

FROM AGREEMENT TO ACTION: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES OF THE 2026 FEDERAL GOVERNMENT–ASUU AGREEMENT IN NIGERIA'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

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Abstract

The recurrent industrial disputes between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have continued to undermine the stability and development of Nigeria's public university system. Although several agreements have been negotiated over the years to address issues of funding, staff welfare, university autonomy, and governance, poor implementation has resulted in prolonged strikes, disrupted academic calendars, and declining educational quality. In January 2026, the Federal Government and ASUU signed a renegotiated agreement aimed at ending long-standing disputes and restoring industrial harmony. Despite its comprehensive provisions and official assurances of funding, concerns persist regarding the feasibility of effective implementation given Nigeria's historical record of non-compliance with similar agreements. This study examines the challenges likely to confront the implementation of the newly signed FG–ASUU agreement. Anchored on Policy Implementation Theory, particularly the top–down and bottom–up approaches, the study adopts a position paper research design and relies on qualitative analysis of secondary data drawn from official statements, policy documents, newspaper reports, and scholarly literature. Findings reveal that weak university autonomy, chronic underfunding, bureaucratic inefficiencies, governance and accountability gaps, political interference, economic pressures, and deep-rooted trust deficits constitute major threats to successful implementation. The study concludes that without deliberate institutional reforms, sustained political will, and effective monitoring mechanisms, the new agreement risks replicating the failures of previous accords. The paper therefore offers policy-oriented recommendations aimed at strengthening implementation capacity, restoring trust, and ensuring sustainable development of Nigeria's public university system.

Keywords: FG-ASUU Agreement; Policy Implementation; Industrial Relations; University Governance; Higher Education Reform; Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

The recurrent industrial disputes between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have remained a critical challenge to the stability and development of Nigeria's public university system. Over the years, several agreements have been negotiated and signed with the aim of improving university funding, staff welfare, infrastructural development, and overall academic standards. However, the persistent failure to effectively implement these agreements has resulted in prolonged strikes, disrupted academic calendars, declining educational quality, and erosion of public confidence in government-union negotiations.

Recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria and ASUU signed a new agreement intended to address long-standing concerns and restore industrial harmony within the university sector. This agreement represents renewed hope for sustainable conflict resolution and improved governance of tertiary education. Nevertheless, given Nigeria's historical record of poor implementation of previous FG-ASUU agreements, there are growing concerns that the new accord may suffer a similar fate if underlying structural, institutional, and political challenges are not adequately addressed.

Implementation remains a critical phase of public policy, often determining whether negotiated commitments translate into tangible outcomes. In the Nigerian context, factors such as weak institutional frameworks, inadequate funding mechanisms, bureaucratic bottlenecks, leadership discontinuity, and limited accountability have consistently undermined policy execution. These challenges raise important questions about the readiness and capacity of relevant stakeholders to move from agreement to action in the current FG-ASUU pact.

This study therefore examines the challenges of implementing the newly signed Federal Government-ASUU agreement in Nigeria. Understanding these challenges is essential for preventing recurrent industrial conflict, strengthening trust between the government and academic unions, and ensuring sustainable development of Nigeria's public university system.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Agreement

An agreement is a contract or a mutual understanding between two or more parties regarding a certain matter. In the context of academia, agreements are commonly used to establish partnerships between universities and organizations, or between universities themselves. These agreements

outline the terms and conditions of the partnership, and may include details such as research collaborations, student exchanges, or joint programs. An agreement is a formal arrangement or understanding between two or more parties. It can be written or oral, and outlines the terms and conditions that both parties have agreed to follow. Agreements can cover various topics, such as business deals, employment terms, or legal matters.

2,2 Concept of Trade Union:

A trade union is an organization that represents and advocates for the rights and interests of workers in a particular industry or sector. In the academic setting, trade unions are often formed by faculty and staff to negotiate for better working conditions, wages, and benefits. They may also provide support and resources for members and organize protests or strikes to address issues with their employers. A trade union, also known as a labor union, is an organization formed by workers in a specific trade, industry, or profession. The main purpose of a trade union is to protect and promote the interests of its members, such as improving working conditions, wages, and benefits. Trade unions also negotiate with employers on behalf of workers to resolve any disputes or issues that may arise. Some of the unions in the universities in Nigeria include; Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU), National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) and Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU)

2, 3 Concept of University

A university is an institution of higher education that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in various fields of study. It provides students with opportunities to further their academic knowledge and develop their skills through lectures, seminars, research projects, and practical experiences. Universities also offer a range of services and resources to support students, such as career counseling, financial aid, and extracurricular activities. A university is a higher education institution that offers various academic programs and degrees. It typically consists of multiple colleges or schools, each focused on a different area of study, such as business, medicine, or engineering. Universities are responsible for conducting research and providing students with a broad range of academic resources and opportunities, such as internships, study abroad programs, and student organizations. Students attend universities to gain knowledge and skills in their chosen field, and ultimately earn a degree that can lead to career opportunities.

