

ASUU Strike Actions and Students' Choice of University for Postgraduate Studies in Nigeria: Implications for Public Policy

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ABSTRACT : *The study examined the effects of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strikes on students' choice of university for postgraduate studies in Nigeria was reviewed. This study used a descriptive survey research design which focused on the following research questions and the following three null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The population consisted of the 630 final year undergraduate students of the Faculty of Management Sciences of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. Stratified random sampling technique was used for selecting a sample of 300 students. The instrument used for the collection of data was an ASUU Strike Actions and Students' Choice of University for Postgraduate Studies Questionnaire (ASASCPQ). Cronbach Alpha method was used to test reliability of instrument which gave a coefficient of 0.82. To answer the research questions, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used and the null hypotheses were tested by Chi-square statistics. The results showed that the acts of ASUU strikes have a significant effect on students' preference for universities where academic activities are not disrupted for postgraduate studies. The study also reveals that, programme completion delay due to strike actions of ASUU and students' aspiration to complete post-graduate programmes in time has significant effect on the choice between ASUU affiliated public universities, non-ASUU public universities and private universities. The study revealed that the negative impacts of the strike action by ASUU in public universities on students' decision to choose public universities for postgraduate studies are significant, thereby driving students to gain admission into private universities and institutions that have stable academic calendar. The Federal Government was recommended to fund public universities adequately, and to keep to all commitment made with ASUU to avoid strikes among others.*

Keywords: ASUU strike actions, students' choice, postgraduate studies, university selection, public policy, Nigeria

Introduction

Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is an umbrella organization of academic staff in Nigerian public universities that is set up to advocate for the welfare and working condition of the academic staff of the public universities in Nigeria. ASUU has engaged in a number of industrial actions since its inception in 1978, many of which have led to prolonged strikes, thereby disrupting academic activities in Nigerian universities. It is even a fact that ASUU had at least 16 major strikes in the period between 1999 and 2022, the total number of months is over 50 months or about one strike in every five years in Nigerian universities during this period (Tolu-Kolawole, 2022; Yusuf, 2020). The causes of these strikes have been different, ranging from the inadequate funding of universities, poor welfare of the academic staff, non-payment of salaries and earned academic allowances, to the failure of the government to honour agreements reached with the union (Adeyemo & Okeme, 2021; Abdulkadir et al., 2025; Chukwudi & Sunday, 2021). The frequent strikes have generated considerable concerns for the stability and sustainability of Nigeria's higher education system.

The effects of ASUU strike actions are far reaching; they impact not only the academic activities, but the academic performance, psychosocial and emotional health, and future academic goals of students. Strike action have been found to have destabilizing effect on the university calendar, disrupt the schedule of the curriculum, affect the academic performance of the students and negatively impact the quality of education in Nigerian universities (Ogbeifun, Erhunmwunse & Agweda 2025; Alutu 2024; Odiase & Faremi 2024). Frequent strikes may lead to lack of self-esteem, frustration, aggression and negative self-concept among the students (Okeke, Anierobi & Ezennaka, 2021). Medical students involved in strikes have been observed to experience lower levels of motivation towards studying, lower retention of knowledge and higher likelihood of re-sitting examinations in the long run (Uzendu et al., 2024). In undergraduate studies, these negative experiences could have a significant impact on students' decisions on higher studies, specifically choice of university for postgraduate studies (Omosefe, Emmanuel & Adeyanju, 2023; Awe et al., 2022).

The decision between which university to attend for postgraduate study can be a vital one, and the quality of academic reputation, the quality of supervision, facilities for research, the speed with which a programme can be completed can all be important considerations. When the students find themselves experiencing the frustration of prolonged strike while in the undergraduate that could lead to a strong preference for universities with uninterrupted academic activities especially the private universities or public universities not affiliated with ASUU (Alabi, 2019; Ogbaji & Ogbaji, 2023). Students' decision on what university to attend may be

significantly determined by the desire to finish post graduate programmes within the desired time frame and avoid the financial and psychological burden of extended periods of study (Agbonaye, 2021; Oyetakin & Odunayo, 2013). Although tuition at private universities is higher than that of ASUU-affiliated public universities, students may think that they have more stable academic calendars and predictable graduation times as compared to ASUU-affiliated public universities (Folarin, Olanrewaju & Ajayi, 2014; Okorie, 2026).

