



## Aftermath of 2022 ASUU Strike in Nigeria: Does Years on the Job and Openness to Experience Play Roles on University Workers' Intention to Quit Their Job?

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**ABSTRACT:** The study explored the roles of years on the job and openness to experience on university workers' intention to quit their job after 2022 ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) strike among three hundred and fifty (350) members of staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria. The participants consist of 200 lecturers and 150 administrative staff, who have spent between 3 – 26 years on the job. Their ages ranged from 36 – 61 years with the mean age of 48.5 and standard deviation of 1.84. Their gender consist of male = 160 (47.3%) and female = 190 (52.7%). Two instruments were used for data collection namely, employee intention to stay or quit scale and Big-Five personality inventory. Multiple regression statistics was adopted for data analyses. The results showed that years on the job significantly and negatively predicted intention to quite  $\beta = -.212, P < .05$  and openness to experience did not predict intention to quit  $\beta = .075, P = .05$ . Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that university based trade unions must adopt extensive welfare packages that could carter for their members especially the newly employed members of the unions during industrial actions. Also, university managements should institute robust welfare system that would relieve the stress newly employed staff undergo, which may be responsible for their higher turn-over intentions.

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**KEYWORDS:**  
ASUU Strike, Years on the  
job, Personality, Intention  
to Quit, intention to stay

### INTRODUCTION

One of the core characteristics of university work is mentorship and production of workforce that will continue to sustain the system. The experienced workers contribute wealth of their knowledge in the development of the university and the entire society. Such development cuts across infrastructural and human capital dimension. Apart from training students, experienced university workers mentor the young employees. On the job training is carried out by the experienced workers. This process has helped universities to become self sufficient in workforce training and re-training (Bos, et al., 2009). In most units or departments, in-house trainings are conducted periodically to empower the employees. The facilitators/trainers are mostly drawn from within the experienced members of the university. Such internal training is cost-effective, hence its high frequency.

However, there seems to be a paradigm shift in work pattern and job characteristics after the 2022 strike of members of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria. There has been observed increase in university workers negative attitude to work after the eight months strike. Aloofness, indifference and non-commitment seem to be manifesting among university workers (Akinwale, Kuye & Akinwale, 2023). The negative aftermath of the 2022 (ASUU) strike has also resulted in the increased number of university workers migrating locally and internationally. Some of them migrate to enroll in academic programs, which they have completed in Nigeria. Archival record of universities admission enrollment of Nigerian emigrants in US, UK and Canada increased geometrically in 2022 academic session (Apply Board, 2022). The reported increase in admission seekers in the global North may be a result of the protracted and debilitating strike action in Nigeria public universities. Some of the admission seekers want to use education as migration route in search of better condition of living because university work in Nigeria has become unsustainable and consequently unattractive. According to rational choice theory (Raymond), people take decisions on the basis of self-interest, personal wellbeing and cost-benefit analysis. The theory further argued that before people engage in certain tasks, they tend to weigh the pros and cons of the action. Such cost-benefit analysis enables the individual to look beyond the case at hand and consider other

related factors (Monogbe & Monogbe, 2019; Ogu, 2003). Thus, it may be consideration of other factors that may propel the members of staff concerned to remain in the job despite the experienced adversities emanated from the strike.

Indeed, interaction with Nigerian education migrants in the global north has reported that there is no difference in content of teaching between Nigeria education systems and global north. On the other hand, the differences in education between Nigeria and the three countries (US, UK and Canada) are stability in education sector, facilities and ease of learning. One of the seemingly factors driving workers to quit their job in Nigerian universities to enroll as students elsewhere may be the excess availabilities of opportunities to grants, awards, scholarships, students' loan and work-aid programs in global north that facilitate education (Higher Education Statistics Agency [hesa.ac.uk](https://www.hesa.ac.uk), 2023). These differences may prompt more Nigerians to seek to migrate for education purposes; not because of differences in quality but due to opportunities offered studying in those countries. More opportunities abound in those countries during and after graduation from the institutions. Regrettably, the large numbers of Nigerian university workers' intention to quit their job and migrate both locally and internationally threatens the underlining cultures sustaining university education globally.

