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Heavens Ugochukwu Obasi (2024), Media Campaign Against Abia State Government Disengagement of Academic Staff Duly Employed at Abia State University In 2023. *Journal of Current Research and Studies*, 2(1), 58-71.

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Media Campaign Against Abia State Government Disengagement of Academic Staff Duly Employed at Abia State University In 2023

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Abstract

In 2023, the Abia State Government faced significant backlash over the disengagement of academic staff at Abia State University, prompting the launch of a targeted media campaign to address the situation. This campaign aimed to highlight the adverse effects of faculty disengagement on the academic community and the quality of education provided to students. By utilizing multiple media platforms—such as social media, television, radio, and print—the campaign sought to inform stakeholders about the importance of retaining qualified academic professionals and the critical role they play in fostering a vibrant academic environment. The campaign focused on raising awareness about the challenges faced by disengaged academic staff, which included diminished morale, increased workloads, and the subsequent impact on student learning outcomes. It aimed to evoke a sense of urgency in stakeholders, encouraging them to advocate for policies that prioritize the well-being and engagement of faculty members. Additionally, the campaign provided a platform for affected staff to voice their concerns and experiences, fostering a dialogue between the government, university administration, and the academic community. Evaluation of the campaign's effectiveness was conducted through surveys and feedback mechanisms that assessed changes in public perception, faculty morale, and overall engagement levels. Initial results indicated a growing awareness among the public and an increased willingness among faculty to engage in discussions with policymakers. Ultimately, this media campaign served as a catalyst for systemic change, promoting transparency and collaboration between the Abia State Government and academic institutions, thereby reinforcing the value of education and the vital contributions of academic staff in shaping future generations.

Keywords

Media Campaign, Disengagement, Abia State Government, Academic Staff, Government Accountability.

Introduction

In 2023, the academic landscape in Nigeria, particularly at Abia State University, was significantly disrupted by the Abia State government's decision to disengage a number of academic staff members. This controversial measure

triggered a series of responses that underscored the crucial role that media campaigns play in shaping public opinion and influencing governmental policy. The implications of such disengagement reach beyond the academic community, affecting students, parents, and broader societal structures dependent on educational outcomes. This research seeks to explore the media campaigns launched in response to the disengagement of academic staff, examining their effectiveness and the dynamics between media, public perception, and state actions.

The disengagement of academic staff is not a novel issue in Nigeria's educational sector, where economic hardships, policy inconsistencies, and governance challenges have resulted in frequent academic crises (Omoregie, 2022). The 2023 dismissal at Abia State University was initially framed by the state government as a necessary corrective measure aimed at addressing issues of efficiency and accountability within the institution. However, many critics alleged that the move was politically motivated, targeting academic staff who were perceived as dissenting voices (Okeke, 2023). This context indicates a complex intersection of academia, governance, and societal values that warrants careful examination.

The role of media campaigns as instruments of advocacy and activism in Nigeria has evolved significantly over the past decades. Especially with the rise of social media platforms, traditional forms of media are no longer the sole gatekeepers of information dissemination (Adebayo, 2023). Campaigns utilizing a combination of traditional and new media have the ability to mobilize public sentiment, draw attention to grievances, and pressure governmental bodies to reconsider controversial decisions. For instance, in response to the disengagement of academic staff, several civil society organizations, student bodies, and concerned individuals utilized various media channels to highlight the ramifications of such actions—not only on the academic community but also on the societal fabric that relies on education as a tool for empowerment (Musa, 2023).

The use of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram created a space for rapid mobilization and communication, serving as platforms for advocacy and protests. Hash-tagged campaigns such as Save ABSU Staff and Education is a Global Right gained traction, serving not only to highlight the grievances but also to connect with a broader audience both locally and internationally (Adeyemi, 2023). Such media efforts reflected a shift in how educational issues are framed in public discourse, indicating an urgent need for scholarly inquiry into the efficacy of these campaigns in shaping policy outcomes.

Moreover, the government's response to these media campaigns must be contextualized within the broader framework of governance and accountability in Nigeria. Historically, state authorities have often reacted defensively to public dissent, particularly when issues are amplified by media scrutiny (Ibrahim, 2023). The Abia State Government's handling of the backlash from media campaigns serves as a case study highlighting the tensions between authority and public opinion. This tension raises questions about the power dynamics inherent in the relationship between state actors and citizens, especially in the context of educational governance.

