



## SKILL LEARNINGS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL START-UPS: THE POSITIVE OUTCOME OF 2022 ASUU STRIKE AMONG VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

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### Abstract

*The 2022 ASUU strike in Nigerian public universities, typically viewed as an impediment to academic progress, may unexpectedly yield positive outcomes among Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) students. This study examined the impact of the prolonged strike on the emergence of start-up ventures and intensified skill-learning outcomes among VTE students. Utilizing qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 final-year VTE students from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who had participated in the industrial work experience and teaching practice. The strike period, characterized by a pause hiatus in traditional academic activities, provided students with enough time, which they channeled into entrepreneurial initiatives and self-directed skill development. The findings reveal that the strike duration inadvertently became a catalyst for innovation, fostering a culture of self-driven learning and practical application of skills among VTE students. This unforeseen positive outcome highlights the adaptability and resilience of these students in leveraging disruptions for constructive purposes. The implications underscore the need for educational policies that support entrepreneurial mindsets and flexible learning approaches within VTE curricula, although limitations exist in the universality and long-term sustainability of the observed positive outcomes.*

**Keywords:** ASUU Strike, skill learnings, entrepreneurial start-ups, vocational and technical education

### Introduction

Academic interruptions due to strikes within the Nigerian educational system, particularly those orchestrated by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), have historically disrupted the continuity of higher education. The recurring strikes have become a defining feature of Nigeria's higher education landscape, punctuating academic calendars and significantly disrupting the learning experiences of students across the nation's universities. These strikes, often characterized by prolonged durations, have been widely recognized for their adverse effects on academic calendars, student progression, and the overall quality of education (Chukwudi & Idowu, 2021; Monogbe, 2019). Spanning decades, these strikes have been characterized by impassioned disputes between the union and the government, primarily centered on funding for education, the welfare of academic staff, infrastructural development, and overall systemic reforms within the university system (Chukwudi & Idowu, 2021; Monogbe, 2019; Muhammad & Nat, 2022). Each strike episode, often lasting several weeks or even months, not only halts classroom activities but also sparks widespread debates on the quality of education, student welfare, and the future of Nigeria's academic prowess. The 2022 ASUU strike, notable for its extended period of eight months, similarly imposed a hiatus



on the academic activities of students across universities in Nigeria, affecting students enrolled in various disciplines, including Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) programmes.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) stands as a prominent association representing the interests of academic staff in Nigerian universities. Comprised of dedicated lecturers, researchers, and professors across various disciplines, ASUU plays a pivotal role in advocating for improved academic conditions, fair wages, better infrastructure, and comprehensive educational reforms within the Nigerian university system. Their persistent engagement in negotiations and occasional strike actions (being the last resort), reflects their commitment to addressing systemic challenges and advancing the quality of higher education in the country (Egbegi & Iheriohanma, 2018, Muhammad & Nat, 2022). On the other hand, Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) students form a distinct subset within the broader university student population. These students are enrolled in specialized programmes designed to equip them with practical skills and competencies tailored to specific industries, preparing them for employment or entrepreneurial ventures upon graduation. VTE students undergo hands-on training, workshops, and practical learning experiences aimed at fostering expertise in technical fields, contributing significantly to Nigeria's workforce across various sectors. However, the disruptions caused by the 2022 ASUU strike inadvertently presented an unexpected opportunity window, amidst some challenges for VTE students.

The landscape of education has evolved significantly, with a notable shift towards cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets and practical skill acquisition among students (Osinem, n.d.; Owolabi *et al.*, n.d.). Within this context, Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) students emerge as a dynamic cohort, uniquely positioned to harness their educational experiences for entrepreneurial pursuits and skill development. As industries increasingly prioritize practical expertise, VTE students find themselves at the intersection of education and industry needs, equipped with specialized training tailored to specific professions. This intersection presents a fertile ground for the cultivation of start-ups and the acquisition of diverse skill sets among VTE students. The educational journey in any VTE programme, centered on practical learning, hands-on experiences, and industry-relevant skills, not only shapes their academic pursuits but also fosters a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, propelling them toward creating ventures and mastering practical proficiencies crucial in today's competitive job market (Chukwu *et al.*, 2020). Understanding the inherent potential within VTE education that posits to cultivate entrepreneurship and diverse skill sets among students, highlights the significance of their educational experiences beyond traditional academic realms.

