public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Tripartism in Labour Relations

Tripartism is a labour relations system that is based on structured engagement between government, employers and workers (via trade unions) to promote discussion, prevent industrial disputes and ensure fair labour standards. ILO (2013) defines it as the collaboration of these three players in the design of labour and social policy. The idea comes from Dunlop's Industrial Relations System Theory which states that industrial relations are a system which is impacted by environmental elements such as politics, technology and economic situations (Dunlop, 1958). Formal negotiating mechanisms are used in many industrialised countries to implement tripartism and assist balance economic aims with workers' wellbeing (Edwards, 2021).

In the Nigerian context, there is also inadequate inclusion because vital stakeholders such as students are excluded from official bargaining processes while they are the most affected by industrial activities. Scholars claim that in Nigeria, tripartism is typically symbolic instead of effective as agreements are not fulfilled often, resulting in mistrust and repeated confrontations (Adewumi&Adenugba, 2010). Tripartism in this study is conceptualised as the interaction between government, institutional management and academic staff unions at tertiary institutions, while recognising the exclusion of students as a significant gap. The approach is employed to understand the

contribution of weak tripartite participation to the ongoing industrial actions and academic instability in the public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study used Equity Theory (Adams, 1963) which explains industrial action and its consequences on academic staff and students' performance in the public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria. According to the notion, people evaluate fairness by comparing their inputs (effort, abilities, time and responsibilities) to outcomes (compensation, recognition and working conditions). Perceived unfairness causes dissatisfaction that may lead to reduced commitment, withdrawal, and collective actions such as strikes.

The hypothesis explains the unhappiness of academics in Adamawa State tertiary institutions as a result of the perceived imbalance between their high workload in terms of teaching, research and administration and their inadequate benefits in terms of poor salary and minimal institutional support. Such views are typically compounded by comparisons with better endowed institutions, which increases the propensity for industrial action (Adams, 1965; Colquitt et al., 2001). In the same vein, students are inequitable when their educational investment is interrupted by strikes, leading to delayed graduation, less involvement, and lower academic outcomes.

The theory is beneficial for understanding how perceptions of fairness influence motivation and collective behaviour in staff and students' responses to academic disturbance (Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978). However, its limitation is that it focuses on individual views of fairness and downplays structural factors such as underfunding, political meddling and weak governance systems (Huseman, Hatfield and Miles, 1987). It also implies rational decision making in the face of the influence of union allegiance and socio-economic influences on conduct (Colquitt et al, 2001). Therefore, Equity Theory explains why perceived inequities lead to industrial action and how industrial action negatively affects students' academic performance. It also suggests that better fairness in remuneration, policies and working conditions can improve institutional stability in Adamawa State tertiary institutions (Adams, 1965).

Methodology

The study utilises survey research design which is considered acceptable for the collection of data from a wide population within a limited period of time. The employment of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies is also possible (Nwana, 1981). The study employs structured questionnaires and interviews to collect data on industrial action and its consequences on academic staff and student performance in selected public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State.

The study area is Adamawa state in North-East Nigeria. Adamawa was founded in 1991 and has 21 Local Government Areas with a population of about 4.2 million people. The state is predominantly rural and socio-economically heterogeneous. The selected institutions, Federal Polytechnic Mubi, Modibbo Adama University Yola and College of Agriculture Ganye are significant public tertiary institutions that have faced frequent industrial actions that have affected academic stability and performance.The population of the study was 5,007 personnel and 38,000 students. Hence, the total population was 43,007 respondents. This is shown in the figure below:

Table: Population Distribution of the Study Area

Institution	Staff	Students
Federal Polytechnic, Mubi	1,874	**14,000**
Modibbo Adama University, Yola	2,781	**20,000**
College of Agriculture, Ganye	352	**4,000**
Total	5,007	**38,000**
Grand Total		**43,007**

Source: Office of the Registrar, 2026

The sample of this research is calculated by using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1973) formula with 95% of confidence level. The calculating formula of Taro Yamane is as follows.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)2}$$

Where :

n= sample size required

N = number of people in the population

e = allowable error (%)

Substitute numbers in formula

$$n = \frac{43{,}007}{1 + 43{,}007(0.05)2}$$

$$n = \frac{43{,}007}{1 + 43{,}007(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{43{,}007}{1 + 107.52}$$

$$n = \frac{43{,}007}{108.52}$$

$$n = 396$$

To make the sample distribution consistent with the calculated sample size of 396 respondents, the proportions are adjusted based on the population size of each institution where the total population of 43,007 consists of Federal Polytechnic Mubi (15,874: 1,874 staff and 14,000 students), Modibbo Adama University Yola (22,781: 2,781 staff and 20,000 students), and College of Agriculture Ganye (4,352: 352 staff and 4,000 students).

