
Influence of Nigeria Union of Teachers on Teachers' Welfare and Working Conditions in Delta State

Egboro, Paul Mukoro

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the Influence of the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) on teachers' welfare and working conditions in Delta State. Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) is the only recognized and legislated industrial union representing the industrial interest and welfare of teachers at the primary and post-primary levels of our educational sector; she decided to set for herself laudable aims and objectives to fulfill her professional and trade union obligations to the generality of Nigerian teachers. NUT has therefore had a positive influence on teachers' working conditions and welfare. Based on the findings, the study recommended that NUT should incorporate scholarship schemes into its services to members and also provide loans for its members to make it more relevant to teachers' welfare. Furthermore, it was recommended that the union should intensify effort in ensuring teachers regular promotion as at and when due as prompt promotion will encourage better job performance among teachers.

Keywords: *Nigeria Union of Teachers, Welfare, Working-condition,*

INTRODUCTION

Before the Trade Union Amendment Act, 2005 which has democratized labour and granted freedom to employees to decide which unions they wish to belong, the 1978 Trade Union Decree had made the membership of the Nigerian Union of Teachers mandatory for every teacher in primary and post-primary institutions in the country and also compelled financial support by members through check-off system. The democratization of labour has however not diminished the jurisdictional scope of Nigeria Union of Teachers as the only legal body to take care of the welfare of teachers in both primary and post-primary schools in Nigeria. The above

Egboro, Paul Mukoro is a lecturer in the Department of Curriculum Studies, Isaac Jasper Boro Colleges of Education, Sagbama – Bayelsa State. He has his B.A (Ed) Degree in Religious Studies Education, M.Ed. and Ph.D in Educational Administration.



claim is buttressed by Federal Republic of Nigeria official gazette of 6th July, 2006 No. 73, Vol. 93. In this gazette, an attempt made by an association with the name Academic Staff of Secondary School in Nigeria to register as a trade union was turned down on the ground that the existing trade union (Nigeria Union of Teachers) is sufficiently representing the interest of the class of persons (Secondary School Teacher), the association intended to represent (Abimbola, 2014).

The position of Nigeria Union of Teachers is further consolidated by the Supreme Court Judgment of 11th January, 2008 in the case between the registered trustees of National Association of Community Health Practitioners of Nigeria and two other Medical and Health workers union of Nigeria. In the above case, the Supreme Court ruled that the Community Health Practitioners are members of the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria and cannot transform into a trade union. The basis of the Supreme Court judgment flows from the provision of the Trade Union Act and Fundamental Right Principles of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Section 3(2) of Trade Union Act Cap 43 of Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 while empowering the Minister or the Registrar to register new trade unions stated that such registration will only be possible where no trade union already exists to take care of the interest of such workers (Afigbo, 2011).

Since Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) is the only recognized and legislated industrial union representing the industrial interest and welfare of teachers at the primary and post-primary levels of our educational sector, she decided to set for herself laudable aims and objectives to fulfill her professional and trade union obligations to the generality of Nigerian teachers as contained in Article 2 (2000) NUT constitution. The objectives of the Nigerian Union of Teachers as stated in the unions' constitution are;

- i. To foster unity and progress among teachers in Nigeria.
- ii. To foster the spirit of active co-operation and comradeship between teachers and other workers.
- iii. To raise the status of the teaching profession through improved quality of education and conditions of service.
- iv. To promote and advance the course of education and the teaching profession throughout the federation; and also endeavor to secure



- the removal of difficulties, abuses, anomalies and obsolete regulations detrimental to progress.
- v. To enhance the social and economic wellbeing of members and establish welfare funds for the benefit of members of the union.
 - vi. To provide a forum for the co-operation of teachers and the promotion of their welfare, the interests of education and teaching profession.
 - vii. To promote the corporate image of the union both nationally and internationally by ensuring the continued existence of a strong, virile and well-articulated organization.
 - viii. To give leadership and stimulate interest in matters which foster national and international unity and understanding.