VTE students, like their counterparts in traditional academic disciplines, encounter challenges during strikes such as interruptions in lectures, workshops, practical sessions, and limited access to educational facilities crucial for hands-on training. Historically, these interruptions have been perceived as impediments to the continuous development of practical skills and entrepreneurial acumen among VTE students (Chukwudi & Idowu, 2021). Contrary to conventional expectations, anecdotal evidence suggests a noteworthy surge in entrepreneurial activities and skill-acquisition endeavours among students during the ASUU strike (Muhammad & Nat, 2022). Reports emerged of students initiating start-ups, participating in skill development workshops, and engaging in practical learning experiences outside the formal academic structures.

However, despite the prevalent acknowledgement of the detrimental effects of strikes on academic pursuits, there exists a conspicuous gap in the understanding of how prolonged academic interruptions, specifically the 2022 ASUU strike, might have inadvertently stimulated entrepreneurial activities and skill development within the VTE student community. The observable trends of scholarly discourse concerning the impact of ASUU strikes, predominantly focus on the



negative implications, overlooking the potential positive outcomes arising from extended academic interruptions. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap in understanding by conducting a thorough exploration of the outcomes of the 2022 ASUU strike among VTE students. By analyzing the emergence of start-ups, the nature of acquired skills, and the factors that facilitated these developments during the strike period, this research seeks to provide insights into how VTE students leveraged such interruptions for constructive purposes. Also, exploring this phenomenon could offer valuable insights into the adaptability and resilience of VTE students in the face of academic adversity, shedding light on potential avenues for harnessing such interruptions for constructive purposes in the realm of vocational and technical education.

## Method

### *Research Design*

This study utilized an exploratory qualitative research approach, enabling the exploration of issues surrounding the experiences, and viewpoints of VTE students (Creswell 2007). The qualitative research method allows for interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. As highlighted by Moriarty (2011), the selection of qualitative research hinges on factors such as sample size, especially when focusing on unique characteristics, and a data collection process involving direct interactions between the researcher and participants. Additionally, qualitative methods are chosen when analysis involves emerging ideas, necessitating the identification of patterns and distinctions, aiming to provide more insightful explanations. It's important to note that this approach allows individuals to express themselves using their terms, rather than being influenced by the researcher's perspectives (Sofaer, 1999). Aimed at answering semi-structured interview questions, qualitative research approach was judged suitable for this study.

### *Sample and Sampling Procedure*

Purposive and accidental sampling methods were employed to identify final-year students who had participated in both the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) programme, and teaching practice. This selection process encompassed five Departments within the Faculty of Vocational and Technical Education at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Students available during the interview days were included as interviewees. The interviews occurred twice a week (Tuesdays and Thursdays) over six weeks. A total of 36 student participants, outlined in Table 1, were involved in the study.

Department	Number of Students		Total
	Male	Female	
Agric Education	1	4	5
Business Education	1	6	7
Computer Education	2	5	7
Home Economics Edu.	2	8	10
Industrial Tech. Edu.	5	2	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>36</b>

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Data for the study was collected using semi-structured interviews. We asked: In terms of activities toward your study in VTE, what did you do during the long ASUU strike? Are there any positive outcomes from the strike for you? If yes, how and what exactly? What would you say about the emergence of more start-up businesses, and skill-learning adventures among VTE students during the 2022 strike? Each interview spanned approximately 25 to 40 minutes and sometimes involved a group of students at once. Permission was obtained to record the interviews, aiding in



transcription using coding schemes derived from line-by-line analysis (refer to Mulkeen et al., 2019). This study was conducted between October – December 2022, upon the return of students to the campus, when the ASUU strike was suspended to allow for the completion of the 2020/2021 academic session in Nigerian public universities.

### **Data Analysis**

Employing a thematic procedure, the analysis structure followed the six phases of thematic content analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis involves recognizing, examining, and presenting patterns (themes) within data, providing a comprehensive yet detailed organization and description of the dataset. Braun and Clarke's method of thematic analysis involves a sequential process comprising six stages: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) creating codes, (3) identifying themes, (4) reviewing these themes, (5) defining and labeling the themes, and (6) pinpointing illustrative examples. This approach facilitated a clearer comprehension of the connections between participants' responses. Responses were categorized into themes, distinguishing similar and dissimilar perspectives, thereby elucidating the activities and perceived positive outcomes of the 2022 ASUU strike among VTE students. Lastly, the identified themes were integrated into a coherent narrative, supporting each theme with illustrative excerpts from the data, providing context, and offering interpretations aligned with the research aims (see Table 2).

### **Results and Discussion**

The results from the interviews are detailed below, with discussions on the activities and positive outcomes, factors facilitating beneficial utilization of the strike period, and the relationships and implications of time management skills on the business start-up and skill learning among VTE students during the strike.