Table 1 Sample Distribution

Institution	Population	Sample Size
Federal Polytechnic, Mubi	15,874	**146**
Modibbo Adama University, Yola	22,781	**209**
College of Agriculture, Ganye	4,352	**41**
Total	43,007	**396**

Source: Office of the Registrar, 2026

Sampling was via purposeful and simple random methods. Purposive sampling allows only relevant respondents (academic staff and students affected by industrial action) to be included in the study whereas simple random sampling gives equal chance of selection and reduces bias. The data is obtained by using structured questionnaires based on five point Likert scale The data collected is analyzed using frequency (f), mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (σ) in order to explain the distribution of responses and quantify the level of agreement among the respondents.

Result and Discussion

Table 1: Bio-Data of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Institution	Federal Polytechnic, Mubi	146	**36.9**
	Modibbo Adama University, Yola	209	**52.8**
	College of Agriculture, Ganye	41	**10.4**
Total		**396**	**100**
Gender	Male	238	**60.1**
	Female	158	**39.9**
Total		**396**	**100**
Age	Below 25	82	**20.7**
	25–34	144	**36.4**
	35–44	112	**28.3**
	45 and above	58	**14.6**
Total		**396**	**100**
Category of Respondent	Academic Staff	156	**39.4**
	Students	240	**60.6**
Total		**396**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 reveals that the bio-data of respondents revealed that Modibbo Adama University, Yola had the largest proportion of respondents (52.8%) while Federal Polytechnic Mubi (36.9%) and College of Agriculture, Ganye (10.4%) had the next highest and lowest proportions respectively. This means that the university respondents are substantially over-represented in the study. The respondents were 60.1% males and 39.9% females, meaning that there were more males who participated in the study.

The age distribution indicates that the bulk of the respondents are in the active and productive age ranges, with 25-34 years accounting for 36.4%, followed by 35-44 years at 28.3%, below 25 years at 20.7% and 45 years and above at 14.6%. This means that most of the respondents are in economically and academically engaged age groups. Regarding the response categories, students made up 60.6% and academic staff 39.4%, which indicates that the student view slightly dominates the dataset. Thus the distribution demonstrates good representation of respondents from institutions, gender, age and status to provide data suited for meaningful analysis.

Table 2: Causes of Industrial Disputes in Public Tertiary Institutions

Item	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD (σ)	Remark
6	Low pay is a contributory factor in industrial disputes	168 (42.4%)	140 (35.4%)	28 (7.1%)	40 (10.1%)	20 (5.1%)	3.99	0.98	**Agreed**
7	Lack of adequate funding leads to industrial action	180 (45.5%)	150 (37.9%)	20 (5.1%)	30 (7.6%)	16 (4.0%)	4.13	0.91	**Agreed**
8	Strikes against government's refusal to fulfil agreements	190 (48.0%)	148 (37.4%)	18 (4.5%)	25 (6.3%)	15 (3.8%)	4.20	0.88	**Agreed**
9	Industrial conflict due to bad working conditions	170 (42.9%)	145 (36.6%)	22 (5.6%)	38 (9.6%)	21 (5.3%)	3.98	0.97	**Agreed**
10	Interference with institutional autonomy creates unrest	160 (40.4%)	150 (37.9%)	30 (7.6%)	35 (8.8%)	21 (5.3%)	3.89	1.00	**Agreed**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Agree (Accepted)

Mean < 3.00 = Disagree (Rejected)

Table 2 indicates that respondents largely agree that several variables contribute to industrial disputes at public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State. Items had high mean scores of more than 3.00 suggesting general agreement. The most highly cited cause is government failure to implement agreements ($\bar{x}$ = 4.20) followed by inadequate financing ($\bar{x}$ = 4.13). This indicates that government-related concerns are viewed by respondents as the main drivers of strikes. Strong agreement is also found for poor remuneration ($\bar{x}$ – 3.99) and poor working conditions ($\bar{x}$ – 3.98) as factors. Interference with institutional autonomy has the lowest mean ($\bar{x}$ = 3.89) but still indicated agreement. The findings therefore imply that industrial disputes are largely driven by systemic difficulties such as poor funding, non-implementation of agreements, low remuneration and weak institutional autonomy.