Though, migration in search for better condition of living, security and wellbeing is inherent in human beings (Lee, 1966); the sudden increase in Nigeria university workers' intention to quit their job and migrate via education route calls for investigation. Push and pull theory of Migration (Lee, 1966) posited that human beings have innate desire to migrate to a place with more security and opportunities. Given that workers' wellbeing were hugely compromised during the strike, the high numbers of job quit among university workers seems justifiable. For example, Saudi Arabia government in the middle of the strike conducted several recruitment exercises in Nigerian for medical doctors and lecturers in sciences, technology, education and medical (STEM) disciplines. The recruited Nigerian doctors and lecturers were flown to Saudi Arabia. Among the recruited physicians were professors of different specialty of medicine (Punch Newspaper, August 2022). To understand the present study, there is the need for further insight into the concept of workers' intention to stay on the job, years spent on the job and openness to experiences.

Accordingly, employees' intention to stay on their jobs entails cognitive and emotional attachment to their current job and willingness to continue rendering their professional services to the organization (Moustafa, Hegazy & Hashish, 2021). Workers intention to stay on the job is intricately related to different factors such as: personality attributes, years spent on the job, job satisfaction, organizational attractiveness, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, career development opportunity, perceived fairness, lack of alternative job opportunities, work environment, occupation prestige, among others (Bailey, et al., 2017; Kim, et al., 2021; Krishnan, Ahmed & Haron, 2018; Odunaiya, et al., 2022; Salau, et al., 2020). University workers during the strike had time to reflect and engage in appraisal of their achievements so far. The idle time afforded them time out of the bustling nature of university environment to compare their developmental progress against their future goals. Given that university workers mix up with young boys and girls in the campus daily tend to create a sense of spryness (tendency to perceive self as still young), which may inhibit accurate appraisal of events. For example, some of the workers that are tenants could not renew their house rent because federal government of Nigeria withheld their salary for the eight months spent on strike and thus served as a reality check on the workers.

Furthermore, people seek for paid employment to satisfy needs (personal and social). On individual level, people have plans on what to achieve with specific timelines. Such plans may be referred to as future orientation, the tendency for individuals to project desirable events they want to achieve in the future (Ugwu, et al., 2021). Such personal needs may include amount of money one has saved, feeding well, building of houses both in the village and the city, marriage, training of children and relatives in school, regular support to parents, ownership of car(s) and meeting up with other personal idiosyncrasy. In the same vein, society places expectations on every individual at every stage of human development. For example, a worker who is at middle adulthood stage is expected to be married with children (if the person is not in religious profession that prohibits getting married). A worker is equally socially expected to contribute to community service, take title among others. The postulation of socio-meter theory (Leary, 2012) seems to succinctly explain the concept of social expectations. Psychologically, meeting up with the social expectations as a worker enhance subjective wellbeing, peer acceptance, confidence, self esteem, interpersonal relationship, and goal achievement.

In addition to social expectation, the idle university worker during the strike might have engaged in social comparison (Festinger, 1954). The concept of social comparison was propounded by Festinger to explain the psychological outcome when people evaluate themselves with others. Social comparison was divided into two namely: upward comparison and downward comparison. Upward comparison refers to the tendency of an individual to compare themselves to an individual that is believed to be better than them while downward comparison entails the tendency of an individual to compare themselves to a person that they believe are better off (Festinger, 1954; Ugwu, et al., 2023). When the comparison is done with friends that are not working in the university, but are still doing well relatively, there may be disillusionment, quest to quit and seek for another work engagement. The situation may have been worsened by cessation of salary during the eight months industrial action.

Another variable of interest to this study is years on the Job. It refers to the amount of time one has spent on his employment in the university. The duration of employment may contribute to an individual's commitment and intention to continue with the organization. It is reasonable to think that the longer an employee stays in the organization, the higher the investment to the organization (Fajcikova & Urban, 2017). Such investment includes spending one's youthful age in the organization. For example,

a professor who spent about fifteen (15) years to get to the position may not think in the same way with a man who just spent a year in the university before the strike. However, the current exodus among Nigeria university workers after the protracted industrial action consisted of professors and other employees that have spent various years in the university. With such trend, the relevance of years on the job is defied. Years on the job carry some responsibilities and respect because they mentor the younger employees (Fajcikova & Urban, 2017). The concept of years on the job may be explained by sunk-cost theory (Thaler, 1980). The theory posits that individuals tend to persist in any task they have invested their time, resources and other factors. From the prism of the theory, Nigerian public university employees who have expended their years for example professors, deputy registrars, deputy directors among others should not quit. However, 2022 scenario after ASUU strike, where professors, other senior members of staff of the Nigeria universities quitted their job, negate the tenet of the theory.

