

# Impact of Employee Involvement in Trade Unions on Employee Well Being in Federal University Kashere Gombe State, Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*Effective trade unions in Nigeria play crucial roles in protecting the interest of their members. Without employee unions in Nigerian organization's workers would be turned to slaves. Therefore, there is a need for employees to form unions for their welfare and well being. The paper aimed at examining the impact of employee involvement in trade unions on employee well being in Federal University Kashere of Gombe State Nigeria. Data were collected through interview and observation. The respondents of the study were the employees of Federal University Kashere who are members and some executives of ASUU, NASUU, SSANU and NAAT. Literature was reviewed through journal articles, bulletins, internet and prior knowledge on text books. The study found that the four trade unions in Federal University Kashere played significant roles in protecting the interest of their members which leads to the well being of the employees. The study recommended that the trade unions should seek for full certification from the national body to progress from an observer's status in order to function fully. By pioneering research on staff unions in Federal University Kashere and adding on existing literature on trade unions, the paper contributes to knowledge.*

*Keywords: Structure, Re-structure, Trade union, Association, ASUU, NASUU, SSANU, NAAT*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Without employees union in Nigerian organizations, workers would be turned to slaves. This is because our employers are exploitative. Therefore, there is a need for employees to form unions for their welfare and well being. A union is an association where people come together for achieving the interest of one another. Trade unionism is now a universal phenomenon operating in almost every organization is it public or private; industry, institution, profession, and trade. It is a product of industrial revolution which was established as an instrument mainly to put up a united and collective fight against exploitation of workers by employers in factories. It has since proliferated to all sorts of workplace, including offices, establishments, banks, educational institutions, etc. It was also intended to be used for securing reasonable wage and salaries, favourable conditions of services commensurate with the nature of work, facilities of housing, medical care, education, travel, recreation and so on (Ahmadu, 2013). Trade unions are organized groupings of workers that relate with employers on various issues related to the conditions of employment of their members. They arose as a consequence of the industrial revolution which led to the development of industrial capitalism. The revolution had given birth to accelerated resource accumulation and the consequent growth of large-scale enterprises (Adefolaju, 2013).

Despite the fact that trade unions are crucial in organizations, but there exist scanty of literature on that aspect. Even related literature that existed, mostly used secondary sources of data. So also, such study was never conducted in

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Federal University Kashere, Gombe State. For that reason the study tends to fill this existing gap by aiming at clarifying concepts on the structure of Nigerian trade unions with reference to Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Non Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASUU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and National Association of Academic Technologist (NAAT) in Federal University Kashere, Gombe state.

## **2.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Nigerian trade union**

Trade unions in Nigeria exist for the primary purpose of protecting the interests of employees and the society at large. Workers rights are identified in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) to include freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargainings; the elimination of forced or compulsory labour; the abolition of child labour and; the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (Chukwunenye, 2011). So many associations are formed in Nigeria but, by implication, there exists disunity and lack of cooperation among employees and organisations in Nigeria (Onyemaechi, 2014). The Trade Union Act (1973) cited in Adefolaju (2013) defines a trade union as: Any combination of workers or employees whether temporary or permanent, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers, whether the combination by any reason of its purposes being in restraint of trade and whether its purposes do or do not include the provision of benefits for its members. A trade union is thus an organization to which workers belong and which collectively deals with employers on behalf of the employees (Fajana, 2000). For the purpose of this research, a definition given by Kurfi (2013) is essential; this is because the main reason of trade unions in Nigeria is protecting the interest of their members and his definition captured that. He defined trade union as a combination of employees formed for the purpose of protecting the interest of workers and promoting their welfare in particular employment or throughout the country.

### **2.2 Reasons for the late formation of trade unions in Nigeria**

Several reasons by Ahmadu (2013) have been given to explain the apparent late arrival of trade unionism in Nigeria, these are:

- a. The repressive colonial labour policy also contributed to the late entry of effective trade unionism in Nigeria. The colonial administration regarded trade unions as destabilizing activities. Consequently, it took measures to discourage its employees from membership of these groups.
- b. Limited wage employment: Since the largest proportions of the citizens are engaged in the informal work sector, the few wage earners are colonial employers and these are restricted to the colonial officers as well as related parastatals.
- c. Low level of economic activities which limited the recruitment into the formal economy and hence membership of trade union.
- d. Low consciousness of the workers as to the need of unionism: During that period the workers have no idea on the importance of the unions and as such were less concern about the formation of the unions.
- e. The absence of legal backing also impeded the early realization of a trade union in Nigeria: By then, no any provision from the colonies encourage for the formation of the trade unions.