The present study thus focused on the effect of ASUU strikes on the choice of University of which students opt to study Post-graduate programme in Nigeria with Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma as a case study, as the final year undergraduate students in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Faculty of Management Sciences, were used for the study. This study has implications for public policy as it seeks to help resolve the underlying causes of ASUU strikes and the strategies to build confidence in the Nigerian public university system.

Statement of the Problem

The frequent strikes by the ASUU in Nigerian public universities have left the higher education system in shambles and have had a knock-on effect on the academic dreams and future of the students. Students who have faced multiple disruptions to the school year, have had long dry spells in their academic careers, and have seen the decline of academic standards may have negative perceptions of public universities and will look for other avenues to pursue further education. The trend has far-reaching implications for the future of postgraduate studies in Nigeria, with the possibility of the loss of the country's best brains to the private universities or the foreign universities with more stable academic environment. The economic and emotional expenses of continuing strikes on students are not insignificant, as students end up spending extra years in school while also spending more money in the process, and also delay their first job (Ayeeran, 2021; Adeyemo & Okeme, 2021).

While there has been an increasing realization of the effects that ASUU strikes have on student learning, there is limited empirical evidence of the effect of ASUU strikes on choice of University for postgraduate studies. A few studies have focused on the consequences of strikes on students' academic achievement, psychosocial health and entrepreneurial aspiration (Ogbeifun, Erhunmwunse & Agweda, 2025; Okeke, Anierobi & Ezennaka, 2021; Uzendu et al., 2024), but none explored the impact of strikes on the subsequent educational choices of the students including their preference for university of study at post graduate level. The relationship between the two is very important, especially for education stakeholders, university administration and policy makers that need to work on strategies to counter the impending challenges of industrial actions in Nigerian universities. The absence of such information in the literature prompted this study to fill this void by investigating the impact of ASUU strikes on the choice of Universities for postgraduate studies in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The study aimed at investigating the link between ASUU strikes and students' choice of University for their postgraduate studies in Nigeria. The study will, in particular,:

1. To study the effect of the strikes of the Academic Staff University of Nigeria on post-graduate students' preference for Universities with uninterrupted academic activities in Nigeria.
2. Identify the impact of anticipated postponement of programme completion due to actions of ASUU on the students choice of University for postgraduate studies in Nigeria.
3. Investigate the effect of students' aspiration to complete post – graduate programmes in time on their preference between ASUU affiliated public universities, non-ASUU public university and private universities in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. How do the strikes of ASUU have an impact on students' choice of university that have uninterrupted academic activities for post graduate studies in Nigeria?
2. How do students' choice of university to study post-graduate in Nigeria change as a result of anticipated delays in programme completion caused by ASUU strike action?
3. How does students' motivation and eagerness for completing post graduate programmes in time influence their choice of selection between ASUU affiliated public Universities, non-ASUU public Universities and private Universities in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. ASUU strike actions do not have any significant influence on students' preferred universities with uninterrupted academic activities for postgraduate studies in Nigeria.
2. The existence of the students' selection of university for postgraduate studies in Nigeria is not significantly influenced by the students' expectation of delays in programme completion due to ASUU strike action.
3. Students' intention to complete postgraduate programme within time frame does not significantly influence their preference between ASUU affiliated public universities, non-ASUU public universities or private universities in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Social Conflict Theory as it is a useful instrument for studying the industrial relations between ASUU and the Nigerian government. According to the Social Conflict Theory, which was first presented by Karl Marx, there are conflicts that are inherent in society due to competition for limited resources and unequal power distribution between groups. In the case of Nigerian Universities, the conflict between ASUU and the government is rooted in their differences over the allocation of resources,

