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IMPACT OF ASUU STRIKES AND ACADEMIC OVERLOAD ON THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of ASUU strikes and academic overload on the mental well-being of undergraduates in Anambra State. Two purposes of the study, with their corresponding research questions, guided the study. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The study population comprised of all undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The sample size for this study was 1044, comprising 376 male and 675 female undergraduate students determined through the multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using researcher-developed instrument titled: Impact of ASUU Strikes and Academic Overload on the Mental Wellbeing Questionnaire (IASUUSAOMWQ). The instrument was validated by experts in the field of education. The instrument's reliability was ensured through Cronbach's Alpha which

yielded alpha coefficients of 0.70 and 0.72 for the clusters respectively, and an overall co-efficient of 0.71. The mean value was used to answer the research questions, and the standard deviation was used to test the homogeneity or otherwise of the mean ratings. The findings revealed that the ASUU strikes have a negative impact on the mental well-being of the undergraduate students. The findings also revealed that academic overload negatively affects the mental well-being of undergraduate students. Based on the study's findings, it was recommended, among others, that the Federal Government of Nigeria implement and enforce binding agreements with ASUU to prevent recurrent strikes, ensure academic continuity, and reduce prolonged uncertainty that negatively impacts students' mental well-being and educational progress.

Keywords: ASUU strike, mental well-being, academic overload, undergraduate students

Introduction

Mental well-being is a state in which individuals can cope with everyday stressors, work productively, and contribute to their communities. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2018) explained that mental well-being describes a state in which an individual has cognitive and psychological balance, which helps them think critically and perform tasks as planned. Ugwueze et al. (2021) described mental well-being as a condition in which an individual experiences positive emotions, engages in meaningful activities, and has strong interpersonal relationships. The importance of mental well-being in academic and students' progression studies can never be overestimated. This is because a student's ability to concentrate, retain information, and perform well in academic settings is strongly linked to their mental state (Ghaleb, 2024). When students have sound mental well-being, they exhibit greater motivation, resilience, and cognitive ability, which are essential for academic success.

Unfortunately, the economic realities in some countries, like Nigeria, are not making things easy for students. In a country like Nigeria, the economy faces persistent inflation, high unemployment rates, and inconsistent government policies, which have created an unstable environment for both students and educational institutions (Orji et al., 2022). As a result, the government, on many occasions, cannot pay workers' salaries or keep agreements with workers,

such as improved welfare packages, salary increments, and enhanced working conditions (Eze & Nwankwo, 2020). This has led to diverse agitations from different labour unions across the country. One such union agitating for the government to implement its agreements is the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is a union of university lecturers in Nigeria, formed to protect and advance the interests of university academic staff in terms of working conditions, salaries, and overall welfare (Otosi et al., 2004). Similarly, Ezinne et al (2024) described the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as a pressure group that advocates for improved university funding, staff remuneration, and infrastructural development to enhance the quality of education in Nigeria. Some of the functions of ASUU include negotiating with the government on behalf of university lecturers, advocating for increased educational funding, ensuring fair employment practices, and promoting academic freedom and research development (Nwagbala et al, 2024).

Due to government's inability to meet its agreements with this union, ASUU frequently embarks on strikes to press its demands. Wordu and Nwanguma (2024) defined an ASUU strike as a deliberate work stoppage by university lecturers aimed at compelling the government to fulfill its commitments to the education sector. ASUU has undergone several strikes, including those in 1999, 2001, 2003, 2009, 2013, and 2020, with the last in 2022 (Idika et al., 2024). Adesola et al. (2024) showed that ASUU strikes lasted from 1 week and 9 months within these striking periods. Beyond these strikes, ASUU has continued to threaten further strikes to press its demands. These strikes have affected students in several ways, including increased anxiety, uncertainty about their academic future, and prolonged disruptions to their learning process (Oderinde et al., 2024). When students face frequent interruptions in their academic calendar, they become disposed to