The activities of the NUT are based on the provisions of the outlined objectives. In order to effectively achieve these objectives and have an impact on the improvement of education and the teaching profession, the Union operates functionally through defined components and sub-components. By its organizational arrangement, the NUT has a National body, State wings and Local Government Area levels through branches. The activities of the NUT are vested on various organs as contained in the Unions' Constitution Article 5 (2000). The constitution of the NUT is a supreme symbol of unity aimed at fostering unity and progress in Nigeria and to promote and advance the cause of education and the teaching profession throughout the federation (Durojaiye, 2012). For the union to be able to carry out its activities that are aimed at improving the welfare and service conditions of teachers by addressing issues on irregular payment of salaries, irregular promotion of teachers, non-payment of fringe benefits, poor physical environment, lack of teaching material, non-professionalization of teaching, and non-implementation of teachers salary structure (TSS).

The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) employs different strategies and tactics which include collective bargaining, consultation, cooperation, work to rule and others, such as confrontation, lobbying and strike-action. These tactics and strategies are used by the NUT to cause positive change in the educational system and the teaching profession. Emiola (2012), however, observed that labour law contains some

provisions by which the government regulates and moderates the activities of the NUT in its day to day operations and application of its strategies. According to him, the 1974 labour law stipulates step and procedure to be followed in declining a trade dispute between the employer and the employee and in turn influence teachers' welfare and working conditions (either negatively or positively) in Delta State.

NUT: A Trade Union and Professional Body

The activities of the early missionaries on matter concerning education in Nigeria had much relevance to the formation of professional association and trade union activities in the teaching profession. This was the period when the loyalty of the teacher was first "to God and his Church", a period when all teachers were seen and treated as potential pastors whose reward was said to be in heaven. At that time, when government subsidy was made available, it was distributed to voluntary agencies sometimes based on examination results (Ejiogu, 2013).

The subsidy as observed by Smyke and Storer (2014) covered certain designated costs and since the cost of furniture, fixture and transport for expatriate staff were relatively fixed items; the only area where money could be got was from African teachers' salaries. This view was supported by Fafunwa (1984) when he observed that the inauguration of the NUT on 8th July, 1931, was sequel to government reduction of the amount of grant-in-aids to voluntary agency schools in 1931. The agencies quickly used the opportunity of the reduction to impose drastic cuts on teachers' salaries. It was to fight against the salary cut, according to Fafunwa (1984) that Mr. T. K. Cameron, the Secretary of the Association of Lagos Teachers, immediately sent out circulars to all existing teachers union in different parts of the country inviting them to an inaugural meeting of one single association for teachers.

The aims and objectives of the union at inauguration were as follows:

1. To study, promote and improve conditions affecting the teaching profession in Nigeria.
2. To create a better understanding among the teachers in Nigeria.

3. To submit to the government the opinions of teachers on matters directly or indirectly affecting the teaching profession in Nigeria.
4. To establish a central working body for teachers, and to unite all the unions of teachers in Nigeria; and
5. To cooperate with the education department and various missionary bodies on education matters.

Activities of the NUT in School Administration

According to Odunsi (2009) the activities of the NUT in school administration can be seen from the strategies and tactics employed to meet the aspirations and desires of its members. The activities include Collective Bargaining. Collective bargaining, simply put, is a method or process of conducting negotiation about wages, working conditions or other terms of employment between an employer or groups of employers or an employer association on the other hand and representatives of workers and their organizations with a view to arriving at collective agreement. The result of any collective bargaining is collective agreement. It is freely given consent by both parties as against grudging (NUT Study Materials, 2008).

According to NUT Study Material (1994) the major interest of teachers and their union is to win wage concessions from employers through collective action. This will first help to eliminate disparity in wages among workers who perform identical work and second group action enables them to present a more forceful case, long arable to that of the employer. However, for collective bargaining to be effective, certain factors must be present. These factors, according to Jowel Systems Development and Services (2003), are:

- (a) Favourable political climate.
- (b) Freedom of association,
- (c) Joint authorship of rules.
- (d) Recognition of trade unions.
- (e) Willingness to give and take.
- (f) Avoidance of unfair labour practices.
- (g) of the parties to negotiate and reach agreement.

The parties to most collective agreements are usually employer or an association of employers or its representatives and on the other hand the trade unions or workers representatives. Correspondence files available at the NUT National Secretariat, as presented by its Secretary General, show that some substantive agreement were reached by the NUT on terms and conditions of work which normally includes the following; wages and salaries, annual leave/leave allowance, transport allowance, rural allowance, science teacher allowance, games master allowance, maternity leave allowance, sick leave allowance, house master allowance. Collective bargaining has in fact become a discipline and a field of practice. Employers of labour and employees are required to operate within the ambit of the law in their relationship. Each party should know its duties and privileges. The NUT fundamental objective of collective bargaining strategy is the creation and maintenance of industrial harmony.

