UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN

AT 40

THE SOARING EAGLE



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THE 21ST CENTURY UNILORIN STUDENT UNIONISM

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Introduction

A student union refers to the umbrella association of students in ahigher institution of learning. It creates a forum for effective interaction among students. It is the government of the students with basically three arms of government namely; the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Student Unionism enhances the work of school authorities and facilitates effective communication between them and the students. Indeed, student unionism provides ample opportunities for leadership training for the youths.

The evolution of student unionism could be divided into two phases. The first phase was the pre-Independence period, the era of colonialism in Nigeria. The second phase was the post-Independence period covering the period between 1960 and now. The first phase was characterised by struggle, militancy, diplomacy and violent actions. Without mincing words, the first generation of the Students' Union leaders was highly militant, resourceful and seriously committed to the struggle. Many of the front-liners in the pre-Independence

students' struggle later emerged as nationalists. They fought alongside others to gain Independence for Nigeria. The majority of them were radical in nature and were also ideological in thought, action and perception.

Historically, student unionism began in 1925 with the emergence of West African Students' Union (WASU), pioneered by some Nigerian students in London. The first president was a Nigerian, Ladipo Solanke. With the establishment of the University College, Ibadan, in 1948, there were efforts to commence student unionism and extend its tentacles to other higher institutions. Efforts were made to form a joint platform for the Nigerian students. The idea later translated into action through the formation of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) in 1956, with the late Ambassador Emmanuel Obe as its first National President. Essentially, student unionism during this period, was characterised by robust debates, diplomatic manoeuvres, active or passive resistance to the oppressive tendencies of the College or University Authorities. Indeed, those who were the vanguards of unionism then were highly articulate, intellectually inclined and very dogged. Even at the secondary school level, the features of student unionism were palpable. It would be recalled that students of King's College, Lagos, staged a violent demonstration in 1944 in response to the directive of the then British Government that the students should vacate their dormitories for the government to re-assign them to military formations and establishment.

The second phase was the post-Independence era starting from 1961 when students protested against the decision of the Nigerian government to enter into Anglo-Nigeria Defence Pact with the British Government. The pact consisted of several articles among which were:

- that the Governments of the Federation and the United Kingdom would assist each other as may be necessary for mutual defence; and
- that they would consult each other on the measures to be taken jointly or separately to ensure fullest co-operation between them for this purpose.

In another section, the pact stated that the Government of the Federation and the United Kingdom undertook to assist each other militarily and offer unrestricted overflying and air staging facilities in their two territories. The Nigerian students considered the pact as an attempt to mortgage the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Several students that were involved in the protest against the pact were victimised by the government. They remained undaunted due to their commitment to the course of unionism. (Aluede, Jimoh, Agwinede and Omoregie (2005).

Also, the police brutality against students, who participated in the University of Ibadan riot of 1st February 1971 which led to the killing of Kunle Adepeju by the Police showed the repressive attitude of the Police and Government to active Student Unionism. The use of fire arms by the Police to quell student demonstration reduced the culture of student militancy substantially even though the Police actions may not be justifiable in a society with entrenched democratic values. Following the death of Adepeju, the Justice B.O. Kazeem Commission of Enquiry found that it was the failure of the police to heed the advice that the use of fire arms was prohibited on campus that led to the sudden death of the Student's Union leader.

The punishment meted unto the students who participated in "Operation Gowon Must Go of 1974", the University of Benin demonstration of 1976 and "Ali Must Go

Crisis of 1978", etc. were the handiwork of the military junta. The consequence was the ban on Student Union activities in various campuses. Several activists were rusticated and expelled. At times, student unionists were arrested and detained. This is equally a reminder of the events leading to the ban of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS). The ban was however lifted by the regime of President Shehu Shagari in 1980 and this served as the precursor to the formation of the present National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) in Yaba College of Technology in 1983. NANS, which inherited the same NUNS ideology, propagated and spread the ideology of Marxism on Nigerian campuses. In the course of the struggle, the student activists enjoyed the support of radical intellectuals in the labour movement and in the academia. The student leaders of the period were idealists and firebrand activists.

This history would be incomplete without acknowledging that it was after the ban on NUNS was lifted that students re-strategised and mobilised themselves. The strategies used by the previous administrations were to politicise the student movement, blackmail the leaders, infiltrate their ranks and cause division among student activists.

