

The Impact of IPPIS Policy on the University System: A Critical Assessment

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Abstract

The 2020 industrial action embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) over the forceful enrolment of its members on the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) by the federal government has elicited uncertainty on the stability of Nigeria's university system. The paper examined the negative impact of the implementation of IPPIS on the Nigerian university system, as well as the overall implications of its rejection by ASUU on industrial harmony in Nigeria's universities. The paper is premised on Marx's Conflict Theory. Marx is of the view that human society is based on class relations, with opposing interests. The ruling class often imposes its rules to the detriment of the working class. Conflict is an inherent aspect of social relations, due to opposing interests. The study used secondary data and content analysis as its methodology. The paper found that the rationale behind the rejection of IPPIS by ASUU is that, IPPIS did not capture the peculiarities of Nigerian university system, which include non-recognition of sabbatical and visiting lecturers, and non-recognition of payment of promotion arrears. More so, it negates the autonomy of the university system. The paper recommends that the federal government should accept the University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) proposed by ASUU which accommodates the peculiarities of universities in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Impact, Policy, Assessment, System, Critical, Industrial Action.*

Introduction

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was founded in 1978. The Union is an offshoot of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) which was established in 1965 to ensure the welfare of its members. Ever since the formation of the union, there were a series of industrial disharmonies between the union and the federal government over issues of welfare and revitalization of the university system (Sabo et al, 2019). Initially, the federal government used the Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS) as the payment platform for university academics. However, the federal government discovered several flaws associated with the GIFMIS payment system which includes its inability to capture and eliminate ghost workers, track and eliminate dead or retired workers, double payment to civil servants, and inability to accurately capture tax deductions (Enakirerhi & Temile, 2017).

The federal government came up with the

idea of replacing GIFMIS payment system with the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) for the payment of salaries of all ministries, departments and agencies. Since the introduction of the new payment system in 2006, it is being implemented in phases. In 2019, the last batch of federal ministries, departments and agencies were ordered to join the payment platform including federal universities' teaching and non-teaching staff. The university academic staff union noticed severe and detrimental flaws in IPPIS, and called on its members not to enroll. The non-teaching staff in the universities irrationally enrolled, and regretted that move (ASUU, 2022a)

The Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System is as an information technology enabled facility ostensibly deployed to facilitate manpower planning, eliminate record and payroll fraud, facilitate easy storage of staff data, enhance the update and retrieval of personnel records for administrative and

pension purposes, and staff remuneration with minimal wastages and leakages (Enakirerhi & Temile, 2017). The IPPIS platform was conceived to eliminate corruption in the public service, but with ASUU's adamant position on the leakages in the platform, it has become visible that IPPIS is a conduit pipe for massive looting ever recorded in Nigeria's history (ASUU, 2022b).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities vehemently refused to be irrationally migrated to IPPIS citing irregularities which include violation of university autonomy, and the inability of the platform to capture peculiarities of the Nigerian university system. As an alternative to IPPIS, ASUU developed and submitted to government another payment system called University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS), which will address all the peculiarities of the university system, and clear all the concerns it has raised with regards to IPPIS. The government's forceful enrolment of ASUU members on IPPIS provided no alternative to the union, but to embark on strike in 2020 to force the government to reverse its unjust decision to place academic staff on the platform (ASUU, 2022c).

Methodology

The study used qualitative research method to investigate and explain the problem under study. The data collection was mainly from secondary sources such as books, journals, newspapers, magazines and ASUU bulletin. The paper is restricted to identifying the issues that prompted ASUU to reject IPPIS, and embarked on strike in 2020, to compel the federal government to replace the payment platform with the University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) it developed.

Conceptual Clarification

Industrial Action

Before conceptualizing industrial action, it is important to understand industrial relations, because industrial disputes in itself is an aspect of industrial relations. Okaka (2011) is of the view that industrial relations are the pattern of interactions that exist between trade unions (employees) and employers. It includes all the issues affecting human resources as well as the

effort of the government in such human resources management. Fajana (2005) believes that whenever relationships go sour, there is bound to be industrial action. Industrial actions are any form of action by employees which is aimed at forcing the management or employers to come to terms with the demands of the employees. Industrial action is often the result of conflicting interest between employers and employees with respect to working conditions, wage demands, and management policies (Ahmad and Basheer, 2012).

What is Policy?

Olssen et al. (2004) define policy as any course of action relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values or the allocation of resources. This definition indicates that there is a close relationship between policy and government action to promote the development and wellbeing of the citizens. In another dimension, Ball (1998) observes that policy is a means of representing, accounting for and legitimating political decisions. In essence, policy is the practical aspect of political idea conceived by government officials aimed at addressing social and economic issues that are relevant to the society.