Consultation as a Strategy for NUT Activities in Schools

Industrial relations rest on a tripod. The three operators are; The Workers (represented by labour union), The Employers (represented by management), and the government. According to Fagbemi (2012) in bargaining methods and strategy the interest of labour and management are often in conflict, in so far as it is the aim of labour to get as much as it can for its services, while it is that of management to give as little as it can for such services. Between the two conflicting interest groups is government which through acts, ordinance and regulations enacts legislations that lay down the rules of conduct in the interest of all the parties concerned.

In the case of conflict between member of a labour union or a labour union versus government, there is need for careful and constructive dialogue whereby each side may shift ground without compromising integrity of each other (NUT Study Material, 2008). In principle, this tri-lateral relationship is supposed to exist even when government itself is the employer. In that situation the role of an arbiter or ombudsman is played by an agency like the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP) or the industrial court which is statutorily empowered to adjudicate on the basis of laid down rules and regulations.

Cooperation as a Strategy for NUT Activities in Schools

It is important to mention that the conduct of industrial relations is strongly influenced by economic and political factors that may have nothing to do with the merit of a case. The facts on the ground may be such that workers have valid reasons for asking for better pay and improved conditions. According to Education and Industrial Relations Department Lagos (2003) in principles of collective bargaining, absence of a conducive economic, social and political environment within or outside the work place may not permit successful or mutually rewarding collective bargaining. The NUT had co-operated with government for the past six years in the struggle for Teachers Salary Structure (TSS) and the establishment of a secondary school commission. The Secretary General of the National Union of Civil Services and Technical Workers, Mr. Sylvester Ejiofor was quoted as saying that the relative industrial harmony in the country in 1996 was achieved through “caution, restraint and co-operation” exhibited by labour leaders who knew that the problems suffered by the workers were not programme (SAP). In such circumstances, he felt “labour leaders need a different approach entirely from that of a conventional industrial relation (Strike)”.

Work to Rule as a Strategy for NUT Activities in Schools

Work to rule is a situation in industrial relations in which the employer and employees work in accordance with the established services rule and service conditions. The employer and the employee under this dispensation are not ready to give or accept work respectively during the period outside the original terms of employment. Here issues of extra working hours like overtime etc. are laid to rest (Omole, 2014). The inability of the parties to work to rules of the game may result in a more severe approach to the issue. Section 3(1) of the Trade Dispute Decree No. 7 of 1976 provides that where a trade dispute exists, “if there exist agreed means of settlement of the dispute, apart from this decree, whatever by virtue of the provisions of any agreement between organizations or interest of employers and organization of workers or any other agreement, the parties to the dispute shall first attempt to settle it by that means”.

Strike Action as a strategy for NUT Activities in Schools

The inability of collective bargaining, consultation, co-operation, work to rule to address labour issues may result in more devastating form of labour confrontation of employers or complete work stoppage often referred to as “Strike Action” either by way of sit-down strike where workers report for duty daily without doing anything or could be a wild-cat-strike of complete work stoppage. The information at the State Secretariat of the NUT (NUT/ESW/0197/130) that have led to full blown strike actions since 1995 to date bordered on the following; non release of promotion of teachers, inadequate staffing of schools, establishment of a teaching service commission, non-payment of leave allowance, irregular payment of salaries, non-provision of school running cost (Subvention), handover of schools to their original owners, non-implementation of the Teachers’ Salary Structure (TSS).

Contending Issues of NUT in School Administration

The teacher is essentially the most important solid-state component in the teaching-learning process. Without the teacher, the teaching learning environment would suffer an irreplaceable damage. Odunus (2009) states that teachers have been and will always be the essential pillars of education. According to him, no matter how grandiose a school system and its curricula may be implementation of its programmes will be fruitless unless they are handled by competent and effective teachers. Therefore the ultimate realization of the aims of education and thus the achievement of the country’s needs depends on the quality as well as the quantity of teachers in schools. Obviously teachers are a force to reckon with for social change and reconstruction.