The Nigerian judiciary has been living up to expectation in promoting the rule of law, equity and justice in student-related actions. Evidence abounds that courts do entertain actions instituted by the students. In the case of the expelled University of Benin students, the Court was approached in 1976 to enforce their rights. Eventually, the Court ruled in their favour and they were reinstated. Of equal relevance was the protest organised by the students on the 2nd February 1983 against Prof. Jubril Aminu, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Maiduguri. Those that led the

protest were expelled consequent upon the recommendations of the panel set up to investigate the remote and immediate causes of the crisis. These students went to court too despite victimisations. They pursued the case up to the Supreme Court. In a majority decision, the Supreme Court on 14th February, 1986 ruled in favour of the expelled students and ordered their reinstatement.

Experience has shown that lack of understanding of rights by students hinders the attainment of the objectives of student unionism on campus. The failure of Government to implement the white papers of Commissions of Enquiries headed by Gen. E. Abisoye and Justice Mustapha Akanbi constitutes an obstacle to the growth of active unionism in Nigerian campuses. The panels were set up to investigate the 1981 University of Ife Riot and 1986 Ahmadu Bello University crisis. The remarkable thing is that these panels recognised youthful exuberance as a factor aggravating crisis on Nigerian campuses. Nonetheless, they frowned at the use of firearms on campuses and advocated reduced role and less involvement of authorities in the activities of the Student Unions (Adeyemi, 2009).

Again, the invocation of obnoxious and draconian laws by the authorities in instilling discipline in the students can result in some form of militancy, albeit low, within the student body. In other words, the leadership of educational institutions is empowered by the military to rusticate or expel any erring Student Union leader without fair trial. *Egunje* or "settlement syndrome" is an instrument usually employed to silence those that are too militant among student activists. The poor communication skills of some student union leaders contribute to low vibrancy. The problem of communication is becoming a threat to active unionism on campuses. Unconducive environment, lack of organisation and mediocrity on the part of

student leaders make it difficult for them to meet up with the challenges of evolving a virile and dynamic student unionism. Political intrigues and intricacies need to be properly understood, in the quest for vibrant, efficient and effective unionism that fits the 21st century realities.

The prevalence of cultism is yet another threat to active unionism as cultists have brought untold hardship on the student populace. In a bid to reduce or possibly eradicate cultism, some universities, notably the University of Ilorin, adopted the measure of compulsory registration for all student societies, clubs, unions and associations and stiff penalties for belonging to any unregistered association.

It has been argued that the authorities are not expected to meddle in the affairs of the students. However, a marked distinction exists between interference and intervention. The authorities would intervene when student activities lead to disruption of peace and breakdown of law and order. They are not expected to interfere in the planning, programmes and policies of the student body provided these are within the laid down rules and regulations.

Unilorin Students Union: 1976 to Date

From inception, the University has enjoyed the leadership of 29 democratically-elected Union Executives and six Students Consultative Council-led Executives due to reasons of proscription and suspension of union activities at different times. The Students Union activities began fully, precisely in the 1976/1977 Academic Session with the first President of the Union being Mr J. O. Fakunle. From 1977/78 set till date, the roll call of Presidents and SCC Chairmen (as the case may be) is as follows (University of Ilorin, 2000).:

1977/78- Mr. Olufemi Durosaro (Now a Professor in the University and former Dean, Faculty of Education)

1978/79- Mr Ayodele Akinkuotu
1979/80- Mr Tunji Tewogboye
1980/81- Mr Akin Makanjuola
1981/82- Mr Akin Olowu
1982/83- Mr Ayo Fagbemi
1983/84- Mr Shola Olorunyomi (Union was dissolved by University Senate for act of gross misconduct)
1984/85- Mr Amos Dada (SCC)
1985/86- Union was again proscribed
1986- Mr Sola Adedoyin
1987/88- Mr Ekagha Denis
1989- Mr Okoro Uche
1990/91- Mr Aiyegbusi Rufus
1991/92- Mr Akanbi Shehu
1993/94- Students Union was proscribed due to June 12 students' demonstration.
1994 -1996 – Mr Omonanyi Michael (this was the longest-serving Union Executive Council in history)
1996/97- Mr Agboola Kehinde
1997- Students' Union was suspended due to electoral intolerance (A Student Caretaker Committee (SCC) led by Mr. Shola Sunday Olaoye was put in place)
1998- Mr Adetola Femi A.
1999/2000- Mr Osagie Johnson
2000/2001- Mr Olabisi Lukman
2001/2002- Mr Alex Akanmu
2002/2003- Mr Bamigbola Akin
2003/2004- Mr Madamori Segun (Union was dissolved by the University Senate for acts of gross misconduct)
2004/2005- Mr Elegbede Shina (SCC)
2005/2006- Mr Hussain Abdulateef (SCC)
2006/2007- Mr Ayinde Muhammed (SCC)
2007/2008- Mr Lukman Fagbemi (SCC)