Openness to Experience as a personality variable was also the focus of this study. Indeed, understanding personality attribute of an employee may be helpful in unraveling the factors that may be contributing to the increase in number of quit among Nigeria university sector. Personality may be described as the specific characteristics that distinguish one individual from another (Delima, 2020). The personality factors manifest across places and events. Personality has been conceptualized from different perspectives but the present study explored the dimension of Big five personality typology (Steel, et al., 2018). Big five describes personality as follows: extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. In the present study, openness to experience was assessed because it is a trait that enables people to attempt to explore their environment. It was considered important study because people with the trait are likely to try new things including quitting their job to take up new challenges. While many people will cling to their job maybe because of years invested on the job, others may not consider those factors. Rather will want to try new responsibilities elsewhere. It was the considered opinion of the authors that the trait may the impetus for the increased migration of university workers in recent time. Relationship between personality trait and intention to quit may be theoretically explained using social cognitive theory.

### **Theoretical framework**

Among all the theories discussed in the work, combination of sunk-cost theory (Thaler, 1980), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989) and Rational choice theory (Raymond, 2003) were combined to robustly explain the study. Sunk-cost theory posited that continuation or otherwise in any task is dependent of investment made in that sector. The higher the investment one has made in a particular endeavour the lower the tendency to quit. In the same vein, social cognitive theory maintained that human beings are active agents, whose decisions are dependent on social support, environment, personality make-up and personal experiences. Rational choice theory postulated that people take decisions based self-interest, personal wellbeing and pros and cons. Therefore, employees' intention to quit may be a byproduct of many factors such as: the number of years invested, personal sacrifices made for organization growth, social support, employee's environment, experiences, personal interest and wellbeing, and possible advantages and disadvantages of the action.

To understand the current trend, the authors hypothesized as follows:

1. Higher years on the job will significantly predict university workers intention to stay.
2. Openness to experience will significantly predict university workers intention to quit.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

A total of three hundred and fifty (350) members of staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria were selected from 6 different units of the institution. The participants consisted of two hundred (200) lecturers and one hundred and fifty (150) administrative staff of the university. Among the lecturers were fifty five professors. The ages of participants ranged from 36 – 61 years with mean age of 48.5 and standard deviation of 1.84. Their gender consist of male = 160 (47.3%) and female = 190 (52.7%)

### **Measure**

Two scales were used for data collection namely: intention to stay or leave (Susan, et al., 2014) and Big-Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999).

### **Intention to Stay or Leave Scale**

The scale assesses the tendency of an employee to stay in the organization or quit his/her job. It has two dimensions: intention to stay and intention to quit. It contains eight (8) items that are scored in 5 point Likert format ranging from 5 = strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient reported by the developers of the scale  $\alpha = 0.96$ .

### **Big-Five Personality Inventory**

Openness to experience subscale, which contains ten (10) items were used for data collection. It is scored in five point Likert response format ranging from 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree. Items number 9 and ten are reversely scored. The developers of the scale reported Cronbach Apha coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.92$ .

Years on the job data was collected together with other demographic information. Participants were requested the number of years they have worked in the university. The data was scored by assigning 1 to people that have worked between 1 to 5 years, 2 was assigned to people that have worked from 6 to 10 years, 3 assigned to employees that have worked from 11 to 15 years, 4 assigned to people that have worked between 16 to 20 years and 5 was assigned to people that have worked from 21 years and above.

### Procedure and Ethical Consideration

Approval for the study was obtained from Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria. Participants were conveniently administered with the questionnaire in their various offices with option of collecting immediately or later date. The data was collected a month after university workers returned from the eight months industrial action with their salaries withheld by the government. Reasons for collecting the data immediately after resumption from strike was to obtain workers true feeling about their work in the university. Out of the 350 questionnaires administered, 3 were incompletely filled and were discarded.

### Design and Statistics

Cross sectional survey design was employed and multiple regression statistics was used for the analyses.

### RESULT

Summary table showing the predictive impacts of various factors on university workers' intention to leave

<i>Factors</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Std Error of B Estimate</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig</i>
	.069	2(348)	.355	3.13			
Years on the Job					-.212**	-6.11	.003
Openness to Experience					.075	1.05	.293

P < .02

The result showed that years on the job significantly and negatively predicted workers intention to leave  $\beta = -.212$ ,  $t = -6.11$ ,  $P < .003$ . Openness to experience did not predict workers intention to leave  $\beta = .075$ ,  $t = 1.05$ ,  $P > .293$ .