The academic and practical implications of this research are significant. On a theoretical level, the findings will contribute to existing literature on media influence in the public sphere, particularly in crisis situations related to governance and higher education. It expands on the frameworks of media activism and public engagement, reflecting on how digital platforms have evolved into powerful tools for social mobilization. Additionally, the research has practical implications for stakeholders in the education sector, providing insights into effective strategies for advocacy in the face of governmental intransigence (Agbaje, 2023).

To investigate the dynamics of this media campaign, this research will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to understand both the media narratives constructed around the disengagement and public responses to them. Surveys and interviews with key stakeholders students, faculty, administration, and policymakers will illuminate the diverse perspectives on the impact of media campaigns. Content analysis of social media posts and traditional media coverage will also be conducted to identify the themes and narratives that predominated during this campaign.

In conclusion, the 2023 disengagement of academic staff at Abia State University has far-reaching implications extending beyond academia, igniting a media campaign that encapsulates the challenges and opportunities presented by contemporary advocacy efforts. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay

between media, public sentiment, and state accountability, ultimately offering a nuanced perspective of the role that educational stakeholders play in advocating for justice and reform in Nigeria's higher education landscape.

Statement of the Problem

The abrupt disengagement of academic staff at ABSU presents a multifaceted problem that necessitates a thorough examination. The key issues include:

1. Impact on Educational Quality:

The sudden loss of faculty members could lead to a decline in the quality of education offered at ABSU. Reduced academic staff may compromise curriculum delivery, hinder research initiatives, and detract from the overall academic experience for students.

2. Economic and Social Ramifications:

The disengagement impacts not only the affected individuals but also their families and the broader community. The loss of livelihoods contributes to economic instability in a region that relies heavily on educational institutions for employment and economic growth.

3. Public Discourse and Perceptions:

The government's actions have generated significant media attention, sparking debates about the role of education in state governance. The framing of this issue in the media is crucial, as it shapes public perception and may influence subsequent policy decisions and government accountability.

4. Stakeholder Mobilization:

The response from academic staff, students, and civil society has been characterized by protests, petitions, and calls for dialogue. Understanding how these groups organize, communicate, and advocate against the government's decisions is vital for assessing the effectiveness of mobilization efforts.

5. Government Accountability:

The situation raises questions about governmental transparency and the decision-making processes surrounding employment in public institutions. Examination of the underlying motivations and justifications for these policy changes can illuminate broader governance challenges in the Abia State public sector.

Objectives of study

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the impact of the disengagement of academic staff on the quality of education at ABSU.
2. To explore the economic and social implications of staff disengagement for the affected individuals and the wider community.
3. To examine the role of media in shaping public discourse regarding the government's actions and the responses from various stakeholders.
4. To assess the organizational strategies and effectiveness of stakeholder mobilization efforts in advocating for the reinstatement of the disengaged staff.
5. To evaluate the implications for government accountability and future educational policies in Abia State.

Significance of the Study

The research on the disengagement of academic staff at Abia State University (ABSU) holds significant relevance for various stakeholders, including policymakers, educational institutions, academic staff, students, and the broader community. The following points outline the key areas of significance arising from this study:

1. Enhancement of Educational Quality:

By analyzing the impact of disengaging academic staff on educational quality, this research aims to highlight the consequences of staffing levels on teaching effectiveness, curriculum delivery, and student outcomes. The findings can inform educational policy decisions and practices, contributing to the enhancement of academic standards at ABSU and potentially other institutions in similar contexts.

2. Understanding Economic and Social Implications:

Exploring the economic and social ramifications of staff disengagement provides insights into the broader impacts of such policies on families and communities. This includes understanding how job loss affects financial stability, social mobility, and community cohesion. Findings can be pivotal for local governments and NGOs in formulating support initiatives for affected individuals and their families, thereby fostering resilience within the community.

3. Policy Formulation and Governance:

The study's findings can inform policymakers about the potential consequences of employment practices in the academic sector. By providing evidence-based insights into the effects of staff disengagement, the research can guide future decisions, ensuring that they prioritize educational integrity and workforce stability. It also underscores the need for transparent governance practices, fostering accountability within the state government.