2008/2009- Mr Animasahun Jubril
2009/2010- Mr Olamilekan Kabiru
2010/2011- Mr Olaitan Obayomi
2011/2012- Mr Musa Surajudeen
2012/2013- Mr Olufemi Malik
2013/2014- Mr Ahmed Lawal
2014/2015 – Mr IshowoYakubu
2015/2016 - Mr Alao Idris Ibrahim

Unilorin and its Developmental Stages of Student Unionism

The University of Ilorin student unionism has gone through different stages since inception and has adopted the 3Cs of *Aluta* at different times: Confrontation, Consultation and Consolidation. For instance, in 1993, the Union was rated the most *Aluta*-conscious with attendant effects; in 1994/95 session, the Union had its share of national experience due to the popular June 12 protests; in 1997, electoral intolerance led to the proscription of the Union and in 2004, the last in the series, the Union had a major protest similar to that of 1997 arising from the demand for potable water supply and electricity. This led to wanton destruction of properties and payment of restitution charges by the students. At this stage, the Union's name was Students' Union Government (SUG), a precursor to the now adopted Student Union (SU), upon the restoration of student union activities in 2008. All these culminated in opening a new chapter for the Union and re-orientation of its leadership with a view to consolidating on the lessons learnt from the confrontational approach of the past.

With the turn of 21st century, confrontational unionism gave way to developmental unionism, a situation where the union leaders see themselves as stakeholders in the university community thereby engaging in activities that would stabilise the University and galvanise it towards development.

2008/2009- Mr Animasahun Jubril
2009/2010- Mr Olamilekan Kabiru
2010/2011- Mr Olaitan Obayomi
2011/2012- Mr Musa Surajudeen
2012/2013- Mr Olufemi Malik
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Today, the Students' Union of the University of Ilorin is seen as a partner in progress in sustaining the founding fathers' vision. For instance, it is an annual event for the Postgraduate Students' Association to organise orientation programmes for its new members and make provision for the seamless academic pursuits of its members.

The Students' Union has an affirmative policy of 30% reserved seat for female students in its Students Representative and Judiciary Councils, which allows for wider participation and gender sensitivity. Some of the enviable innovations of the Union include the establishment of Health Trust Fund to cater for students who may have health challenges beyond their immediate families' financial strengths and the organisation of Annual Leadership Summit, which led to the birth of *THE ERUDITE* (Journal of Leadership and Development), which mentors students on how to publish scholarly articles. Very recently, the President of the Students' Union (Ishowo Yakubu) emerged second best Union President in Nigeria in a keenly contested Leadership Talent Hunt Tournament (*Unilorin Bulletin*, 2015)

The changing nature of student unionism at the University of Ilorin from the confrontational *Aluta* to the developmental *Aloha* no doubt explains the peace and stability that have permeated the system.

The Crisis of 2004

The condition of Nigerian universities has recently attracted much attention not only from scholars but also from policy makers. A devastating crisis has swept over the country, profoundly affecting the universities and their academic communities. The cause of this continuous crisis in Nigerian Universities was as a result of poor funding of the education sector by the government which consequently led to incessant

strike by staff unions due to poor remuneration and lack of basic amenities (Adeyemi, 2009).

It is against this background that the World Bank, which in the mid-1980s claimed that Africa did not need universities, has acknowledged that Nigerian universities are in crises. The universities are grossly under-funded, under-staffed, over-crowded and lacking in infrastructure and facilities. Also, they have experienced violations of due process, suppression of academic freedom and restriction of university autonomy.

Between March 15 and 17 2004, violent student protests rocked the University of Ilorin due to alleged non-availability of water on campus. What started as a child's play snowballed into a big conflagration that consumed several vehicles and other properties belonging to the University, staff and the general public.

One may ask what actually caused the protest after five consecutive, peaceful academic sessions. The University Authority claimed that the main public water pipe had burst in the first week of March 2004, which hindered the free flow of water to the Main Campus, a distance of about 15 kilometres to Ilorin metropolis. However, some other reasons precipitated this crisis. In early 2004, the Obasanjo-led Federal Government announced that Government would cease to maintain student hostels in all federal universities. This led to the increament of hostel fee on campus from ninety naira (N90.00) to ten thousand naira (N10,000.00). The University of Ilorin was affected like every other Federal University in the country. Incidentally, the University was about to resume for the 2003/2004 academic session and would be the first to implement the new hostel fee (Adeyemi, 2009). The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) waded in to prevent the implementation of this policy at the University of Ilorin.