However, with time these obstacles were overcome and this paved the way for the emergence of trade unionism in the country.

### **2.3 Movement of a trade union in Nigeria**

Prior to the coming of the colonial masters, organisations of people engaged in craft or trade have existed in Nigeria. These organisations could be referred to as trade unions because they were organised to regulate trade practices, to offer mutual aid and to fix wages price for their services. Such organisations included organisations of hunters, blacksmiths, carvers and weavers. These organisations consisted of tradesmen and their children or other blood relatives usually sons, there were no employment contracts as known today as the children learned the trades and took over from their fathers. The functions of these organisations some of which still existed today in the villages included: settling of disputes, regulation of the relationship between tradesmen, fixing of prices and others (See, Olusoji, Oluwakemi, & Uche, 2012: Lucky, 2017).

Organised trade unions officially started on Monday 19 August 1912 in Nigeria when workers in the then civil service organised themselves into trade unions as was done in Sierra Leone. Mr Henry Libert a Sierra Leonean, summoned a meeting of about thirty-three (33) indigenous workers, and by the fifth meeting on 15 November 1912 after advice was received from Sierra Leone, the aim of the union was decided and this was to promote the welfare and interests of the indigenous workers of the Nigerian Civil Service. It was known then as the Civil Service British Workers Union but later changed to the Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU) shortly before independent it remained an exclusive union of Africans of first-class workers until the outbreak of the first world war in 1914. This brought about an astronomical rise in the cost of living and the union had to seek the support of other workers outside the 1st class to agitate for 30% increase in basic salaries as the war bonus which was granted by the colonial administrators. The union later discussed other grievances which included: discrimination in salary scale in favour of Europeans against African workers performing the same jobs, and the abolition of the 'frequent imposition of fines as a measure of discipline. In 1931, the Railway Workers Union (NRWU) and the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) was formed. Before this time, railway workers were under the Nigerian Civil Service Union. The 1930 economic crisis aided the coming out of the then Mechanic Union out of the Nigerian Civil Service Union; although the former claimed to embrace all employees of the railway; the clerical workers choose to remain with the later. With the passing of the Nigerian Trade Union Ordinance in 1938, the numbers of registered trade unions, as well as memberships, increased. That is in 1940 only fourteen (14) unions were registered with four thousand six hundred and twenty-nine (4,629) members but, by 1944 this had increased to ninety-one (91) registered unions with over thirty thousand (30,000) members (Kenneth, 2009: Kabuoh, Semako And Abiola, 2014: Justice, 2016).

Before the attainment of independence in 1960, most senior staffs were Europeans and there were very few Nigerians in this category, they were, therefore, unable to form a trade union. In 1957, the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA) was formed with a membership of twenty-eight (28) employers. It is more interested in regulating trade practices, providing trade services, negotiating or consulting with the government to protect the interest of all employers in the country. While the workers were multiplying their unions, a new development came up into 1960 and this was the urgent need for a different union for the senior staff. Associations of Nigerian Senior Staff came to limelight in the civil service in 1960 and in the private sectors in 1971.

By 1975, under the military regime of General Murtala Muhammed, one thousand (1,000) trade unions were registered. That same year, his government established a Commission of enquiry to look into the past activities of the unions. Administrators were appointed to manage the unions as the unions were polarized and ideologically divided therefore creating labour problems for the country. The unions were restructured into forty two (42) along with industrial lines and a Labour centre was created. With this victory by 1976, there were about twenty-four (24) senior staff associations registered as a trade union with a membership of 5,383 (Nigeria Ministry of Labour: records of trade unions as at January 1976: 21-22).