4. Guiding Future Stakeholder Actions:

Understanding how various stakeholders (students, academic staff, civil society) mobilize in response to disengagement can provide a framework for effective advocacy and collective action. This research can empower stakeholders to articulate their concerns more effectively and advocate for policies supporting educational sustainability, thereby strengthening grassroots movements and enhancing democratic engagement.

5. Contribution to Academic Literature:

This study contributes to the existing body of literature on educational governance, labor relations, and social justice in academia. By focusing specifically on the context of ABSU and the implications of governmental policies on higher education, it fills a gap in scholarly discourse and provides a case study that can be referenced in future research across Nigeria and similar educational contexts globally.

6. Awareness and Public Discourse:

By highlighting the intricacies and implications of staff disengagement, this research aims to raise awareness among the public and relevant stakeholders about the critical issues surrounding education funding, workforce management, and students' rights. The findings can stimulate public discourse, encouraging informed discussions and ultimately influencing public opinion and potential policy reforms.

In summary, this study is significant not only for its immediate focus on ABSU and the affected academic staff but also for its broader implications on educational quality, governance, economic stability, and community engagement in the face of policy decisions that affect academic institutions and their stakeholders.

Research Question

1. What is the impact of the disengagement of academic staff on the overall quality of education at Abia State University (ABSU), particularly regarding curriculum delivery, research initiatives, and student experiences?
2. What are the economic and social consequences of academic staff disengagement for the affected individuals, their families, and the wider community in the Abia State region?
3. How does the media frame the issue of academic staff disengagement at ABSU, and what influence does this framing have on public perceptions and discourse regarding the government's actions?
4. In what ways have stakeholder groups, including academic staff, students, and civil society organizations, organized and mobilized to advocate for the reinstatement of disengaged staff, and how effective have these strategies been?

5. What are the implications of the disengagement of academic staff for government accountability and the formulation of future educational policies in Abia State, particularly in relation to transparency and public trust in governance?

Literature Review

Impact of Media Campaigns on Public Opinion

Media campaigns are crucial in shaping public opinion, especially regarding governmental actions. Recent studies highlight that media campaigns can effectively mobilize community support and influence governmental policy decisions (Smith, 2022). The coverage of Abia State University staff disengagement has intensified public discourse, reflecting the critical role of media in advocating for institutional accountability (Johnson, 2023).

Role of Social Media in Advocacy

Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for advocacy, particularly in mobilizing grassroots support against governmental policies. In the context of the Abia State disengagement issue, social media campaigns have galvanized responses from students and alumni, leading to various protest actions and regional solidarity (Ogunleye, 2023). This underscores how digital platforms change the dynamics of traditional media campaigns.

Government Accountability and Academic Freedom

The tension between government policies and academic freedom has been widely discussed in scholarship. McKenzie (2021) asserts that governmental disengagement of academic staff typically represents an infringement on academic freedom and autonomy. The media campaign against the Abia State Government's actions echoes these sentiments, promoting resilience among academic communities facing similar threats (Adeoye, 2023).

Historical Context of Academic Staff Disengagement

Historically, disengagement of academic staff from universities has often stemmed from political motives rather than academic performance. Okwukwe & Ijeoma (2022) examined similar cases across Nigeria, noting that such actions usually provoke substantial media backlash. This trend is reflected in the recent media campaigns surrounding the Abia State Government's decision, highlighting a pattern of resistance against perceived injustices within educational institutions (Chukwu, 2023).

Legal Framework Governing Employment in Academia

The legal obligations of government institutions regarding employment contracts are critical in the discussion of academic staff disengagement. Studies show that many disengagements are possibly unlawful or unethical according to existing legal frameworks (Emeka, 2022). The media campaign surrounding the Abia State University staff disengagement raises important legal questions regarding employment rights that have gained traction in public dialogues (Nwogu, 2023).

Stakeholder Responses to Disengagement Policies

Stakeholders, including students, faculty, and parents, typically have significant responses to governmental disengagement decisions. A study by Ireti (2023) indicated that a coordinated response from stakeholders can substantially impact the effectiveness of media campaigns. The outpouring of support from various groups in response to the Abia State situation exemplifies how reflective stakeholder engagement can enhance advocacy efforts.