Table 3: Effects of Industrial Disputes on Academic Staff Performance

Item	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD (σ)	Remark
11	Strikes hit staff productivity	200 (50.5%)	140 (35.4%)	18 (4.5%)	25 (6.3%)	13 (3.3%)	4.24	0.86	**Agreed**
12	Strikes hamstring research, publishing	185 (46.7%)	150 (37.9%)	20 (5.1%)	25 (6.3%)	16 (4.0%)	4.18	0.89	**Agreed**
13	Industrial disagreements lower motivation and commitment	210 (53.0%)	130 (32.8%)	15 (3.8%)	25 (6.3%)	16 (4.0%)	4.25	0.87	**Agreed**
14	Strikes to disrupt academic schedule, workload planning	220 (55.6%)	125 (31.6%)	14 (3.5%)	22 (5.6%)	15 (3.8%)	4.30	0.83	**Agreed**
15	Strikes affect efficiency in service delivery	205 (51.8%)	135 (34.1%)	18 (4.5%)	24 (6.1%)	14 (3.5%)	4.22	0.85	**Agreed**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Agree (Accepted) Mean < 3.00 = Disagree (Rejected)

The respondents agree strongly that industrial conflicts have detrimental effects on the performance of academic staff in public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State (see Table 3). All items had high mean scores above 3.00 suggesting substantial unanimity. The delay in academic calendars and workload planning was the highest rated effect ($\bar{x}$ = 4.30) followed by diminished staff motivation and commitment ($\bar{x}$ = 4.25). Industrial action affects staff productivity ($\bar{x}$ = 4.24), diminishes service delivery efficiency ($\bar{x}$ = 4.22) and disrupts research and publication efforts ($\bar{x}$ = 4.18). The findings suggest that industrial disputes have a considerable negative effect on the performance of academic staff by reducing productivity, disturbing academic calendars, eroding motivation and influencing research output in the institutions studied.

Summary of Major Findings

The study therefore finds the following

i. The study found that systemic and governance related factors such as poor remuneration, interference in institutional autonomy, poor working conditions, inadequate funding and government's failure to implement agreements are the major causative factors of industrial disputes in public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State. These factors were all areas of great agreement among responders.

ii. The result revealed that industrial action has a great negative impact on the performance of the academic staff in terms of productivity, disruption of research and publication activities, delay in academic calendar, demotivation and lack of commitment and reduced general efficiency of service delivery in the institutions.

iii. The findings also revealed that industrial disputes are perennial due to poor implementation of agreements and lack of stakeholder consultation, and that the unresolved labour issues are a perennial cause of strikes, which affect the stability of the institutions and academic progression in the studied institutions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the industrial action in public tertiary institutions in Adamawa State is largely as a result of systemic challenges such as inadequate funding, poor remuneration, failure to implement agreements, poor working conditions and weak institutional autonomy resulting in recurring dissatisfaction among academic staff. It also indicates that industrial action significantly impacts on academic staff performance through reduced productivity, disruption of research activities, delayed academic calendar and weakened motivation and service delivery. Therefore, the continued existence of industrial disputes is an indication of inadequate governance and lack of stakeholder participation and more financing, equitable welfare packages, increased autonomy and effective discussion mechanisms are vitally important to minimize conflicts and improve the performance of staff and students.

Recommendations

Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

i. The government and relevant education authorities should increase and release adequate funding to public tertiary institutions on time, improve staff welfare by providing better remuneration and working conditions, and strictly implement agreements reached with academic unions to reduce recurring grievances.

ii. Institutional management and government should reinforce mechanisms for continuous dialogue and effective implementation of collective bargaining outcomes. Agreements should be implemented and not signed, failure to do this will disrupt work and affect academic staff productivity and institutional performance negatively.

iii. The institutionalisation of autonomy and participatory governance should be further enhanced by the involvement of key stakeholders such as academic unions and other relevant bodies in decision-making processes to reduce conflicts, build trust and ensure long-term stability in the tertiary education system.

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