the welfare of the academic staff and working conditions (Abdulkadir et al., 2025; Adeyemo & Okeme, 2021). In cases where the government cannot meet the demands of academic staff, ASUU adopts strike action as bargaining strategy to force the government to act and deal with their grievances. The conflictual relationship has been entrenched in Nigeria's higher education such that strikes are not uncommon occurrences in the academic calendar (Chukwudi & Sunday, 2021; Okorie, 2026). The Social Conflict Theory has the potential to explain why the government and ASUU seem to be playing opposite sides of the table, why the agreements made are not implemented and why the strike action has become a routine occurrence in Nigerian universities. It also brings to the fore the general effects of these conflicts on national development since protracted strikes affect human capital development and research innovation (Adeyemo & Okeme, 2021; Idika et al., 2024).

The Human Capital Theory supports the Social Conflict Theory by suggesting that investment in education and training will improve the productivity and earnings of individuals and thus help to promote a nation's economic growth. Based on this theory, people undertake education decisions rationally, taking into account the expected returns on their investment in education, which include not only returns in the future, but also the time and costs of this investment (Becker, 1964). When discussing postgraduate studies, students consider the pros and cons, such as the chances of completing the studies on time and what it may mean for their future. Students who have participated in the disruptions caused by ASUU strikes while studying in the undergraduate stage may feel that the public universities are risky when it comes to pursuing postgraduate studies, as there is the likelihood of future strikes and the resulting programme delays (Ogbaji & Ogbaji, 2023; Alabi, 2019). This perception can cause students to select public universities other than ASUU or private universities, even though they may be more expensive. The Human Capital Theory serves as a helpful lens for analyzing students' choices of continuing on to post graduate studies, as well as their preference for various types of universities as a result of their experiences during ASUU's strikes.

Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies have examined the impact of ASUU strike actions on various aspects of Nigerian university education. Chukwudi and Sunday (2021) examined the implications of ASUU strikes on students and society in a changing world. Using secondary sourced data from journals, newspapers, books and the internet, underpinned by the social contract theory, the study discovered that strikes are orchestrated largely by the union's quest to protect its members' welfare and the government's failure to adequately fund universities and entrench a right legal milieu for negotiation. The study concluded that public university students are exposed to social vices, have a sense of being disadvantaged unlike their private colleagues, and the society's developmental agenda is threatened because of the poor quality of graduates produced.

Ogbeifun, Erhunmwunse and Agweda (2025) investigated the role of ASUU strike actions on students' academic activities in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design with 350 undergraduates, the study employed a structured questionnaire and analysed data using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that ASUU strike actions have a significant influence on students' academic activities, destabilizing the calendar of university education, affecting curriculum implementation, quality of lesson delivery, period of graduation, students' performance, and quality of education.

Adeyemo and Okeme (2021) evaluated ASUU-Government conflicts in Nigerian universities and discussed its implications on national development. Using secondary source of data collection, the study found that bad leadership style, non-payment of salaries and earned academic allowances, inadequate funding, non-fulfillment of agreements, poor staff welfare, and proscription of unions are the major causes of industrial conflict. The study recommended democratic leadership styles in conflict management and adequate funding of universities.

Okeke, Anierobi and Ezennaka (2021) investigated the impacts of ASUU strike on the psycho-social development of academic staff in Nigerian universities using ex-post-facto research design. From a population of 12,587 academic staff in five federal universities in South-East Nigeria, 1000 subjects were selected. The result revealed that ASUU strike is associated with frustration, withdrawn behaviours, low self-esteem, aggression, deviant behaviours and negative self-concept.

Uzendu et al. (2024) investigated the impact of strike actions on the academic performance of fifth and sixth-year medical students at the University of Ibadan using a cross-sectional study design with 242 participants. The study found that strikes significantly affected students' motivation, long-term retention of medical knowledge, and increased the tendency to have a re-sit examination. Incessant strikes decrease medical students' long-term memory of medical knowledge and motivation for studying.