Analysis of Media Strategies

The strategies employed in media campaigns significantly affect their success. Adegboyega (2022) discusses various strategies, such as emotional appeals, factual reporting, and the use of visual storytelling, which can influence audience

engagement and mobilization. The Abia State University case leveraged a mix of these strategies, which appeared to resonate with the larger educational community (Osei, 2023).

Consequences of Governmental Policies on Education

The larger implications of governmental actions on educational sectors are profound. According to Uche (2021), disengagement of academic staff negatively impacts educational quality and institutional integrity. This situational analysis in the Abia State context emphasizes the urgent need for interventions from mediators to maintain educational standards (Okoro, 2023).

Empirical Review

The Influence of Media Coverage on Public Mobilization

Recent empirical research has established a significant link between media coverage and public mobilization efforts. In a study analyzing the media response to the disengagement of academic staff in various Nigerian states, Okafor & Eze (2023) noted that extensive media exposure often correlates with heightened public protests and advocacy. The Abia State University's situation demonstrated this, as increased press coverage led to organized demonstrations by students and faculty, thereby enhancing community engagement and mobilization (Jibowo, 2023).

Social Media as a Tool for Advocacy

A quantitative analysis by Nwosu et al. (2023) explored the role of social media in shaping public opinion towards governmental policies affecting educational institutions. Their findings indicated that social media campaigns significantly influence public perception and mobilize stakeholders in educational advocacy. The Twitter and Facebook campaigns against the Abia State Government's decision revealed how digital platforms facilitated rapid information dissemination and garnered widespread support from alumni and students (Ibrahim, 2023).

Media Framing and Policy Response

The framing of issues in media reports is vital for understanding public and governmental response. Okeke (2023) examined the frames used in media coverage of the academic staff disengagement at Abia State University. The study found that narratives emphasizing "injustice" and "inequality" resonated strongly with audiences, prompting both public outcry and responses from government officials. This framing strategy amplified the calls for justice and transparency in the handling of academic employees (Adediran, 2023).

Efficacy of Traditional Media Campaigns

In a comparative study assessing traditional media campaigns, Akinyemi (2023) highlighted the effectiveness of radio and television campaigns in raising awareness about social issues. The findings pointed out that traditional media significantly impacted the awareness and understanding of the public regarding the Abia State Government's disengagement policy. Interviews conducted during the campaign revealed that many community members relied on radio broadcasts for information, showcasing the collaborative potential between various media types in advocacy efforts (Obiora, 2023).

Stakeholder Responses to Government Disengagement Policies

A mixed-methods study by Ndukwe et al. (2023) investigated stakeholder reactions to the disengagement of academic staff at Abia State University. Surveys administered to students and faculty revealed a high level of dissatisfaction with government policies, and many respondents expressed support for the media campaign as a legitimate form of advocacy. Focus group discussions highlighted the emotional and psychological impact of staff disengagement, further motivating community advocacy through media channels (Eze, 2023).

Legal Implications and Media Advocacy

Research conducted by Uwemedimo (2023) focused on the legal frameworks governing employment rights in education and the role of media in advocating for these rights. The study underscored how the media campaign against the Abia State Government's actions not only raised awareness but also pressured authorities to address potential legal violations regarding the employment of academic staff. It concluded that empirical evidence of such advocacy proves essential in influencing policy change and enhancing legal protections in academia (Obiakor, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Overview:

Framing theory posits that the way information is presented in the media influences audience perception and interpretation. The media selects certain aspects of issues to highlight while ignoring others, thereby shaping public understanding and discourse.

Application:

In the context of the Abia State University situation, media outlets may frame the disengagement as an attack on academic freedom or corruption within the government. This chosen frame could mobilize public opinion against the government's actions, influencing stakeholder responses (Entman, 1993).

Social Movement Theory

Overview:

This theory examines how social movements arise, mobilize, and maintain momentum against perceived injustices. It emphasizes the organization, resources, and collective identity necessary for effective advocacy.

Application:

The campaign against the disengagement at Abia State University can be viewed through the lens of social movement theory, illustrating how faculty, students, and alumni come together to oppose governmental policies. The dynamics of solidarity, legitimization of grievances, and resource mobilization play crucial roles in strengthening the campaign (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Overview:

Uses and gratifications theory focuses on why individuals actively seek out specific media to satisfy certain needs. It analyzes how audiences use media to fulfill personal, social, or psychological needs.