#### **1. Activities and Positive Outcomes**

Table 2 shows a summary of the responses according to the activities and positive outcomes of the 2022 ASUU strike among VTE students. From the suggested themes and responses in Table 2, it could be deduced that the students engaged more in activities that point toward skill learning, and starting a business venture. Analytically, extending one's stay in the Students' Industrial Work Experience (SIWES) placement industry/company, continuing with teaching practice, learning new skills/mastering already known skills, and personal development are all skill-learning activities and positive outcomes afforded by the long strike period. On the other hand, starting a business is one of the cardinal purposes of the VTE programme, and students reported making attempts to venture while the 2022 ASUU strike lasted.

Skill learning and business venturing are the core of VTE programmes. VTE programmes are fundamentally centered on the dual pillars of skill learning and business venturing, constituting the core ethos of these educational pathways (FRN, 2013). At their essence, VTE programmes are meticulously designed to equip students with not just theoretical knowledge but also the practical expertise essential for thriving in various industries. Skill learning within VTE programmes extends far beyond classroom teachings, emphasizing hands-on experiences, industry-specific training, and technical competencies tailored to real-world applications (Olukanni et al., n.d.). Moreover, the emphasis on business venturing within VTE underscores the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset among students (Owolabi et al., n.d.). These programmes nurture the seeds of innovation, encouraging students to translate their acquired skills into viable entrepreneurial ventures. By instilling a combination of practical skills and entrepreneurial acumen, VTE programmes empower



students to not only navigate the complexities of the workforce but also to proactively contribute to economic growth through innovative business initiatives within their respective fields. Judging by the core principles of the VTE programme, it is not surprising that the students utilized the opportunity of the strike towards the positive outcome of skill learning and business venturing.

**Table 2: Summary of the Activity Responses and Positive Outcomes Among VTE Students**

Examples of activity responses/positive outcomes	Suggested Themes
<i>I simply went back to my industrial training work. I feel it is better to go there every morning, to learn more, than to sit at home.</i>	Extend Students' Industrial Work Experiences (SIWES)
<i>Being that my SIWES place is not far from my house, it was easy for me to explain to the owner, and I continued to visit and work with them all through the strike.</i>	
<i>I taught in a secondary school. It was easy for me because I worked with them before coming to UNN.</i>	Continued teaching practice
<i>One thing is sure, I will graduate to become a teacher, and then any other thing. I asked the proprietor of a school close to my house to employ me, and she did. I taught primary 3 for a total of 5 months before school resumed.</i>	
<i>I engaged myself in learning tailoring and fashion designing</i>	Learn/master a skill in one's course of study
<i>All through the strike, I worked with a furniture-making outfit. I have really improved.</i>	
<i>My father worked as a Masonry, so I joined him so that I could master block laying.</i>	
<i>I was fully engaged in the farming/poultry business. I understand more now.</i>	
<i>It has been my dream to learn how to make different paints. The strike gave me the opportunity to learn paint production instead of waiting till I graduate.</i>	
<i>I learned blockchain technology coding/programming.</i>	
<i>I worked as sales person, mainly to save up money, and avoid idling at home.</i>	
<i>I learned affiliate / online marketing.</i>	Personal development strides



*I took courses on Coursera in line with being a teacher and teaching with technology.*

*I read more books for personal development than ever before.*

*I started a business. It is online though; the strike gave me time to master the skills needed for the business.* Start-up a business

*I began selling shoes and slippers on my WhatsApp status. Within a little while, the returns from the sales made me smile. I think I have found what to do next after school. Just selling!*

**Table 3: Promoters of start-up and skill learning outcomes among VTE students**

S/n	Business Start-up and skill learning promoters
1	Duration of the strike
2	Skill learning and self-discovery adventures
3	Individual motivations
4	Access to resources
5	Mentorship
6	Entrepreneurial mindset
7	Diversification zeal
8	Time management ability

## 2. Factors that promote skill learning and start-up business venturing

Table 3 shows the factors that promote skill learning and business venturing start-ups among VTE students. The relationship between the duration of the ASUU strike, the emergence of start-ups, and skill-learning adventures among VTE students is interconnected. The extended strike period provided the temporal space conducive to both entrepreneurial endeavours and skill development. The surplus time was one resource that students could allocate to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations while concurrently investing in enhancing their skill sets.