2.4 New FG-ASUU Agreement (2025/2026)

The Federal Government of Nigeria and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) **signed a landmark renegotiated agreement in January 2026**, ending a *16-year negotiation impasse* and longstanding industrial disputes in the nation's public university system. The pact

replaces the outdated 2009 FG-ASUU agreement and aims to foster stability, improve welfare, and strengthen academic productivity in federal universities.

Key Provisions

40% Salary Increase

The agreement provides for a 40 per cent upward review of the remuneration **package** for academic staff in federal universities, effective January 1, 2026. This increase is implemented through a revised salary structure that combines the Consolidated University Academic Staff Salary (CONUASS) with a new Consolidated Academic Tools Allowance (CATA) to support research, conference participation, internet access, and other academic tools (NewsWorth Online. 2026, January 16).

Earned Academic Allowances Restructured

Nine earned academic allowances are restructured to ensure transparency and fairness by linking payments directly to duties such as postgraduate supervision, fieldwork, examination duties, and leadership responsibilities.

Professorial Cadre Allowances

For the first time, the agreement introduces dedicated allowances for senior academics. **Full-time professors will receive approximately ₦140,000 monthly** (about ₦1.8 million annually), and **readers will receive ₦70,000 monthly** (about ₦840,000 annually) to recognise their workload and expertise (BizWatch Nigeria. 2026, January).

Enhanced Welfare and Conditions

The agreement includes improvements in pension and retirement benefits, with proposals to provide pensions equivalent to final salary and raise the mandatory retirement age to 70. Additional non-salary conditions such as extended maternity leave for female lecturers are also addressed.

Commitment to Implementation

Government officials have publicly stated that the deal is fully funded and captured in the 2026 budget, and that faithful implementation is expected to prevent future strikes and promote uninterrupted academic calendars (Arise News. (2026, January 15; BusinessDay Nigeria. 2026, January 14; Information Nigeria. 2026, January).

Union Position

ASUU leaders have welcomed the agreement as historic, urging lecturers to resume academic activities, but also warned that structural problems in university governance and implementation capacity must still be addressed to ensure sustainability.

1.4 Theoretical Framework: Policy Implementation Theory

This study is anchored on Policy Implementation Theory, **particularly the** Top-Down and Bottom-Up approaches advanced by scholars such as Pressman and Wildavsky. The theory explains how public policies and agreements, once formulated, are translated into concrete actions and outcomes. It emphasizes that successful implementation depends not only on policy design but also on institutional capacity, political commitment, administrative coordination, and stakeholder cooperation. Policy Implementation Theory argues that many policies fail not at the formulation stage but during execution due to weak institutions, unclear responsibilities, insufficient resources, and conflicting interests among actors. This makes the theory particularly suitable for analysing government labour agreements in developing countries where implementation gaps are prevalent.

Applicability of the Theory to the Study

The relevance of Policy Implementation Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain the persistent disconnect between signed agreements and actual outcomes in Nigeria's public university system. The FG-ASUU agreement represents a formal policy commitment designed to address funding, welfare, autonomy, and governance challenges in federal universities. However, past experiences show that these agreements often fail during implementation.

Using the top-down perspective, the theory helps examine how federal authorities such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and Budget Office translate the agreement into budgetary allocations, circulars, and administrative actions. It exposes challenges such as bureaucratic delays, weak enforcement mechanisms, and lack of political continuity.

From the bottom-up perspective, the theory allows the study to analyse the role of implementing actors at the institutional level, including university management, governing councils, and academic staff. It highlights issues such as limited autonomy, poor accountability, and resistance arising from mistrust between stakeholders.

By applying Policy Implementation Theory, this study systematically explains why previous FG-ASUU agreements suffered poor execution and assesses whether similar structural and institutional constraints could undermine the implementation of the newly signed agreement. The

theory therefore provides a strong analytical lens for understanding implementation failures and proposing practical solutions.

3.0 Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts the Position Paper research model, which is appropriate for policy-oriented and analytical studies. The position paper approach involves presenting a clearly defined standpoint on a public issue and supporting it with logical arguments, empirical evidence, and scholarly literature. In this study, the position advanced is that without addressing structural, institutional, and governance challenges, the newly signed FG-ASUU agreement is likely to face implementation difficulties similar to previous agreements.