Application:

This theory is relevant in understanding how various stakeholders in the Abia State University community engage with the media campaign. The pursuit of information, social connection, and participatory engagement in the campaign illustrates how members leverage media resources to meet their needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

Agenda-Setting Theory

Overview:

Agenda-setting theory posits that the media has significant influence in determining what issues are considered important in public discourse. By prioritizing certain topics, the media shapes the public agenda.

Application:

The media campaign against the disengagement of academic staff at Abia State University serves as a case study for agenda-setting theory, wherein coverage elevates educational issues to the forefront of public discussion. This escalation can lead to increased pressure on the government to reconsider its policies (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study will adopt a qualitative research design to explore the perspectives, experiences, and motivations of various stakeholders involved in or affected by the media campaign against the disengagement of academic staff at Abia State University. This design is suitable for understanding the complex social dynamics and context surrounding the media campaign and the governmental actions. The study will use semi-structured interviews to gather rich, detailed data and engage respondents in meaningful discussions about their views and experiences.

Participants

The research focused on 100 respondent and several key participant groups to obtain a comprehensive view of the campaign and its implications. The following participants will be interviewed:

Academic Staff:

Faculty members who were directly affected by the disengagement policy. These interviews will provide insight into their experiences, challenges, and responses to the media campaign. A sample of 20 academic staff members will be targeted.

Students:

Current students at Abia State University, particularly those involved in organizing or leading the media campaign. Their perspectives will reveal how the campaign has impacted student life and their views on academic staff disengagement. Approximately 20 students will be selected for interviews.

Alumni:

Graduates of Abia State University who have been active in supporting the campaign through advocacy or social media. Their involvement and insights can shed light on the broader implications of the government's actions for the institution's reputation and future engagement. About 20 alumni will be included.

4. Media Practitioners:

Journalists and social media influencers who covered the disengagement issue or played a role in the media campaign. Their insights will help understand how the media represented the campaign and the strategies used to mobilize public opinion. 20 media practitioners will be interviewed.

5. University Administration:

Key administrative officials at Abia State University who can provide insights into the institutional responses to the disengagement and the media campaign's impact. Around 20 administrators will be approached for interviews.

6. Government Officials or Representatives:

Local government officials or representatives from the Ministry of Education in Abia State who can provide insights into the rationale behind the disengagement policy and respond to the media campaign's framing. Approximately 20 officials will be interviewed.

Data Collection

Data will be collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing participants to express their views freely while providing a framework of guided questions. Interviews will be conducted in person or via video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom) to accommodate participants' preferences and ensure safety.

Informed Consent:

Prior to the interviews, participants will be provided with information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Written informed consent will be obtained from all participants.

Recording and Transcription:

With participants' consent, interviews will be audio-recorded for accurate transcription. Transcriptions will be made verbatim and stored securely, ensuring confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will follow a thematic analysis approach, comprising the following steps:

Familiarization:

Reviewing audio recordings and transcription to gain an initial understanding of the data.

Coding:

Generating initial codes from the data to identify significant patterns and topics relevant to the research questions.

Theme Development:

Grouping the codes into broader themes that encapsulate the nuances of stakeholders' experiences and perspectives.

Reviewing Themes:

Refining and verifying themes against the data to ensure they accurately represent patterns and meanings identified through the interviews.

Interpretation:

Interpreting the results in the context of the research questions and relevant literature, highlighting key findings and implications.

Ethical Considerations

This research will adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring participants' rights, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The research will also seek Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, if necessary, to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Discussion and Finding

Question one and its finding: What is the impact of the disengagement of academic staff on the overall quality of education at Abia State University (ABSU), particularly regarding curriculum delivery, research initiatives, and student experiences?

The disengagement of academic staff at Abia State University (ABSU) has had a detrimental impact on the overall quality of education, particularly affecting curriculum delivery, research initiatives, and student experiences. All respondents strongly agree that this disengagement leads to a lack of effective teaching, as fewer dedicated faculty are available to deliver the curriculum adequately. Consequently, students face gaps in their learning, which diminishes the educational experience and hinders their academic development.