Smith (2003) categorized policy into two; namely vertical and horizontal policy. Vertical policy is normally made by the top echelon of an organization especially at the Head Office. It is also known as corporate policy. The vertical policy is implemented throughout the levels and components of the organization. Horizontal policy on the other hand, covers only a section of the organization to which the policy is targeted, and not affecting the whole organization. So also, Torjman (2005) further classified policy into reactive and proactive policy. Reactive policy is an imperative and necessary policy geared towards addressing a crisis situation. It could be a response to terrorist attack, health emergency or drought. Proactive policy is the type that is designed, implemented and pursued through a planned course of action to achieve set objectives. For instance, poverty alleviation, girl-child education and agriculture transformation initiative are within the ambit of proactive policy.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Marx's Conflict Theory, which is a revolutionary idea that depicts the inevitability of conflict in the society (Tucker, 1969). Arguing from this point, Koop (2019) notes that every society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of unrestricted, and intense competition existing among the various classes over limited resources. This seems to suggest that economic factor is the major source of conflict in the Society. Conflict Theory sees society as a state in which two or more social entities, such as ASUU and the federal government feel that they possess mutually incompatible goals (Mitchell, 1981). Hence, Conflict Theory shows a sequence of interactions between ASUU and the federal government which explains the basis of dispute in the University educational system.

Marx believed that society is based on class relations with opposing interests. The theory asserts that individual position within a class hierarchy is determined by their role in the production process and that political and ideological consciousness is determined by their class position (Parking, 1979). Marx views conflict as the driving force of history, and the main determinant of social trajectories. Conflict arises from a unified class interest also known as class consciousness (Kingston, 2000). Class consciousness is an aspect of Marxist theory, referring to the self-awareness of social classes, and the capacity to act in their relational interest or measuring the extent to which individuals are conscious of the historical tasks their class set for them (Kingston 2000). However, by definition, the objective interest of classes is fundamentally in opposition. Consequently, these opposing interests eventually lead to class conflict. When increasing class conflict manifests at societal level, class consciousness and common interest also increase. When class consciousness is augmented, policies are organized to ensure the duration of such interest for the ruling class (Edward, 1983; McLellan, 2006; Kingston, 2000).

Marx's Class Conflict Theory provides an explanation on the insistence of the federal government on the use of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) for payment of emoluments of academics in the federal universities in Nigeria. The federal

government therefore uses the IPPIS policy as a weapon to decimate ASUU. Government is well aware that the IPPIS policy violates university autonomy, but still went ahead to implement it in spite of ASUU's resistance. ASUU developed and presented UTAS as an alternative to IPPIS, but government is reluctant to adopt it. The situation eventually leads to strike embarked upon by ASUU, because there were no plausible efforts by the government to resolve the issue. However, public officials have the wherewithal to enroll their children to study abroad and in private universities, so they are careless about what happens to the public universities. The academic staff union is in strong opposition to this, a situation that does not go down well with the people in control of power in Nigeria.

The IPPIS Policy in the Nigerian Public Service

Before the introduction of IPPIS in 2006, the federal government was using GIFMIS as the legal and institutional guideline for the supervision of the budget in all its ramifications in the area of preparation of the budget, its execution, internal control, audit, procurement, monitoring, revenue collection and payment of salary (Shehu, 2020). The main goal of GIFMIS was to enhance effective management of resources, avoidance of waste and efficient control of public funds against leakages. The adoption of GIFMIS in the Nigerian public service also included the universities (Ogbonna & Ojeaburu, 2015). A study conducted by Shehu (2020) shows that GIFMIS had greater peculiarity to the Nigerian university system, because it is flexible and accommodates the needs of the academic environment. There were no complaints on the working of GIFMIS by universities with regards to its function and service delivery capacity.

The major weakness of GIFMIS according to Shehu (2020, p.2) is that:

Anti-corruption is rarely a clearly stated objective of Public Finance Management reform, especially in post-conflict countries where the objective of these reforms is primarily to enable the state to perform its basic functions such as regular payment of salaries to civil servants, delivery of public services

and the rebuilding of public infrastructure.

It was the attempt by the federal government to remedy the deficiency in anti-corruption component in GIFMIS that led to the implementation of IPPIS in 2007 which was executed in phases. Government ministries, departments and agencies were incorporated into IPPIS platform incrementally, and by the year 2020 universities were obliged to form part of the financial reform programme (Folorunsho, 2022; Bello & Mela, 2022).

The major thrust of IPPIS is to eliminate corruption, waste and ghost workers in the payment of salaries and financial business of the government. The implementation of IPPIS in universities was problematic because it eroded the basic principles of university autonomy and it negates due process in terms of recognition of salary arrears, overpayment and underpayment of salary for staff among others which compelled ASUU to reject the payment platform (Folorunsho, 2022).

The Impact of IPPIS Policy on the University System

The federal government decided to introduce IPPIS in view of the loopholes detected in GIFMIS as discussed earlier, but ever since the introduction of IPPIS by the federal government, ASUU vehemently rejected the payment platform on the ground that the software did not capture the peculiarities of Nigerian university system. Below are the major reasons ASUU rejected the IPPIS:

I. IPPIS violates university autonomy: Section 2AA of the University (Miscellaneous) Provisions Amendment Act 2003, states that the power of the Council shall be exercised, as in the Law and statute of each University and to that extent establishment circulars that are inconsistent with the Laws and statutes of the University should not apply to the Universities. Therefore, every federal university is an independent community of its own, with its own instituted Governing Council and Senate. It has independent control over its affairs and programmes. Violation of this autonomy was one of the reasons ASUU rejected IPPIS. The ASUU

leadership met with the Senate in 2019 to explain to the legislature the reasons why the universities cannot be placed on the IPPIS platform. Unfortunately, the government did not listen to ASUU's genuine position (Iroanusi, 2019).