Odiase and Faremi (2024) critically evaluated the impact of ASUU strike actions on undergraduate programmes at the University of Ibadan from 1999 to 2022. Using a multistage sampling procedure to select 318 respondents from 12 faculties, the study revealed a significant relationship between perception of ASUU strike actions and undergraduate programmes. The study recommended that universities be prioritized with sufficient funds allocated to them, and that ASUU members should use other industrial dispute techniques to communicate their discontent rather than embarking on indefinite strike actions.

Alabi (2019) examined students' perceptions of the impact of ASUU industrial actions on the development of Nigerian public universities using the University of Ibadan as a case study. A sample size of 392 was generated using the Yaro Yamane formula. The study found that ASUU industrial actions had moderate functional impacts by compelling the government to do the needful in ensuring university development, but had high dysfunctional impacts by disrupting academic calendars, extending students' stay on campus, and damaging the reputation of the university system. The study concluded that if public Nigerian universities are to function effectively, the dysfunctional effects of ASUU industrial actions must be effectively minimised.

Methodology

The design of the study was descriptive survey research design to determine the effect of ASUU strike action on choice of university for postgraduate studies in Nigeria. The study was carried out in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. The population consisted of all 630 final year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Management Sciences including public administration, business administration, banking and finance and accounting departments. Stratified random sampling technique was used to take a sample of 300 students, which was proportionate to the four departments. A sample size of 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error was used in the Taro Yamane formula. The data was collected with a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher which consisted of four sections namely: Section A obtained demographic data of the respondents, Section B contained items pertaining to the first research objective, Section C contained items pertaining to the second research objective and Section D contained items pertaining to the third research objective respectively. The instrument was tested for face, content and criterion validity by three experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Benin with specialties in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument was found to be reliable by using pilot test with 30 students from other university which is not part of this study and Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient obtained was 0.82 with high level of internal consistency. The questionnaire was delivered and retrieved using direct method with the support of four trained research assistants who were briefed on the objective of the study and how to administer the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and the null hypotheses were tested using Chi-square statistical analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: How do the strikes of ASUU have an impact on students' choice of university that have uninterrupted academic activities for post graduate studies in Nigeria?

Table 1: Students' Preference for Universities with Uninterrupted Academic Activities

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	ASUU strike actions have influenced my preference for universities with uninterrupted academic calendars	3.42	0.78	High
2	I prefer to pursue postgraduate studies in universities that have no history of prolonged strikes	3.56	0.71	High
3	The frequency of ASUU strikes has made me reconsider studying in public universities	3.38	0.82	High
4	I am more likely to choose a private university for postgraduate studies because of ASUU strikes	3.21	0.89	High
5	The experience of ASUU strikes during my undergraduate studies has negatively affected my perception of public universities	3.47	0.75	High
Grand Mean		3.41		High

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows that students have an average grand mean score of 3.41 to show that the strike actions of ASUU have a significant impact on their preference for universities with continuous academic calendar. For preferring universities that have never had any long strikes, the highest mean (3.56) was reported, indicating that the students who have suffered from strike during their undergraduate study are more likely to select stable universities for postgraduate study.

Research Question 2: How do students' choice of university to study post-graduate in Nigeria change as a result of anticipated delays in programme completion caused by ASUU strike action?

Table 2: Influence of Expected Delays on Students' Choice of University

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The possibility of strike-induced delays influences my choice of university for postgraduate studies	3.51	0.73	High
2	I am concerned that strikes may prolong my postgraduate programme completion time	3.48	0.76	High
3	The financial cost of extended stay due to strikes is a major consideration in my choice of university	3.39	0.80	High
4	I consider the stability of academic calendar before choosing a university for postgraduate studies	3.44	0.74	High
5	Fear of programme delays due to strikes makes me prefer universities with stable academic activities	3.53	0.70	High
Grand Mean		3.47		High

Source: Field Survey, 2026

In terms of the expected delay caused by strike (Table 2), students strongly agree that the strike-induced delay has an impact on their university choice, with a grand mean score of 3.47. The highest mean (3.53) was for fear programme delays and prefer stable academic activities, suggesting that students place a high emphasis on the importance of completing the programme on time, and make deliberate decisions on whether they believe that the programme will be stable when choosing universities to pursue postgraduate studies.