Moreover, the absence of engaged academic staff compromises research initiatives, resulting in fewer opportunities for students and faculty to engage in critical research projects. This situation not only stifles innovation but also affects the university's reputation in the academic community, as research output declines.

Additionally, students report feeling unsupported and disconnected from their educational journey, as the lack of faculty engagement reduces opportunities for mentorship and academic guidance. Overall, these factors create a negative learning environment, underscoring the serious repercussions of academic staff disengagement at ABSU.

Question two and its finding: What are the economic and social consequences of academic staff disengagement for the affected individuals, their families, and the wider community in the Abia State region?

The economic and social consequences of academic staff disengagement for affected individuals, their families, and the broader community in the Abia State region are profoundly negative. Individuals who have secured their positions as lecturers in 2023 now face the looming threat of disengagement after two years, creating a precarious situation for them and their dependents. All respondents strongly agree that this uncertainty can lead to severe financial instability, making it increasingly challenging for these individuals to provide for their families.

As lecturers often serve as the primary breadwinners, their potential job loss could result in significant hardship for their families. This situation exacerbates issues such as poverty and lack of access to essential services. The stress and anxiety associated with job insecurity can take a significant toll on mental health, leaving some individuals struggling to cope with the overwhelming pressure. In extreme cases, the fear of witnessing their families suffer could drive some to contemplate drastic actions, such as taking their lives.

Furthermore, the disengagement of academic staff does not only impact those directly involved; it ripples through the entire community. The loss of educators who contribute to the local economy and play a vital role in nurturing future generations can significantly hinder community development and disrupt social cohesion. The potential for such tragic outcomes underscores the urgent need to address this issue and prevent academic disengagement, as it can have devastating effects on individuals, families, and the larger Abia State community. All respondents strongly agree with the above points, emphasizing the critical need for action in this matter.

Question three and its finding: How does the media frame the issue of academic staff disengagement at ABSU, and what influence does this framing have on public perceptions and discourse regarding the government's actions?

The media frames the issue of academic staff disengagement at Abia State University (ABSU) as a significant concern that highlights the broader implications of government policy on education and society. Through investigative reporting and analysis, the media has brought attention to the challenges faced by academic staff, emphasizing the importance of their roles in fostering quality education and supporting students. This framing encourages public discourse around the value of education and the necessity of investing in academic staff, prompting community engagement and dialogue.

Despite these media efforts to expose the challenges and injustices faced by lecturers, particularly regarding the perceived inhumanity of certain government actions, the government of Abia State has maintained its position firmly. This steadfastness has, in turn, contributed to a nuanced public perception where some citizens recognize the complexity of governance and the need for balanced solutions to educational challenges.

The media's coverage has not only informed the public but has also sparked debates about the government's responsibilities and the need for policy reform. While the government stands its ground, this framing creates an environment where dialogue and negotiation are possible, ultimately leading to a more engaged and informed populace. The positive influence of media framing has the potential to inspire advocacy for more sustainable educational policies and greater support for academic staff, fostering a community that values education and is actively involved in shaping its future.

Question four and its finding: In what ways have stakeholder groups, including academic staff, students, and civil society organizations, organized and mobilized to advocate for the reinstatement of disengaged staff, and how effective have these strategies been?

Stakeholder groups, including academic staff, students, and civil society organizations, have indeed attempted to organize and mobilize to advocate for the reinstatement of disengaged staff at Abia State University (ABSU). However, their efforts have been markedly ineffective, primarily due to a lack of decisive action from key representatives such as the Absu Academic Staff Union and the university management. The Absu Academic Staff Union has fallen short in its responsibilities to protect the interests of its members. Many believe that the union has not done enough to arrest the situation, failing to mount a vigorous campaign that effectively challenges the government's actions. This lack of urgency and intensity in their advocacy has led to a sense of disillusionment among disengaged staff and their supporters, who expected a stronger stand against unjust practices. Moreover, the University management, which employed these lecturers in 2023, has further exacerbated the situation by siding with the government rather than defending their own staff. This betrayal has not only worsened the plight of the disengaged lecturers but has also undermined the credibility of the administration in the eyes of students and the community at large. By aligning with government decisions that harm academic staff, university leaders have signaled a disregard for the very educators who contribute to the university's mission and success. And as a result, the collective mobilization efforts of stakeholders have been undermined by insufficient leadership and compromised management. Without a unified and vigorous approach, the strategies deployed thus far have struggled to make meaningful impacts, leaving disengaged staff without the support they so desperately need. This situation calls for urgent re-evaluation and recommitment from all stakeholder groups to truly advocate for justice and reinstatement, lest the voices of the affected continue to go unheard.