experience academic burnout, reduced motivation, and frustration, which could affect their psychological stability. Adanna and Ogunode (2022), university strike in Nigeria are a critical source of psychological distress among students, leading to emotional burnout and reduced academic enthusiasm. Similarly, Chukwudi and Idowu (2021) found that frequent ASUU strikes result in emotional instability and uncertainty among undergraduates, contributing to high levels of stress and reduced coping capacity. Adebayo and Oyeleye (2019) also reported that repeated academic interruptions severely compromise students' mental well-being by increasing depressive symptoms and reducing a sense of academic control. On the other hand, Omosefe, Emmanuel and Tinuade (2023) showed that academic strikes do not affect the mental wellbeing of students. The prolonged idleness during strikes can lead students to engage in unproductive or even delinquent activities, which further compound their stress and overall psychological challenges (Adesola et al, 2024). Also, prolonged stay-at-home or idleness caused by the ASUU strike and subsequent return to school usually predisposes students to academic overload.

Academic overload refers to the excessive amount of coursework, assignments, and academic expectations that students must meet within a limited timeframe (Eduwem & Ezeonwumelu, 2020). Likewise, Anierobi et al (2024) defined academic overload as an overwhelming academic demand that exceeds a student's cognitive and emotional capacity, leading to stress and diminished academic performance. This academic overload has affected students in several ways, including decreased concentration, increased pressure to meet deadlines, sleep deprivation, and heightened stress levels (Igwe & Ejide, 2024). Sadly, many federal universities in Nigeria are affected, and those in Anambra State are no different. Federal universities such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, have faced numerous challenges due to ASUU strikes, leading to disrupted academic calendars and prolonged study years (Adesola et al.,

2024). These disruptions might have negatively impacted students' mental well-being as they struggle to cope with uncertainty and the pressure of making up for lost time when academic activities resume.

Scholars have shown that academic overload could be debilitating to the mental wellbeing of students. For instance, Chukwuemeka and Yusuf (2020), academic overload among Nigerian undergraduates correlates strongly with emotional fatigue and anxiety disorders. Chukwuemeka and Yusuf explained that overwhelming academic tasks lead to increased stress and depression, particularly during exam periods. Ibrahim and Onuoha (2019) also affirmed that students subjected to excessive academic pressure experience higher levels of mental distress and are more prone to burnout. Alvarez-Becerra et al. (2024) contend that academic rigor is essential for intellectual development and that resilience training should be incorporated into academic curricula to equip students to cope with demanding schedules.

Despite extensive research on ASUU strikes and their impact on the Nigerian educational system, few studies have examined how these strikes specifically affect students' mental well-being in federal universities in Anambra State. In other words, there is a scarcity of localized research focused on the intersection of ASUU strikes, academic overload, and mental well-being within the specific socio-academic setting of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Therefore, this study is essential to investigate the impact of ASUU strikes and academic overload on the mental well-being of students at Federal University in Anambra State. The study was guided by 2 research questions as follows:

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of the ASUU strike on the mental well-being of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
2. What is the impact of academic overload on the mental well-being of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design, which involves collecting detailed information about a population or phenomenon that has already happened. This method is suitable for this study because though the ASUU strike happened in the past and normal academic sessions resumed, students still grapple with the effects of the strike to cover the lost months due to the strike. Normal academic sessions have commenced, but the researchers sought to opinion of students on the impact that ASUU strikes and academic overload had on their mental well-being.

Research Participants

The study population comprised all the final year undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The sample size for this study was 1044, comprising 376 male and 675 female undergraduate final year students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka drawn through a multi-stage sampling technique. Firstly, the programmes were stratified into 5 fields names: Science-based, Tech-based, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education. Secondly, final-year students

were drawn to ensure that they had experienced ASUU strike. Finally, simple random sampling was used to draw 1,044 students from all the fields as shown in the Table below.