Sources of Data

The study relies exclusively on **secondary data**. Data are drawn from:

- a) Newspaper reports on the newly signed FG-ASUU agreement
- b) Official government and ASUU statements
- c) Scholarly journal articles on policy implementation, industrial relations, and higher education governance
- d) Reports from education-focused policy institutions

These sources provide sufficient evidence to analyse both historical and contemporary implementation challenges.

Method of Data Analysis

Data are analysed using **qualitative content analysis**. Relevant documents are carefully reviewed and thematically analysed to identify recurring issues such as funding constraints, political interference, bureaucratic inefficiencies, accountability gaps, and trust deficits. These themes are then interpreted within the framework of Policy Implementation Theory to explain how they may affect the execution of the new agreement.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds in three stages:

- 1) Review of past FG-ASUU agreements to identify recurring implementation failures
- 2) Examination of key provisions of the newly signed agreement

3) Theoretical interpretation of identified challenges using Policy Implementation Theory

This structured approach ensures logical coherence between the theory, data, and arguments presented.

Justification for the Method

The position paper model is suitable for this study because it allows for critical engagement with policy issues without the need for primary field data. Given the policy-focused nature of the FG-ASUU agreement, this method enables a robust evaluation of implementation prospects while offering evidence-based recommendations for stakeholders.

4.0 Result and Discussion on Challenges to the Implementation of the New FG-ASUU Agreement

Effective implementation of government agreements with organised labour, such as the recently signed Federal Government-Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) agreement, is critical for achieving intended policy outcomes. However, Nigeria's history of repeated ASUU-government pacts shows persistent implementation failures. This section discusses the likely challenges that may undermine the translation of the new agreement into concrete actions.

Weak University Autonomy and Political Interference

University autonomy has remained a contentious issue in Nigeria's public university system despite its recognition in statutory and policy frameworks. Several newspaper reports have documented persistent political interference in university governance, particularly in the dissolution of governing councils and the appointment of vice-chancellors. ASUU has consistently argued that such interventions undermine meritocracy, institutional stability, and effective policy execution. The Punch reported that ASUU expressed concerns that federal universities continue to operate under excessive government control, noting that arbitrary dissolution of governing councils weakens internal governance structures and disrupts continuity in policy implementation (Punch, 2026). Similarly, Arise News documented ASUU's warning that although the new FG-ASUU agreement promises reforms, unresolved issues of autonomy and political interference could undermine its implementation, especially in areas requiring institutional discretion (Arise News, 2026). In another report, The Guardian highlighted cases where ASUU accused the government of interfering in vice-chancellor appointments, arguing that politically motivated decisions erode trust and compromise academic standards (The Guardian, 2025). These reports collectively suggest that without genuine respect for university autonomy, implementing sensitive provisions of the 2026 FG-ASUU agreement may face significant resistance and administrative bottlenecks.

Chronic Underfunding and Resource Constraints

Chronic underfunding has been identified as one of the most enduring problems confronting Nigeria's public universities and a major trigger of ASUU strikes. Media reports consistently show that many provisions of past FG-ASUU agreements failed largely due to inadequate and irregular funding. Nairametrics reported that ASUU nationwide protests were largely driven by the government's failure to release funds committed under previous agreements, including revitalisation funds and salary arrears (Nairametrics, 2025). The report emphasised that financial constraints have continued to limit research output, infrastructural development, and staff welfare. Similarly, BusinessDay observed that Nigeria's budgetary allocation to education remains below international benchmarks, making it difficult for the government to fully meet its financial obligations under agreements with academic unions (BusinessDay, 2026). *Punch* further reported that ASUU had expressed scepticism over the implementation of new funding promises, citing the poor execution of the 2013 revitalisation fund as evidence of structural funding weaknesses (Punch, 2024). These reports indicate that unless sustainable funding mechanisms are institutionalised, the financial components of the 2026 FG-ASUU agreement may remain largely aspirational.

Governance and Accountability Gaps

Beyond funding, governance and accountability challenges have continued to undermine the effective utilisation of resources within Nigerian universities. Several newspapers have reported allegations of mismanagement, weak administrative controls, and lack of transparency in university administration. Vanguard reported ASUU's claim that governance gaps within universities have allowed mismanagement to thrive, thereby weakening the impact of funds released by the government (Vanguard, 2026). According to the report, poor accountability mechanisms have contributed to the erosion of trust between academic staff, university management, and the government. In a related report, *Leadership* noted that ASUU had repeatedly called for stronger oversight and transparent financial management in universities to ensure that allocated resources translate into improved facilities and staff welfare (Leadership, 2026). *TV360 Nigeria* also highlighted concerns that governance weaknesses could frustrate the implementation of new welfare and infrastructural provisions in the 2026 agreement (TV360 Nigeria, 2026).