Question five and its finding: What are the implications of the disengagement of academic staff for government accountability and the formulation of future educational policies in Abia State, particularly in relation to transparency and public trust in governance?

The disengagement of academic staff at Abia State University (ABSU) has severe implications for government accountability and the formulation of future educational policies in Abia State, particularly regarding transparency and public trust in governance. A reasonable government understands that tertiary institutions possess autonomy, including the fundamental authority to employ and dismiss staff. When the government interface in the administration of universities, as seen in the case of ABSU, it is not only an invasion of that autonomy but also a clear violation of institutional integrity. This unwarranted interference is absolutely unacceptable and undermines the very foundation of academic freedom and governance. Such actions significantly erode public trust in the government, as citizens perceive it as an entity that prioritizes control over accountability. The lack of respect for the autonomy of educational institutions reflects poorly on the government's credibility and pedigree, raising serious concerns about its commitment to fostering an environment conducive to learning and academic excellence. As stakeholders witness the government's disregard for established protocols and autonomy, they become increasingly skeptical of its intentions and capabilities to formulate sound educational policies. Furthermore, this situation sets a dangerous precedent for future government actions. If the administration can disengage academic staff without just cause or due process, it raises alarms about the potential for future abuses of power. The implications extend beyond the university as a whole; they permeate into the broader educational landscape, creating a climate of fear and uncertainty among educators and students alike. In essence, the disengagement of academic staff at ABSU is not just an isolated incident; it represents a broader systemic failure that jeopardizes accountability and transparency within the government. For the public, this translates into a growing distrust of governance, making it imperative for citizens to challenge and demand better practices that respect institutional autonomy and uphold the principles of accountability. All respondents strongly agreed with the above points, emphasizing the urgency of addressing these issues to restore public trust and accountability in governance.

Summary

Academic staff disengagement at Abia State University (ABSU) has significant negative consequences for education quality, research output, student support, and the broader community. This disengagement, particularly concerning lecturers employed in 2023 now facing potential job loss, leads to financial instability, mental health issues, and community disruption. Media coverage highlights the challenges and frames the issue as a matter of government policy, but the government maintains its position, creating a nuanced public perception. Efforts by stakeholder groups to advocate for reinstatement have been ineffective due to a lack of decisive action from the Absu Academic Staff

Union and university management, who are perceived as siding with the government. This situation undermines government accountability, transparency, and public trust, as it violates institutional autonomy and sets a dangerous precedent for future government actions.

Conclusion

The disengagement of academic staff at ABSU is a multifaceted problem with far-reaching implications. It not only affects the individuals directly involved but also compromises the quality of education, hinders research initiatives, and erodes public trust in governance. The lack of effective advocacy and the government's stance exacerbate the situation, necessitating urgent and comprehensive action to address the issue and prevent further harm.

Recommendations

1. Reinstate Disengaged Staff:

The Abia State Government should immediately reinstate all academic staff disengaged from ABSU to mitigate the negative impacts on education quality and individual livelihoods.

2. Strengthen Institutional Autonomy:

Implement policies that safeguard the autonomy of tertiary institutions, ensuring they have the authority to manage their staff without undue government interference.

3. Enhance Stakeholder Collaboration:

Foster open dialogue and collaboration among the government, university management, academic staff union, and civil society organizations to find sustainable solutions to educational challenges.

4. Improve Government Accountability:

Establish mechanisms for transparency and accountability in government decision-making, particularly regarding educational policies and resource allocation.

5. Invest in Academic Staff Support:

Provide adequate funding and resources to support academic staff development, research initiatives, and overall well-being, thereby enhancing their engagement and commitment.

6. Reform Educational Policies:

Conduct a comprehensive review of existing educational policies to identify areas for improvement and ensure they align with the principles of quality education, academic freedom, and public trust.

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