### DISCUSSION

The study explored relationship between workers years on the job, openness to experience and intention to leave on the job. Specifically, regression result showed that workers' years on the job significantly and negatively predicted university workers' intention to leave the job after 2022 ASUU strike. The fewer the numbers of years on the job the higher the tendency to quit and vice versa. The result was in tandem with sunk-cost theory (Thaler, 1980). This theory was coined by Thaler (1980), on the basis of earlier postulation of cognitive bias by Tversky and Kahneman (1979). Sunk-cost theory posited that people tend to continue with a particular behavior if they have invested in such venture. The emphases of the theory revolve around the tendency to persist in any task that time, mental resources, effort, money and any other investment have been expended irrespective of the adversity of the current situation. In this context, workers that have spent their youthful ages and may have made different types of contribution for the university development will find it difficult to quit despite the challenges of incessant industrial actions. The 2022 industrial action was more challenging because workers salaries were withheld by government while it lasted. Thus the massive exodus of the newly employed workers in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria (within five years of employment).

On the other hand, the result showed that personality trait (openness to experience) did not significantly relate to employees' intention to quit their jobs. Rather it is plausible to assert that personal experiences, actions of others, social support, expectations and environmental factors may be responsible for employees' intention to stay or leave an organization. Theoretically, this result is supported by social cognitive theory developed by Bandura (1989). It is a classical theory and applicable to different spheres of human endeavours. The theory posited that human beings are active agents whose actions and inactions depend on personal experiences, actions of others, self-efficacy, support of others, personal and societal expectations, environmental influences, reinforcement, among others. Based on the above theoretical stand-point, employees turnover intentions after the inglorious 2022 ASUU strike may have resulted from the consideration of numerous factors in the life of the employees. Worthy to note from the result is that environmental factors still play substantial role in decision making.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY ON UNIVERSITY SUSTAINABILITY

Given the importance of continuity and mentoring of younger employees in the university system for sustainability, the intention to quit is an existential threat to productivity and quality of services delivery, which manifests in research output and quality of graduates. When a worker leaves an organization, serious vacuum is created irrespective of the person's number of years on the job. This is because even if a replacement is engaged; it will take sometimes for the new person to acclimatize, hence may delay productivity. Also, mentoring of younger workers by the experienced ones is a part of university cultural practice that equips the employees without reliance on external training for staff development. The internal training and re-training saves cost for both



employees and the organization. Thus employees' intention to quit may destroy the well entrenched procedure for university development and production of quality graduates that are capable to compete favourably with their contemporaries. From the results, university environment, such as receptive mien, improved welfare packages and creation of future orientation for the new employees may cushion the intention to quit.

This work has explored the related factors of employees' intention to quit their work, which is timely. Apart from the timely research on the massive resignation of university workers after the strike, more empirical literature has been yielded, which may be critical for further inquiry. This research is germane because education is the bedrock of development; understanding factors that interplay in the employees' disillusionment that leads to intention to quit is an essential task.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Despite the usefulness of the study, there are some observed limitations experienced in the course of the study. Data for the study was collected a month after the strike, which may account for the exponential report of intention to quit. Observation and reports from members of staff of university in Nigeria showed that university workers experienced terrible blow during the eight months strike without payment of salary hence may have resulted to the thought pattern. Therefore, longitudinal research design seems to would have been most appropriate design to ascertain whether the intention to quit was induced by the eight months strike without salary or prevailing general working conditions in the university. Secondly, participants in this study were selected from only one university Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria. This findings may not be generalized because the participants were from one university where as there are more than fifty four (54) universities that participated in the strike. Future researches in this area should incorporate other factors such as work environment, welfare scheme among others.

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.

This study explored related factors in university workers turn-over intentions especially after the 2022 industrial action by workers of public universities in Nigeria. The study adopted survey design to explore the effect of 2022 industrial action among university workers. Four theories (Rational choice theory by Raymond, 2003; Social cognitive theory by Bandura, 1989; Social comparison theory by Festinger, 1954; sunk-cost theory by Thaler, 1980) were reviewed to further deepen understanding of the study. Multiple regression statistics was adopted for the analysis of data. Results showed that durations of years in service and intention to stay were related to turn-over intentions among university workers after the strike. Openness to experience dimension of personality traits was not significantly related to turn-over intention. The present finding is timely and instructive. University based trade unions must adopt extensive welfare packages that could carter for their members especially the newly employed members of the unions during industrial actions. University managements should institute robust welfare system that would relieve the stress newly employed staff undergo, which may be responsible for their higher turn-over intentions. Ultimately, measures that can prevent industrial actions in universities should be established to forestall the numerous negative consequences that accompany it. Strike is an ill-wind that blows nobody good.

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