Bureaucratic Inefficiencies and Policy Implementation Challenges

Bureaucratic inefficiency remains a recurring theme in discussions on public policy implementation in Nigeria. Newspaper analyses frequently point to delays in inter-ministerial coordination, slow release of funds, and weak monitoring mechanisms as factors undermining government agreements with labour unions. Independent observed that many FG-ASUU

agreements failed at the implementation stage due to bureaucratic inertia and lack of coordination among the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and Budget Office (Independent, 2024). Similarly, *Arise News* reported that ASUU remained cautious about the new agreement, citing past experiences where administrative delays stalled implementation despite public assurances (Arise News, 2026). Channels Television further reported that ASUU warned of possible renewed industrial action if bureaucratic delays continued to affect the execution of outstanding commitments (Channels TV, 2024). These reports underline the role of administrative capacity in determining whether the 2026 agreement will succeed or fail.

Trust Deficit and Historical Non-Implementation

The trust deficit between the Federal Government and ASUU has been shaped by decades of unmet promises and partial implementation of agreements. Media reports show that ASUU's scepticism is rooted in historical experiences rather than mere speculation. Nairametrics documented widespread protests by ASUU members over unpaid allowances and abandoned agreements, noting that repeated government assurances without tangible outcomes have deepened mistrust (Nairametrics, 2025). *The Guardian* described the relationship between ASUU and the government as a "fragile peace," sustained more by temporary compromises than genuine resolution of core issues (The Guardian, 2024). According to *Punch*, ASUU leaders have warned that failure to implement the new agreement faithfully could quickly erode the fragile trust built during negotiations, potentially leading to renewed industrial conflict (Punch, 2026). This pattern suggests that implementation failures are both a cause and consequence of the trust deficit.

Wider Economic Pressures

Macroeconomic challenges also shape the government's ability to implement labour agreements. Nigeria's fiscal constraints, rising debt burden, and competing budgetary priorities have been widely reported as limiting factors in education funding. BusinessDay noted that economic pressures and revenue shortfalls have constrained government spending, raising concerns about the sustainability of new financial commitments to ASUU (BusinessDay, 2026). *Channels Television* reported that ASUU acknowledged these economic challenges but insisted that education funding should remain a priority given its strategic importance to national development (Channels TV, 2024). Nairametrics further highlighted how inflation and currency instability have eroded the real value of education budgets, making implementation of salary and welfare provisions more difficult (Nairametrics, 2025). These reports indicate that even with political will, economic realities may still constrain effective implementation.

4.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The persistent crisis in Nigeria's public university system underscores the critical gap between policy formulation and policy execution. Although the newly signed agreement between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) represents a renewed commitment to industrial harmony and educational reform, its success largely depends on effective and sustained implementation. Evidence from past agreements reveals that weak institutional capacity, inadequate funding, political interference, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and a deep-seated trust deficit have consistently undermined government–union accords.

This study demonstrated that without deliberate efforts to address these structural and systemic challenges, the new FG–ASUU agreement risks becoming another symbolic document rather than a transformative policy instrument. The recurring failure to translate agreements into action has not only disrupted academic calendars but has also weakened the quality, credibility, and global competitiveness of Nigeria's university system. Therefore, moving from agreement to action requires more than negotiations;

Based on the findings and discussions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effective implementation of the FG–ASUU agreement:

1. The Federal Government should demonstrate genuine political will by prioritising the implementation of all agreement provisions within clearly defined timelines. Commitments should be insulated from changes in political leadership to ensure continuity and consistency.
2. Government should institutionalise a sustainable funding framework for public universities, including dedicated budgetary allocations for revitalisation, research, and staff welfare. This will reduce reliance on ad-hoc releases that often delay implementation.
3. A standing joint implementation committee comprising representatives of government, ASUU, and independent experts should be established to monitor progress, evaluate compliance, and provide periodic public reports on implementation status.
4. The autonomy of universities should be respected and strengthened by reducing political interference in governance structures and leadership appointments. Transparent and merit-based administration will facilitate smoother implementation of reforms.
5. Robust accountability systems should be introduced to ensure that released funds are judiciously utilised. Regular audits and public disclosure of expenditures will promote trust among stakeholders.

6. Continuous engagement and dialogue between the government and ASUU should be institutionalised beyond periods of crisis. Proactive communication can prevent disputes from escalating into strikes.

67 Key provisions of the agreement should be embedded into enforceable policy or legislative frameworks to reduce ambiguity and ensure long-term compliance.

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