Any careful observer of our public school programme in Delta State would see nothing but careless and haphazard policy formulation. This explains why those who can afford it would prefer the private schools to the public schools. The little restructuring that is being made across the state as exemplified in Ogbe Secondary School, Effurun; Urhobo College, Warri and other schools to revamp the system could be attributed

to the fighting spirit and relentless efforts of the state wing of the NUT acting as a watchdog over the educational development of the state. Some of the problems confronting the administration of public school system are:

1. Poorly motivated students
2. Low teachers' morale
3. Inadequate infrastructural facilities

The Role of NUT Activities in School Administration

According to article 2(V) of the Unions Constitution, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) must not only work for the upliftment of teachers through better conditions and improved working environment, it must work tirelessly for better public education system. Thus, the NUT has always played the role of influence on policies in the areas of class size, ancillary staff, hours of work, annual holidays, school terms, study leave, special leave, teacher exchange and special provisions for specialist teachers as well as for teachers in rural and remote areas. Under general conditions of service of teachers, NUT has achieved a lot for the Nigerian teacher. A few more sensitive areas like study leave with pay, visit to others schools, class size, substitute teachers for absent colleagues and teachers exchange are in line for change.

Influence of NUT Activities on Teachers' Welfare

Concerned with the plight of teachers of Delta State under the down turn of economic environment which has made decent living and savings difficult, worried by the pain and frustration retired teachers suffer and motivated by Article 2(V) of the Unions' Constitution with the objectives "to enhance the social and economic well being of members and establish welfare funds for benefits of members of the Union" Delta State wing put in place "Delta State Teachers Social Security and End-Well Scheme (DSTSSSES)" otherwise known as "Teachers Insurance Scheme". The Nigerian Union of Teachers has been very much involved with the economic welfare of its members.

Influence of NUT Activities on Teachers' Working Condition

The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) as a professional body and trade union has been concerned with the improvement of teachers' working condition over times. The working environment of the teachers is repulsive. The infrastructural facilities like classrooms, furniture, ceiling, instructional materials, teaching aids, laboratories, libraries, workshops, seats, desks, books and hostels are all lacking, as government fails to provide them. Class size is unimaginable as the teacher faces a crowd rather than a class. A visit to some of these schools will reveal dilapidated buildings with collapsing walls, bare classrooms, lacking electricity and water, foul toilet (if any), unfurnished offices and when furnished they usually consist of only a chair and a table. In most cases the office is an open hall called "staff room".

The teachers are expected to work under this harsh environment that is ill-motivated, and yet produce good results. Meanwhile, teachers colleagues working in offices and companies have air-conditioned offices with executive chairs and tables, refrigerators, colour TV's and satellite dishes, wall to wall rugs and air-conditioned cars with official drivers attached, the conditions of service for teachers remain appalling and dehumanizing; wages are poor and discriminatory comparatively considered with other occupational and professional groupings. There is depressive frustration in the teaching profession, creating rebellious attitudes to work.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was concluded that the NUT has recorded commendable achievements in the area of economic welfare services as well as agitating for better conditions of service to her members. NUT has therefore had a positive influence on teachers' working conditions and welfare; that schools heads rating of the influence of NUT on teachers' working conditions and welfare is higher than that of the teachers; that secondary school teachers rated NUT influence on teachers working conditions higher than primary school teachers; that primary school teachers rated the influence of NUT on teachers welfare higher than secondary school teachers; that despite the



fact that NUT activities is important, it is however regrettable that the activities of NUT in school administration is not appreciated enough by some of its members. Government tends to misconstrue and undermine the position of the NUT in school administration by culpable neglect of brilliant ideas and useful suggestions offered by the union. This partly accounts for the high level of educational crisis in some cases.

Based on the aforesaid assertions, it was recommended that NUT should incorporate scholarship schemes into its services to members. This will help reduce the burden of NUT members in maintaining their children in schools. The scholarship scheme will therefore prove very useful strategy by NUT in improving members' welfare. Also, the Union should provide loans for its members. This will encourage more teachers to agree with the benefits or influence of NUT on their welfare. In addition, NUT should intensify efforts in ensuring teachers prompt and regular promotion as at and when due. The union should therefore step up efforts in her dialogue with government. Prompt promotion will encourage better job performance among teachers.

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