The NANS leadership visited the University of Ilorin purposefully to hold meetings with the Student Union Government (SUG) to fashion out ways of preventing government from implementing the policy. Unfortunately, the efforts were abortive due to some alleged security concerns in the University.

Meanwhile, students resumed from their holiday and paid the sum of ten thousand naira (N10,000.00) accommodation fee but there was no significant renovation of the existing facilities. The students were miffed that the SUG executives could not stop the University Administration from implementing the new hostel fee. News started flying around campus that the Segun Madamori-led SUG had been bribed by the University which generated much tension on campus.

Few weeks into the First Semester, there was no water supply to the campus as a result of the burst water pipe. The students felt that the University was not doing enough to salvage the situation. The SUG executives, however, wanted to prove a point to the students that they were not "**sell outs**". It was also reported that the SUG was aware of the steps being taken by the University to fix the burst water pipe. This report was substantiated when the Segun Madamori-led SUG went round students' hostels on the evening of Sunday 14 March, 2004 informing the students on steps taken to restore water to the campus by the University. They also announced that if water was not supplied by Monday 15th March, the students would take a decisive action.

Series of students' stakeholders meetings were held between the night of Sunday 14th March and the dawn of Monday 15th March 2004. By 6:30a.m., students had begun to mobilise themselves for the protest. Though the University made frantic efforts to supply water to the campus through water tankers, the situation was already out of hand. The main

pipe replacement could not be readily found in Ilorin and had to be sought outside the state. Meanwhile, water was being supplied to the campus, through the Task Force on Water, which included the Students Union President, Mr Segun Madamori.

The University claimed that despite the return of free flow of water to the campus on Monday 15th March, 2004 at 5.30 a.m., Madamori allegedly insisted on the need for the planned demonstration to proceed, citing "undue pressure" and the need for him to prove that he was tough to the students, who had earlier accused him of being a stooge of the then University Administration.

Subsequently students began to protest violently on the streets of Ilorin. Some 87 students arrested by the police, were released the following day. The efforts of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Shamsudeen Amali, to dialogue with the students were scuttled by their leaders. Due to their recalcitrance, the University had no option but to dissolve the Students' Union Government and order all students to proceed on a compulsory inter-semester break. Besides, the University Senate set up a committee to investigate the remote and immediate causes of the protest.

The Investigative Committee of the University recommended the expulsion of the ring leaders of the protest. The university was closed for about five weeks. Students were asked to swear to an oath of good conduct and pay a restitution fee of ten thousand naira (N10,000.00k) each as conditions for resumption. The University has since remained committed to admitting, training and producing high quality graduates when due, which is its sacred mandate.

Unilorin Students' Union from 2008 till Date

Following the 2004 students' crisis and the ban on Students' Union activities, the University initiated the Students' Consultative Council (SCC), a new student body put in place to interface with the administration. The SCC is a body of Faculty Presidents in the university. After being elected presidents of their respective faculties, the elected presidents would thereafter elect a president and vice-president among themselves. The body was at best an executive body and this was the situation until the 2007/2008 academic session.

In 2008, the University Administration under Prof. Ishaq Oloyede lifted the ban on student unionism after the student politicians' assurance that they would conduct themselves with civility and decorum. The Students' Union, as opposed to the previous "Students' Union Government" came into being. The removal of "Government" from the name was to reduce the autonomous mind set of the students regarding the Union. Comrade Jibril Animashaun of the Faculty of Agriculture was subsequently elected president with full-fledged union activities commencing in the 2008/2009 academic session.

Since then, several Students' Union administrations came with their programmes and policies that have shaped the face of the union into what it is today. The Students' Union administrations have performed creditably well in recent years. For instance, the Kabanayo-led administration is known for its attraction of the mini buses (*Korope)* operators to the campus. The completion of the Students' Union Shopping Mall was achieved during the administration of Comrade Sirajudeen Musa (Smart) and the Tricycle (*Keke Napep)* initiative was the hallmark of the administration of Comrade Malik Aremu (Attention). Comrade Ahmed Lawal (Ambassador) introduced

the *Starter Pack* for newly admitted students (*freshers*) and *Simpli Move* transport service. Comrade Yakub Ishowo-led regime initiated the customized *flash drive* student-related information as permanent content. These are commendable projects that have impacted positively on the lives of students on campus. Undoubtedly, the current Students' Union Executive Council under the leadership of Comrade Idris Alao (Observation) will not only sustain the legacy but also make positive impacts.