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) was created in 1978 and the forty two (42) industrial unions became affiliates (Kurfi, 2013: Ahmadu, 2013). This was given a legal backing through the Trade Union Decree. In 1989, the trade union was restructured again with twenty-nine (29) industrial unions affiliated to NLC through the Trade Union (Amendment) Decree 22 of 1978.

The NLC has made a significant impact on the nature, structure and implementation of government programmes. Although the political role of unions continues to increase in the sphere, their impact diminished under the Obasanjo administration. Events evolving since 2004 in industrial relations reveal that the State in democratic dispensation is still coercive. In June 2004, the government announced its plan to decentralise the labour union and remove the oil subsidy. Consequently, a bill to amend the Trade Union Act was sent to the National Assembly. The bill sought to proscribe the NLC and fragment the trade unions to take strike action impossible, make recognition difficult and freeze union sources of finance. Consequent to the immediate action taken by the NLC with support from the ILO, the national house of assembly reworded the bill and passed a law which was slightly different from what the executive has proposed. However, the executives' action, despite earlier set up a stakeholders committee, including the ILO, to review the industrial and labour relations laws in the country, revealed the government's repressive and draconian stand in industrial and labour relations. Arguably this may not affect the struggle by labour due mainly to the prevailing problem in the economy. The fact, however, is that while these problems lead to increased demand for labour's political role (Oyelere and Owoyemi, 2011).

## 2.4 Structure of Nigerian trade unions

Justice (2016) looked structures of Nigerian trade union from the dimensions below:

### Junior Staff Union

The Union like any other industrial union was formed in 1997 basically to protect the interest of the workers based on the following premise:

- (a) Secure the complete unionization of all workers employed in food and beverage tobacco trade throughout the federal republic of Nigeria.
- (b) To obtain, maintain just and equitable hours of work, wages/salaries and all other condition of employment.
- (c) To encourage the establishment of high productive efficiency in the establishment.
- (d) To advance the education and training of members.
- (e) To encourage the participation of members in the decision making process at undertaking industry and national levels.
- (f) To provide other assistance as provided in the constitution or as may be directed by the national executive council.
- (g) To protect, advance the socio-economic and cultural interest of workers in the community.

The union is open to all non-management and junior employees in the establishments engaged in any of the following undertaking related to manufacturing of food for human consumption and related products, such as chewing gum, spices prepared for foods for animal and fowls, tobacco and other related product. Such unions include National Union of Food, Beverage and Tobacco Employees (NUFBTE) which maintains three structures - the house union, the Federation/ nationwide union which is the umbrella union and national trade union centre with NLC. The supreme authority of the union is vested in National Delegate's Conference which is composed of the principal national officers and the state officers. The national executive council is composed of full time elected officers, state chairmen, states vice chairmen, states treasurers, states internal auditors and states trustees. The national administrative council consists of the following; the president, vice- president, national deputy vice president, national vice president, general secretary, deputy general secretaries, national treasurers, national signing trustee, national trustees, national internal auditor and assistance general secretaries/heads of departments. There is also a state council in every state of Nigeria, provided enough branches of the union exist to form State Council or where less than five thousand (5,000) members are in the union. The state council is governed by its own state executive council. They coordinate the activities of branches and units under state jurisdictions to ensure that the union's policy is widely known, understood and implemented so as to strengthen and enhance the union's performance within the state.

### Senior Staff Union

This is an association of senior staff. Example of this is Food, Beverage and Tobacco Senior Staff Association (FOBTOB) which came into existence after house unions in Nigeria. Such unions were restructured into industrial unions. Prior to this restructuring exercise, the three prominent and registered unions of senior staff within the Food, Beverage and Tobacco Industry were: Flour Mills of Nigeria Senior Staff Association, Nigerian Breweries Management Staff Association and Management Staff Association of Guinness Nigeria Limited. Upon the restructuring exercise, these house unions fused together to form the nucleus of the Food, beverage and tobacco senior staff association which received its certificate of registration under the Trade Unions (Amendment) Act No. 22 of 1978. The union has thus come of age. The union organizes membership mainly from the private sector with few Government Owned companies and organizations. FOBTOB organizes workers who are qualified for membership and helps in regulating the relationship between senior, management staff and other staff and between staff and senior management staff interest. They establish and maintain just and proper hour of work, rates of pay and condition of work which contributes to maintaining a high standard of workmanship and professional practice. FOBTOB is affiliated with the Trade Union Congress which serves as the national centre for the senior staff unions. It has been very active within the organ of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC), formerly SESCO (the umbrella labour centre for senior staff in Nigeria). FOBTOB has been making constructive contributions in promoting the objectives of TUC as a viable and relevant labour centre in our industrial relations system.

