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Is industrial and labour relations a misfit as an academic programme floated in specialised universities of education?

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Introduction

Some of us who drank from the pot of wisdom and knowledge and who benefited from the technical skills and professional understanding advanced by the premier university of education, Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED), Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, consider the upkeep and continuous development of this vast-growing university as a serious subject of concern. Among other issues considered as germane to the university in her quest for excellence in teaching, research and community service, the recent deletion of some courses in the university, is one of such areas of worries to some of us who hold the institution in high esteem. For the love of dear alma mater; for the sake of integrity and selflessness; in pursuit of truth and knowledge and; in distinguishing *what ought to be* from *what is,* it behoves of us to no longer remain silent on this contending issue of courses deletion in TASUED.

Since ILR and other courses have been deleted, there has been a growing and diverse opinion about the definition, intellectual boundaries, and major premises of the fields of industrial relations, as well as its relevance in higher institutions specialising in pedagogy. Hence, this write-up attempts to crystallise the relevance and essence of Industrial and Labour Relations (ILR) as a field of study offered in TASUED while advocating for its resuscitation. The need for its re-inclusion and resuscitation becomes more pronounced considering the height which the field has currently attained on the global scale.

Industrial and Labour Relations in Contemporary Nigeria and the World

In past few decades, labour and employment relations has experienced significant changes, especially in developing nations. This is partly as a result of the growing influence of

globalization, turbulent competition, neo-liberal reforms, and privatization of public sectors workplaces. All of which affect processes of enforcing labour standards leading to new trends such as decentralization of production, the accompanying outsourcing of workers to third parties, and other uprising series of ambiguous employment arrangements including agency work, casualization, telecommuting, contract or part-time work and other temporary employment arrangements. Palpable from this new turn of events in Nigerian world of works is the growing inability of practitioners to tackle the challenges associated with these uprising new versions of industrial relations.[1] The new employment challenges face all who, on daily bases, strive to make ends meet and live meaningful life through the job that they do.

Recent employment-related challenges in Nigerian today, according to the Minister of Labour, Emeka Wogu, include weak and unfavourable labour laws; the ease with which government and employers abandon signed agreements with labour unions at the slightest opportunity; corruption in the judiciary and judgments that create doubt as to whether or not the judiciary still serve as the last hope of the common man. Decent jobs are fast disappearing while contract staffing and outsourcing have become the order of the day (see Eroke, 2013). Nigerians are resultantly forced, by the harsh economic situation, to work in the most debilitating conditions just to earn a living. Nipping these in the bud requires an academic field of study specialising in workplace studies and employment relations. Hence, Industrial and Labour Relations becomes a necessary epistemic tool in turning the new tides for the betterment of all. It becomes beneficial to all and sundry since man has, from inception, engaged himself in one activities or the other so as to eat, clothe and survive in the socio-ecosystem. The central challenge and responsibility facing our generation of professionals, according to Kochan (2003: 2), is to update our ideas, policies, institutions, and practices so that they can once again achieve their fundamental mission: the enhancement of efficiency and equity at work and in our societies.

The foregoing evidently spurs the need for increase in the number of professional practitioners in the field of labour and employment relations. However, in spite of this growing need for more experts in ILR, the question about its suitability as an academic field of study in some specialised universities poses more probable questions in a rational and more curious mind. In the case of

[1] For instance, scholars have identified the failure to respond to the representational gap of some working class (like those in Small and Medium Scale Industries, or those in private educational institutions) who are underrepresented and are without a voice at work, as a manifestation of new practices in industrial relations.

universities of education, would ILR be unsuitable? If it were not, what likely are the reasons advanced for its unsuitability and subsequent delisting in TAUSED?

Is Industrial Relations an Unsuitable Academic Programme in Universities of Education?

With epistemic curiosity and continuous quest for knowledge, one is tempted to probe into the rationale for deleting ILR from the list of courses offered in TASUED. Very likely, one may also be tempted to believe that the reason for tagging ILR as irrelevant in universities of education is borne out of the fact that ILR is somewhat a managerial discipline unsuitable to be floated in pedagogically inclined institutions of learning. In the perspective of the *delisters*, the two (ILR and Education) seem not in congruity.