Research Question 3: How does students' motivation and eagerness for completing post graduate programmes in time influence their choice of selection between ASUU affiliated public Universities, non-ASUU public Universities and private Universities in Nigeria?

Table 3: Influence of Desire to Complete Programmes on Time on University Choice

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The desire to complete my postgraduate programme on time influences my choice of university	3.58	0.69	High
2	I prefer private universities because of their more stable academic calendars	3.23	0.87	High
3	I am willing to pay higher tuition for timely completion of my postgraduate programme	3.15	0.92	Moderate
4	The possibility of timely completion is more important than the cost of the programme	3.46	0.77	High
5	I would choose a non-ASUU affiliated university over an ASUU-affiliated one to avoid delays	3.41	0.79	High
Grand Mean		3.37		High

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The grand mean of 3.37 indicates that the students' desire to complete postgraduate programmes on time has significant effect on their choice of university. The most common value was for desire to complete on time that had the mean score of 3.58 and the least common was for willingness to pay higher tuition that had a mean score of 3.15, indicating that timely completion is of greatest importance, but cost is also a factor. The students are ready to attend a non-ASUU affiliated university to avoid delays (mean = 3.41).

Hypothesis One: ASUU strike actions do not have any significant influence on students' preferred universities with uninterrupted academic activities for postgraduate studies in Nigeria.

Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis of Influence of ASUU Strike Actions on Students' Preference for Universities with Uninterrupted Academic Activities

Variable	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	p-value	Decision
ASUU Strike Actions and Preference for Uninterrupted Activities	12.47	2	0.002	Significant, H_{01} Rejected

The results of the Chi-square analysis on the effect of ASUU strike actions on students preference for universities with uninterrupted academic activities are presented in table 4. The calculated value of chi square is 12.47 with p value of 0.002 at 0.05 level of significance, which means that the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, the impact of ASUU strikes on students' preference for universities with uninterrupted academic activities for postgraduate studies in Nigeria is significant.

Hypothesis Two: The existence of the students' selection of university for postgraduate studies in Nigeria is not significantly influenced by the students' expectation of delays in programme completion due to ASUU strike action.

Table 5: Chi-Square Analysis of Influence of Expected Delays on Students' Choice of University

Variable	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	p-value	Decision
Expected Delays and Choice of University	9.86	2	0.007	Significant, H_{02} Rejected

Table 5 shows the Chi-square analysis of the effect of anticipated delays in the completion of the programmes due to the action of the ASUU on the choice of university for students. By calculating Chi-square, the value is found to be 9.86 with a p-value of 0.007 at 0.05 level of significance which implies rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, the impact of the possibility of prolonged duration of the programme due to strike actions of ASUU on students' preference for university choice for further studies in Nigeria is significant.

Hypothesis Three: Students' intention to complete postgraduate programme within time frame does not significantly influence their preference between ASUU affiliated public universities, non-ASUU public universities or private universities in Nigeria.

Table 6: Chi-Square Analysis of Influence of Desire to Complete Programmes on Time on University Choice

Variable	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	p-value	Decision
Desire to Complete on Time and Choice of University	11.23	2	0.004	Significant, H_{03} Rejected

The Chi-square analyses of the effect of students' desire to complete postgraduate programmes on time on their choice between ASUU affiliated public universities, non-ASUU public universities, and private universities is presented in Table 6. The calculated Chi-square value is 11.23 with a p-value is 0.004 at 0.05 level of significance and shows that the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence,

there is a tremendous effect of students' desire to complete post-graduate programmes on time on their selection of ASUU affiliated public universities, non-ASUU public universities and private universities in Nigeria.