- ii. IPPIS does not recognize the payment of academic staff promotion arrears, and other allowances. This situation contributed immensely to the rejection of the payment platform by ASUU. Academic staff is denied promotion arrears deliberately to provide space for the IPPIS merchants to siphon resources as demonstrated by the alleged looting of billions of naira by the former Accountant-General of the Federation, Ahmed Idris (Igoni, 2022).
- iii. IPPIS does not capture the technicalities and peculiarities associated with the flexibility and mobility of academics in the university system. Sabbatical and visiting lecturers are not recognized by IPPIS, which has resulted in a deficiency in academic staff requirements by several universities in the country. This will retard academic standards in some universities due to a shortage of manpower (Toyin, 2021).
- iv. So also, IPPIS unnecessarily delays the recruitment of academic staff to fill vacancies that are urgently required. Before the introduction of IPPIS, universities recruit lecturers without any difficulty. However, under IPPIS, universities cannot recruit lecturers at will. This means that when the school requires lecturers, it has to apply to Abuja and wait for clearance for as long as possible. The IPPIS procedure has created inertia in the recruitment of academic staff which does augur well for the university system (Enakirerhi, & Temile, 2017).
- v. The IPPIS also automatically retires university lecturers at the age of 60. The IPPIS template is designed to phase out staff who are sixty (60) years of age and above, which contradicts the policy of professors retiring at the age of seventy (70) years. There is also complaint by academic staff of incessant variations in monthly salary alert and deductions they receive from IPPIS under the management of the Accountant-General of the Federation's office (The Nation, 2022; Igoni, 2022).

University Academic Staff Strike and Government's Responsibility

The series of industrial actions embarked upon by ASUU is a result of government's regening of honestly signed agreements. The academic staff union does not derive any pleasure from embarking on strike, but it is forced to take that line of action, because that is what the government understands. Successive administrations in Nigerian whether military or civilian have never at any particular time designed a policy to enhance the conditions of service of academics, unless the lecturers fight for it through industrial action (ASUU, 2022c). The federal government's careless and recalcitrant attitude to ASUU demands in recent years particularly the issue of IPPIS has resulted to the following set back to Nigeria's greatness and image, which the government must be held responsible:

- i. The government's negative attitude towards the education sector leads to the destabilization of the universities' programmes and calendar leading to the production of sub-standard graduates that are not globally competitive (Njure, 2021).
- ii. Industrial action by academics due to the government's callous attitude prolong students' academic years, and this is the reason why foreign students do not patronize Nigerian universities, which is a blow to national prestige, and impediment to foreign currency flow to the country (Akasike, 2022).
- iii. The inability of the government to address the demands of academics leads to a brain drain of highly valued intellectuals, which is to the detriment of Nigerian students and society (Akasike, 2022).
- iv. The academic staff union's consistent condemnation of the irregularities obvious in IPPIS resulted in the discovery of staggering fraud and embezzlement replete in the payment platform. There was the allegation of fraud and diversion of funds by the former Accountant-General of the Federation (AGF) Ahmed Idris. There is N80bn initially discovered to have been diverted by the AGF, but witnesses at the court hearing on the case filed by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) confirmed that the

alleged amount is 109bn, diverted by the former AGF through the manipulation of IPPIS, and the Treasury Single Account (TSA) (The Nation, 2022; Igoni, 2022). So also, the National Security Adviser Babagana Monguno stated that 54,000 fraudulent entries were detected on IPPIS payment platform. This discovery virtually proves the legitimacy of ASUU's claim that IPPIS is full of contradictions and scams (Channels News, 2022).

Conclusion

The paper critically examined the inadequacies inherent in the implementation of IPPIS by the federal government and its negative effects on the university system. Issues relating to endemic corruption in IPPIS, non-recognition of implementation of academic staff promotion salary increment by the platform, delay in the recruitment of academic staff due to bureaucratic hurdles imposed by IPPIS, unnecessary deductions from staff salary, variations in staff salary on monthly basis and a sharp rise in tax deductions. These are the contradictions replete in IPPIS which ASUU wanted the government to address for equity and fair play towards enhancing industrial harmony in the university system in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward to the government for implementation in order to resolve issues that are creating instability in Nigerian universities:

- i. The federal government should respond to the demands of ASUU and deploy UTAS as the payment platform for university academics, because it complies with the peculiarities of the university system.
- ii. The legislative arm of government should wade into the stalemate between the federal government and ASUU on the IPPIS issue in order to ensure industrial harmony in the universities.
- iii. Civil society organizations should also provide a voice to convince the federal government on the need to implement UTAS for sustainable development of the universities.

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