We must hasten to remind ourselves that the academic field of industrial relations is characterized by a multidisciplinary approach to studying and improving the employment relationship (Budd, 2012: 1). Corroborating this fact, Kaufman (2001: 363) submits that Industrial Relations is largely applied, multidisciplinary fields of practice — just as it were when the field first emerged in the late 1910s. Today, researchers in the field have successfully developed a general, integrative theory or conceptual framework that guides and structures research on the central workplace issues of interest. *Theories and models exist, to be sure, but they are largely drawn from other allied disciplines*. Rooted in a concern with the labour problems that were created by the transformation of work brought on by the industrial revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism, ILR has become a cross-road where other disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology, History, Law, Politics, Economics, Education, etc., converge (see Otobo, 2005). Hence to construe ILR as a misfit in universities of education, or in any other specialised universities, to some extent, shows an atheoretical ideology of correlative weakness and intellectual/conceptual shallowness.

Apart from the multidisciplinary nature of ILR, the fact that the discipline is taught in other Nigerian universities as a sub programme of fields of studies such as Sociology, Education, Business Administration and Management further shows its interdisciplinary nature and its capability of residing in any kind of university. For instance it is offered as sub-programme of Sociology in Olabisi Onabanjo University, in Nnamdi Azikiwe University and in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ibadan. It is offered in the Faculty of Management Sciences

in Lagos State University (LASU), as well as the Faculty of Business Administration of University of Lagos (UNILAG). The Department of Adult Education in University of Ibadan also offer a version of this course as Industrial Education.

This is notwithstanding the fact that some universities of Technologies in the diaspora, as will be indicated soon, float the course in many modes. In truism, ILR has truly spread its tentacles across fields, disciplines and professions. This trend is not likely to stop in near future and repositioning it in TASUED is never an aberration.

Another reason advanced for delisting ILR from courses in TASUED is that, as a university of education, TASUED should float courses that only have 'teaching subjects' to be taught in secondary schools. Since ILR is not one of those subjects taught in secondary schools, its relevance in a university of education is thus doubtable to the delisters. This is another not-very-correct perception of the true essence of universities of education; another ideological assumption that lacks theoretical basis. This is because perceiving university of education as producing only teachers means that education is only to aid teaching. Such perception is fallacious, grievously confusing the concept of 'education' with 'teaching' while unfairly reducing the former to the latter. Whereas education is broader in scope, encompassing all other sister-concepts such as teaching, learning, training, development, indoctrinating, drilling etc. Education also takes different forms; it can be formal, non-formal or informal. Thus, if education is to be authenticated by the requirement of teaching subjects, then informal education[2] should not be regarded as a kind of education since it does not have direct teaching subjects of note. In essence, universities of education are not universities of teaching! If they were, other field of studies such as Guidance and Counselling, Educational Management, Adult Education, CED Education, Secretariat Administration, Childhood Education etc., which have no such direct teaching subject to be taught in secondary schools would have been delisted as well.

Why Universities of Education Are Not Universities of Teaching

The perception of the *delisters* of ILR from TASUED academic programmes is probably informed by the idea that wherever the phenomenon known as education is mentioned or taking place, it is tantamount to phenomenon aiding teaching or acquisition of teaching skills. Hence, to

[2] Informal Education is understood as education that is predominantly unstructured, experiential and non-institutional which has neither visible compartmentalised curriculum nor teaching subject of note. Examples are learning acquired by intuition, accidents or through native experience.

them, universities specialising in education only train specialists in teaching. Without delay, there is a serious need to quickly do a correlational distinction between these two concepts (education and teaching). Tight (2002: 27) defines teaching as:

> …the activities of person A (the teacher), the intention of which is to bring about an activity (learning) by person B (the pupil), the intention of which is to achieve some end-state (e.g. knowing, appreciating) whose object is X (e.g. a belief, attitudes and skills)