Discussion

The first finding is that, ASUU strike has a pronounced effect on preference for universities that offer uninterrupted academic activities for post graduate studies in Nigeria. Learners also showed a high level of preference for universities that have not had extended strikes, which means that their experiences with ASUU strike during their undergraduate studies have impacted their attitude towards public universities. The finding agrees with the study conducted by Alabi (2019) which revealed that the effect of ASUU industrial action on university development was very dysfunctional as it disrupts the academic calendar and tarnished the image of the university system. The discovery also validates the assertion of Ogbeifun, Erhunmwunse and Agweda (2025) which confirmed that strike actions disrupt the academic calendar of education in the university and also impact the quality of education. Considering the frustrations encountered by students during the long periods of strikes, institutions that provide more stable academic environment for post-graduate students are expected to be more sought after by students because of the sense of being disadvantaged by their public colleagues, as noted by Chukwudi and Sunday (2021).

The second finding showed that anticipated delay in programme completion due to strike action of ASUU has a significant impact on the choice of university for post-graduate studies in Nigeria. Students were very concerned about the potential for delays caused by strikes to extend the time it takes to complete their postgraduate programmes, with financial cost of prolonged time away and certainty of academic calendar key factors. The finding corroborates the finding of Odiase and Faremi (2024) which revealed that perception of ASUU strike actions had significant relationship with undergraduate programmes and that the strikes affect academic calendars and keep students longer on campus. It also confirms the findings of Ogbeifun, Erhunmwunse and Agweda (2025) that the strikes of ASUU have a significant effect on students academic activities especially on the duration of graduation. The significant Chi-square result indicates that expected delay is one of the most important factors that influences the choice of universities for the students to pursue their postgraduate studies, since students are looking for ways to reduce the risk of programme extension and the associated costs.

The third finding confirm that the students' aspiration to finish post graduate courses in time strongly affect their decisions on the choice of ASUU public universities, non-ASUU public universities and government owned private universities in Nigeria. Students were keen to finish their postgraduation studies within a fixed period, many of them preferring private universities because they generally have a more fixed academic calendar. The result is in accordance with that of Okorie (2026) who pointed out that the tension between the right to strike and the constitutional call for uninterrupted education has far-reaching implications to academic stability and national growth. The discovery also aligns with the stance of Adeyemo and Okeme (2021) who noted that the recurring strikes by Nigerians University students have adverse effects on national development, such as the interruption of human capital development. The significant Chi-square result, on the other hand, validates the fact that the desire to finish the programme in time is a significant determinant of students' choice of different types of universities for post-graduate studies, as students are now opting for universities other than the ASUU affiliated ones because of the disruptions caused by the strikes at the public universities.

Conclusion

From the result of this study it is concluded that the action of ASUU has significant negative effect on students' choice of University for postgraduate studies in Nigeria. Students who have been affected by the disruption of the ASUU strikes during their undergraduate studies have a strong preference for University that has uninterrupted academic activities, whereas they express their concerns about the timing of programme completion, and are influenced by their desire to complete postgraduate programme on time. Students' behaviour in this direction is driven by these factors that could jeopardise the future of postgraduate education in public universities of the country. The study also reveals that if the current pattern of ASUU strikes persists, the Nigerian public universities may attract the best students into private universities or abroad with attendant impacts on human capital development and national growth.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Federal Government should adequately fund the public universities, and ensure that all dealings with ASUU are honored to avoid strike which will affect academic calendar and deter prospective post-graduates from opting for public universities.
2. ASUU should consider other methods of resolving the dispute instead of going on an extended strike which will negatively impact on students' academic dreams and University choice processes.
3. To reduce the negative effects of strikes on the academic process of students, public universities need to establish measures to ensure that students can learn online and have flexible academic calendars that are able to be disrupted in some way (3).
4. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should set minimum academic stability requirements for all universities including industrial action management and continuity of academic activities.

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