### **Employer's Association**

For the fact that employees have their unions, employers also do have. Example of these is Association of Food, Beverage and Tobacco Employers (AFBTE) AFBTE is an employers' organization registered under the Trade Union Decree No. 22 of 1978. The membership is open to companies that are manufacturers of food beverage tobacco products and that employ a minimum of ten workers. Though, legally a trade union AFBTE is functional, a trade organisation in view of the spectrum of its responsibilities which now covers trade matters, regulatory issues and public advocacy. They negotiate (on behalf of its members) collective agreements covering salaries and wages, and major fringe benefits, with the national union of food, beverage, tobacco employees (junior staff) and food, beverage and tobacco senior staff association. They assist their members in resolving industrial conflicts, provide research and advisory services to its member-company, provide information on terms and condition of employment in the industry for its members, liaise and dialogue with regulatory agencies (NAFDAC, RMRDC, SON, Federal Ministry of Environment, etc) on issues of interest to their members. And they also source, train, and develop human capital in the industry.

### **2.5 Trade unions in universities**

According to Orok (2015), university staff unions are representative of the various sub-groups and they assign themselves the responsibility of negotiating grievances on behalf of the groups. Within the Nigerian university system, such unions that do exist are:

- a. Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU).
- b. Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASUU).
- c. Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities (SSANU).
- d. National Association of Academic Technologist (NAAT).

### **Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU)**

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is a Nigerian union of University academic staff with a history of militant action. ASUU is a trade union whose objectives include regulation of relations between academic staff and employers; encouragement of the participation of its members in the affairs of the university system and of the nation, protection and advancement of the socio-economic and cultural interest of the nation; establishment and maintenance of a high standard of academic performance and professional practice; establishment and maintenance of just and proper conditions of service for its members (Pemedede, 2007 cited in Uzoh 2017, P.740).

ASUU was formed in 1978, a successor to the Nigerian Association of University Teachers formed in 1965 and covering academic staff in all of the federal and state universities in the country. After the return to democracy in 1999, the union continued to be defending the rights of its members and improved funding for universities. The association has always elicited mixed reactions among Nigerians due to its frequent industrial actions either locally or nationally. In 2007, ASUU went on strike for three months. In May 2008, it held two one-week "warning strikes" to press home a range of demands, including an improved salary scheme and reinstatement of 49 lecturers who were dismissed many years earlier.

In June 2009, ASUU ordered its members in federal and state universities nationwide to proceed on an indefinite strike over disagreements with the Federal Government on an agreement it reached with the union about two and a half years earlier. In October 2009, the union and other staff unions signed a memorandum of understanding with the government and called off the industrial action. On July 1, 2013, ASUU embarked on another strike which lasted five months and 15 days and was called off on December 16, 2013. Claims made by ASUU in regards to the strike are centred largely on funding and revitalization of Nigerian public universities, and this, of course, proved how the associations play roles in protecting the rights of its members. (See Yusuf, Salako, Adedina & Ayelotan 2015).

### **Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities**

The Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASUU) is the association that represents the junior non-teaching staff in Nigerian universities. The union came into existence in 1977 as one of the house unions, and in 1978 it was strengthened by Decree No. 22. It was formally recognised as one of the 42 registered unions affiliated to the NLC. The principal objectives of the union are the regulation of relations between workers and the Governing Councils of the university. NASUU, like ASUU has fought a number of pitched battles mainly in the interest of its members. In 1992, when Babatunde Fafunwa was the minister of education, the federal government approved a separate