The above definition only shows that teaching involves keeping order in the class, pouring forth facts, usually through lectures or textbooks, helping to learn, giving examinations and setting grades. Education is however broader than such classroom activities. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) provides a lucid and concise definition of the activity known as education as:

> ...organised and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for the activities of life (quoted in Tight, 2002: 17)

Something is palpable from UNESCO's definition; education is a phenomenon *combining many variables* such as knowledge, skills and understanding of *all activities of life* and not just the single activity of imparting as done in teaching. It means therefore that *if a university is named university of education, such university is established to provide instructions designed to cater for, not just pedagogy but a combination of field of studies valuable for all activities of all human endeavours in life*. Universities, regardless of areas of specialisation, should offer universal knowledge, skills and understanding to learners therein. Universities of education, and other specialised universities for that matter, should do same.

Other Specialised Universities in Perspective

It is probably on the premises of the universal nature of university education that many specialised universities float courses across disciplines regardless of areas of focus. Examples of these specialised universities abound. Check out the following institutions for instance,

- In New Zealand, Auckland University of Technology offers a degree programme in Human Resources Management and Employment Relations (see link 1).
- Also the South African Cape Peninsula University of Technology offers range of courses in Management Sciences, such as Tourism Management, Public Management, Accounting, Human Resources Management and Industrial Relations Practices (see link 2).

- Same goes for Durban University of Technology, Faculty of Management Sciences who offers courses in Human Resources Management.
- The London School of Economics and Political Science in the United Kingdom also does not offer ILR as 'Labour Economics' or 'Politics of Industrial Relations' because of the specialised nature of the university's nomenclature. It offers it as Human Resources Management and Industrial Relations (HMRIR) and one of the graduates of this programme is the well-known Nigeria Professor of Industrial Relations, Dafe Otobo who has contributed much to the Nigeria model of industrial relations.
- In Nigeria, the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) offers Bachelors of Science in several non-agricultural-related courses like Banking and Finance, Marketing Management and Computer Science (see link 3).
- Many examples still abound in this trend and are indications of the universal and wider nature of subjects of concern to all kinds of universities regardless of specialisation.

If these are possible in other specialised institutions both in and outside Nigeria, why would universities of education be different in spite of the fact that a University of Education, by concept of coverage, seem broader and wider in outlook than universities of agriculture or universities of technology? If universities of agriculture do not restrict their programmes to training just farmers and if universities of technologies would not train just technologists or technicians, then reducing universities of education to the training of only teachers is inappropriate. Universities of education are not Teachers' Colleges or universities of teaching, just like universities of agriculture are not universities of farming and universities of technology are not universities for technicians.

The Need to Resuscitate ILR in TASUED

Judging from the above, it becomes crystal clear that delisting ILR in TASUED was a wrong step. There is therefore an urgent need for its reinstatement. This is highly necessary. ILR in Universities of Educations tends to be more unique because of the pedagogic methodology used in delivering instructions to students. It is unique because it is only in TASUED that Industrial Relations is embedded in pedagogy, giving students double-edged advantage as both professionals and teachers groomed and knowledgeable in effective teaching and learning of industrial relations practices and human resource training and development. Thus the inclusion of the programme in a university of education curriculum makes the graduates to be highly

linked as professional trainers needed in training institutes, professional bodies and other organisations that have bearings with staff training and man power development. Such organisations include institutes of Labour studies (like Michael Imodu Institute of Labour Studies, Ilorin), Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Chattered Institute of Personnel Management (CIPM- with whom ILR-TASUED already has a pact), Nigeria Industrial Relations Association (NIRA), Nigerian Institute Training and Development (NITAD), among others.

It is safe to conclude that housing ILR in a vast growing university like TASUED is not ill-fitting. There is therefore an urgent need to resuscitate and re-float it so that more experts in this field will emerge to help nip in the bud the uprising series of new employment challenges for the betterment of all and sundry.

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Links

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