Table 1: Students' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

	Frequency	**Percentage (%)**
Age		
22-26	964	92.34%
27-31	57	5.46%
32>	23	2.20%
Field		
Science-Based	157	15.04%
Tech-Based	100	9.58%
Humanities	273	26.15%
Social Sciences	116	11.11%
Education	398	38.12%
Residence		
On-Campus	46	4.41%
Off-Campus	998	95.59%
Gender		
Male	369	35.34%
Female	675	64.66%
Total	**1,044**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work (2026)

Research Instrument

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Impact of ASUU Strikes and Academic Overload on the Mental Wellbeing Questionnaire (IASUUSAOMWQ)." The questionnaire has two sections: A and B. Section A collected information on respondents' demographic variables. Section B was divided into two clusters based on the research questions. The questionnaire has 20 items structured on a four (4) point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) – 4, Agree (A) – 3, Disagree (D) – 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) – 1. The instrument was validated by experts in the field of education. The instrument's reliability was ensured through Cronbach's Alpha which yielded alpha coefficients of 0.70 and 0.72 for the clusters respectively,

and an overall co-efficient of 0.71. The study used an online questionnaire administration method done through sharing Google Form link for the questionnaire to the final year students in various fields in the university. This was done through the various course representatives of the students to ensure that circulation was done among final year students only. Moreover, an instruction was written on the questionnaire that it was strictly for students in their final year. The Course Representative administered the questionnaire to the respondents via students' WhatsApp groups. After the exercise, the researcher received 376 responses from the male and 675 from the female undergraduate final year students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka representing 35.34% and 64.66% respectively which were used for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Mean scores and standard deviations were used to analyze all the responses to the research questions. The decision of the agreement was rated on the following scale: Strongly Agree (SA) - 3.50 – 4.00, Agree (A) - 2.50 – 3.49, Disagree (D) - 1.50 – 2.49, and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 0.00 – 1.49. By implication, any mean value that is 2.50 and above were considered a positive impact while scores above 2.50 were considered a negative impact.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers adhered to ethics by following established ethical criteria for educational and social science research. This was ensured by providing written explanation of the study, obtaining respondents' permission and providing a link to the shared Google Form questionnaire. The respondents were duly informed that they were at liberty to participate in the study or withdraw from it any moment they felt they were no longer comfortable with continuing. Data collection

adopted anonymous method to protect the privacy of the participants. To ensure this, the researchers avoided any identifying markers while gathering data.

Results

Research Question One: What is the impact of ASUU strike on mental well-being of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation of the impact of ASUU strike on mental well-being of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

S/N	Item Statements	X	SD	Decision
1	The ASUU strike caused significant emotional distress for me.	3.30	1.075	Agree
2	The prolonged ASUU strike increased my anxiety about my academic future.	3.14	1.040	Agree
3	I experienced feelings of depression due to academic instability caused by ASUU strike.	3.11	1.008	Agree
4	The uncertainty of resumption due to ASUU strike negatively affected my motivation.	3.13	.956	Agree
5	I felt a decline in my academic self-esteem due to disruptions caused by ASUU strike.	3.11	.990	Agree
6	ASUU strike caused financial stress, which affected my mental well-being.	3.11	1.085	Agree
7	I struggled with a lack of structure and routine due to the impact that ASUU strike had on my mental health.	3.15	1.147	Agree
	Grand Mean	**3.15**	**1.043**	**Agree**

Table 1 presents the mean ratings of the impact of the ASUU strike on the mental well-being of undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The results revealed that items 1 to 7 have an average mean score of 3.15, which is above 2.50, and with a standard deviation of 1.043. This implies that the ASUU strike has a negative impact on the mental well-being of undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question Two: What is the impact of academic overload on the mental well-being of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 2: Mean ratings and standard deviation of the impact of academic overload on mental well-being

S/N	Item Statements	X	SD	Decision
1	Excessive academic workload makes me feel stressed.	3.40	.947	Agree
2	The pressure of academic demands negatively affects my sleep patterns.	3.50	.869	Agree
3	Academic overload causes me frequent feelings of burnout.	3.47	.864	Agree
4	I find it difficult to balance academic workload with personal life.	3.49	.811	Agree
5	The burden of numerous assignments caused me emotional exhaustion.	3.48	.850	Agree
6	High academic workload has reduced my ability to retain information.	3.48	.910	Agree
7	I often experience physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue due to academic stress.	3.09	1.191	Agree
8	Academic overload has negatively impacted my overall mental well-being and motivation.	3.40	.947	Agree
	Grand Mean	**3.41**	**1.924**	**Agree**