First, the prolonged duration of an ASUU strike often leads to an extended stoppage in traditional academic activities. During these periods, VTE students might find themselves with surplus time, and a break from routine lectures, workshops, and academic obligations. Secondly, since time for practical is usually short for VTE programmes in the universities, surplus time can simultaneously prompt VTE students to seek alternative avenues for skill enhancement and inadvertently create an opportunity for entrepreneurial-minded VTE students. Logically, with fewer formal academic commitments, students might engage in self-directed learning, personal development workshops, online courses, or practical experiences relevant to their field. This could lead to a surge in skill-learning adventures, where students actively pursue honing their technical competencies, acquiring new skills, or gaining practical industry-related knowledge. On the other hand, the break in academic activities enforced by the ASUU strike might serve as a catalyst for the ideation and execution of start-up ventures. Students might utilize this time to conceptualize, plan, and even launch their entrepreneurial initiatives, thereby capitalizing on the break from regular academic schedules.



Among the factors listed in Table 3, time management ability holds sway in what became of the break occasioned by the 2022 ASUU strike. Though the strike created enough time for other activities, it equally presented VTE students with a pivotal moment for time allocation. It is expected that students strategically manage this additional time between pursuing entrepreneurial ventures, engaging in skill-learning adventures, and balancing their academic commitments. Sadly, it is not the experience of all the students, one said:

*Well, I didn't do anything in particular. I was just helping out at home; I was always at the shop selling with my mum. I never believed the strike would be this long, truth. I would have found something else to do. (Final year student, female)*

Thus, proactiveness and effective time management become crucial as students diversify their time between entrepreneurial pursuits, skill enhancement, and any remaining academic obligations that might persist despite the strike. This requires careful planning, prioritization, efficient utilization of available time resources, and trade-offs in time management. Stressing the importance of time management, MacCann et al., (2012) underscore that effective time management fosters the development of time-related skills such as prioritization, goal setting, and multitasking. Moreover, it nurtures an entrepreneurial mindset that values time as a resource to be optimized and leveraged for maximum productivity and growth. It is noteworthy that managing time effectively during an ASUU strike is both a challenge and an opportunity. While the surplus time allows for exploration, innovation, and self-directed learning, improper time management can lead to inefficiencies, missed academic goals, or inadequate progress in entrepreneurial endeavours, which inform the negatives of the ASUU strike, and project many vices in support of the saying that “an idle man is a devil’s workshop.”

In essence, the interrelationship between the ASUU strike, the emergence of start-ups, and skill-learning adventures among VTE students accentuate the importance of adept time management. The surplus time provided by the strike becomes a valuable asset that should necessitate judicious allocation and utilization to balance academic pursuits, entrepreneurial aspirations, and skill-enhancement endeavours effectively. Effective time management skills developed during such periods can significantly benefit students in their future academic and professional pursuits. However, many of the students require mentorship, access to resources, and motivation both from lecturers and in their various homes.

## Conclusion

From the results shared in this study, the 2022 ASUU strike presented an unexpected window of opportunity for Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) students, leading to the emergence of start-up ventures and intensified skill-learning endeavours. The prolonged hiatus from traditional academic routines allowed students to channel their surplus time into entrepreneurial initiatives and self-directed skill development activities. This unforeseen positive outcome signifies the adaptability and resilience of VTE students in leveraging disruptions for constructive purposes. The strike period, often viewed as a setback, became a catalyst for innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, fostering a culture of self-driven learning and practical application of skills among these students.

The positive outcomes witnessed among VTE students during the 2022 ASUU strike hold significant implications for educational policies and practices. Firstly, it underscores the need for a reevaluation of the role of educational interruptions and their potential for fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and skill development. Institutions can explore integrating entrepreneurial modules or



fostering environments conducive to innovative thinking within VTE curricula. Additionally, it highlights the importance of flexible learning approaches, where students have the autonomy to pursue self-directed skill enhancement. Policymakers and educators could consider promoting experiential learning opportunities and providing more support for entrepreneurial endeavours within educational settings.

However, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations within this context. The observed positive outcomes might not be universal across all VTE disciplines or educational institutions. Factors such as resource availability, individual motivation, and the specific nature of VTE programmes could significantly influence the extent to which students capitalized on the strike period for entrepreneurial and skill development activities. Furthermore, the sustainability and long-term impact of the start-ups and skill learnings initiated during the strike period remain to be thoroughly assessed, as their success might be contingent on factors beyond the scope of the strike duration, such as market conditions and ongoing support systems.

In summary, while the 2022 ASUU strike posed challenges to traditional academic pursuits, it inadvertently stimulated an environment where VTE students capitalized on the interruption to foster entrepreneurial initiatives and intensify skill acquisition. Understanding and leveraging the positive outcomes of such interruptions could pave the way for more dynamic and resilient educational systems that empower students to thrive amidst disruptions.

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