university salary table that favoured members of the ASUU. When NASUU heard of the disparity in the salary table, they embarked on a 42-day nationwide strike to demonstrate their disapproval of the action of the federal government. Apart from strikes, NASUU has been able to improve the welfare of its members by introducing lots of life-changing benefits such as financial life-lines. Like most trade unions, NASUU is frequently at loggerheads with the management, government, or themselves and this usually affects the operation of the universities (Moses and Olalekan 2010; Olabode and Adebukola 2017). It would be recalled that the unions had embarked on an indefinite strike on Dec. 4, 2017, by Joint Action Committee of NASUU, SSANU and NAAT over the failure of the Federal Government to fully implement 2009 Agreements and various Memoranda of Terms of Settlements. The strike which was suspended on 14<sup>th</sup> of March, 2018 due to the agreement reached with the Federal Government.

**Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities (SSANU)**

As stated explaining in NASUU, SSANU is an association of senior non- academic staff in university. They also aimed at protecting the interest of their members.

**National Association of Academic Technologist (NAAT)**

This is a trade union of all the academic technologist of a university. Like other unions in the university, the union aimed at protecting, defending and promoting the rights, well being and the interest of its members.

**2.6 Functions of trade union**

The main functions of trade union according to Kurfi (2013) are:

1. Economic: Trade unions are responsible for negotiations of wages and terms of work, a method of pay, sources of wages and any other condition of employment in other to ensure job security and to prevent unnecessary retrenchment of labour.
2. Political: Unions often perform some political functions, for instance, they constitute a powerful pressure group when certain pieces of legislation are being debated in the national assembly. They also support and sponsor their candidates during a local or national election.
3. Social: Unions also plays a role in conflict resolution. Trade unions settled conflict among its members and between unions.
4. Educational: Trade unions do organize periodically conferences at state, zonal and national levels which provide opportunities to learn about industrial conditions and development to the interested parties.

**2.7 How do the unions protect the right and interest of their members in FUK**

The unions in practice protect the interest of their members in many ways. For instance, in December 2017 the chair people concerned for the unions were consulted by the management of the University for a Month advanced salary to their members which is to be deducted in three months time. The management succeeded in given that. The University started deducting the amount in March of this year 2018. But for last month, the unions stand on a chance that an interval should be given so that the employees should be at ease, and they were being able to succeed. Furthermore, they argued that because of Ramadan, the deductions should be adjoined till after Sallah and that was also granted for the union’s sake. Another recent incident was that of the recent non-academic staff strike. The management attempted to identify some key employees for not attending during the strike to fire them but their unions (NASUU and SSANU) denied and stand against that.

**3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted mostly by using the quantitative method. The respondents of the study were the employees of Federal University Kashere (FUK) who are members and some executives of ASUU, NASUU, SSANUU and NAAT. The university has about one thousand five hundred and ten (1510) academic and non-academic staff. A sample of twenty employees (20) was selected and apportioned below:

S/N	UNION	EXECUTIVES	MEMBERS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	ASUU	4	2	6	30
2	NASUU	4	3	7	35
3	SSANU	2	1	3	15
4	NAAT	2	2	4	20
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

**SOURCE:** Field work survey (2018)

The primary data collected for the research was through the interview and direct observation to the employees of Federal University Kashere.

From the observation angle, the researcher is a graduate assistant in the university; as such, the researcher knows the chairpeople of the unions and some of the members as well and has seen how the unions function. The secondary data collected involved journal articles, bulletins, internet and prior knowledge on text books.

#### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that four (4) trade unions in Federal University Kashere: Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Non Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASUU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and National Association of Academic Technologist (NAAT) played significant roles in protecting the interest of their members which lead to the well being of the employees.

#### 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the preceding, it is obvious that trade unions have been in existence even prior to the coming of colonies. But the formal trade unions began in 1912 in which the Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU) was formed. From there many unions started subsequently. Not employees association alone, Employers also established their association lately in 1957 named National Employers Consultative Association (NECA). Despite the challenges of trade unions of Federal University Kashere, they still played significant roles in protecting the interest of their members. Based on the findings, the study recommended that there is a need for the chairpeople of the respective unions in Federal University Kashere (FUK) to seek for full certification from the national body to progress from observer's status in order to function fully.

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