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of the impact of academic overload on the mental well-being of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The results revealed that items 1 to 8 have an average mean score of 3.41, which is above 2.50 with a standard deviation of 1.924. This implies that academic overload negatively affects the mental well-being of undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study showed that ASUU strikes have a negative impact on the mental well-being of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The findings indicated that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike significantly affects the mental well-being of undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Students are

vulnerable to prolonged academic uncertainty, which can trigger heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional fatigue. The disruption of academic progress, delays in graduation, and uncertainty about future career prospects contribute to psychological distress. Moreover, many students feel disillusioned and helpless because strikes reflect structural instability within the educational system. Such mental strain often reduces motivation, concentration, and overall academic engagement. This impact is not merely emotional; it also influences cognitive and behavioral responses to education-related stressors.

Several scholarly works support the observed findings. According to Adanna and Ogunode (2022), university strikes in Nigeria are a critical source of psychological distress among students, leading to emotional burnout and reduced academic enthusiasm. Similarly, Chukwudi and Idowu (2021) found that frequent ASUU strikes result in emotional instability and uncertainty among undergraduates, contributing to high levels of stress and reduced coping capacity. Adebayo and Oyeleye (2019) also reported that repeated academic interruptions severely compromise students' mental well-being by increasing depressive symptoms and reducing a sense of academic control. These studies support the claim that ASUU strikes impose a psychosocial burden on students' academic lives and mental health.

Additionally, the finding revealed that academic overload has a negative impact on the mental well-being of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The finding reflects the growing pressure students face due to excessive academic demands. Academic overload involves an unmanageable quantity of assignments, tight deadlines, extensive reading materials, and high expectations, all of which contribute to psychological stress. When students are overwhelmed by coursework, they often experience anxiety, sleep disruption, emotional exhaustion, and reduced academic self-efficacy. This overload can also impair concentration,

increase burnout, and lead to feelings of helplessness. As academic expectations escalate without corresponding support, students' mental health suffers, affecting both academic performance and overall psychological stability.

The finding aligns with numerous scholarly works. According to Chukwuemeka and Yusuf (2020), academic overload among Nigerian undergraduates correlates strongly with emotional fatigue and anxiety disorders. Chukwuemeka and Yusuf explained that overwhelming academic tasks lead to increased stress and depression, particularly during exam periods. Ibrahim and Onuoha (2019) also affirmed that students subjected to excessive academic pressure experience higher levels of mental distress and are more prone to burnout. These authors suggest that academic environments that prioritize quantity over quality of learning often create hostile learning conditions detrimental to students' psychological well-being, reinforcing the need for balanced academic workloads and institutional mental health support systems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ASUU strike and academic overload negative affect the mental well-being of undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. These stressors, both individually and jointly, trigger emotional distress, cognitive fatigue, and academic disengagement. Ultimately, this underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms, including policy consistency, mental health support services, and manageable academic planning, to foster a stable learning environment that protects students' mental health and academic outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria should implement and enforce binding agreements with ASUU to prevent recurrent strikes, ensuring academic continuity and reducing prolonged uncertainty that negatively impacts students' mental well-being and educational progress.
2. University Management (Nnamdi Azikiwe University) should establish accessible on-campus mental health centers staffed by trained professionals, offering counseling, stress intervention programs, and regular psychological assessments to support students experiencing academic-related emotional distress.
3. The National Universities Commission (NUC) develops flexible academic frameworks that prevent post-strike academic overload by restructuring course schedules, moderating workloads, and allowing adequate recovery time for both students and lecturers after strikes.
4. Academic Staff (Lecturers and Departmental Coordinators) coordinate assignment deadlines and lecture delivery across departments to reduce workload intensity, promote clarity, and prevent overlapping academic responsibilities that heighten student stress and cognitive fatigue.
5. Students' union government and peer support groups initiate peer-based mental health support programs, including awareness campaigns, emotional resilience workshops, and academic mentorship to encourage shared coping strategies and reduce feelings of isolation among students.

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