As of today, the University of Ilorin Students' Union stands out as first among equals as it blazes the trail for others to follow. The Union is very keen about entrepreneurship and innovation, the realities of the 21st century. For instance, the Union is the first in Nigeria to use online voting system (a variant of e-voting system) to elect its officials.

Activities of Students' Union

The Students' Union activities are aimed at providing the constitutional responsibilities of the union. This is in line with **ARTICLE 2** of the Students' Union Constitution of the University of Ilorin, which states that:

The aims and objectives of the Union shall be

- To preserve, protect and defend the constitution of the Union.
- To defend and uphold the interest and welfare of members of the Union
- To promote and sustain academic excellence among members
- To enhance staff-members and inter-faculty relationship
- To provide a forum for the freedom of thought, expression, action and association.

- To play an efficient and worthy role in National and International Association of Students' Unions.
- To serve as a forum for training members for positive leadership role in the society
- To create and promote social, political and cultural awareness amongst members.

In order to achieve its aims and objectives, so many activities are carried out every session. Some of the Students' Union activities are highlighted below:

Academic and Career Talk

The Students' Union seeks to promote academic excellence amongst its members, and in furtherance of this objective, the Union organises events to provide academic support and career guidance. Events such as inter-faculty quiz, oratory contests and debate competitions among others are being organised every session among the students. The Students' Union in recent years also organises career talks, inspirational and motivational lectures among the students.

Accommodation

The Students' Union supervises the use of facilities and renovations in the hostels on campus during the holiday in order to ensure that the facilities are in good condition. Through the BOT (Build, Operate and Transfer) policy, individuals and organisations are enjoined to come and build hostels on campus. This will enhance the availability of more bed spaces for members of the Union.

Transportation

The Students' Union, through its Transport Scheme and the support of the University, provides shuttle buses

transportation between the University campus and Tanke terminus at a subsidised rate. The Students' Union also ensures that the transport fares are regulated from time to time to ensure that commercial drivers do not extort the students. There are tricycles provided for the intra-campus transportation to cover routes within the campus.

Welfarism

The Students' Union handles all matters relating to the general welfare of members of the Union and all the Union guests. In doing so, proper monitoring is put in place to control the prices of goods being sold on campus. There is a sanction for any shop owner that sells above the regulated price.

Students' Media and Volunteer Groups

Information dissemination by the Students' Union is within the purview of the office of the Public Relations Officer, which also cuts across the various Faculties and Departments. The class/course reps, hall/hostel representatives are also engaged as information outlets to the entire student community.

This information channel has been enhanced due to the consistent publication of the Student Union Bulletins and placement of billboards in strategic places in the University. The Students' Union also makes use of the University radio station (Unilorin 89.3 FM) to pass information across to its members and the larger society.

Some student clubs and societies serve as primary volunteers for information dissemination within and outside the University Community. They assist in creating awareness on students activities as most of these activities are published in various newspapers and online media in the country.

Social Programmes

The Students' Union in conjunction with private bodies organises Annual Inter-faculty Dance Competitions, Talent Shows, Art work Displays, Carnivals, etc. All these activities promote social awareness and interaction.

Most of these events are scheduled to be organised in a single week called the **"Students' Union Week".** The week comprises various activities of the Union ranging from the academic, social, cultural to sporting activities.

Sport Events

The Students' Union organises the female five-aside soccer championship that helps in the selection for the female soccer team for the University. The inter-faculty championship is also organised among male students. Furthermore, the Union has facilities and equipment that aid sporting activities on campus.

Campaign and Elections

Every matriculated student has the right to vote and be voted for based on the eligibility criteria laid down in the Students' Union constitution and the Electoral Act. As part of its notable achievements, the union pioneered electronic voting system in 2013/2014 for the election of its executive.

Orientation Programmes and Conferences

Orientation programmes are organised across various Faculties and Departments for the new students of the University. The Student Affairs Unit in conjunction with the Union also organises a general orientation and sensitisation programme for the newly admitted students. An orientation programme is an annual event aimed at sensitising the new

students about the University rules and regulations and acquainting them with the vital organs of the University.

Academic, business and trade conferences or trade fairs are organised for students virtually every session. There is also the women sensitisation programme. The two previous editions were tagged **"Women of the 21st century"** and **"Nurturing Women of Excellence".**

Rewards, Recognitions and Awards

Rewards and recognitions are duly given to societies, organisations and personalities who are have distinguished themselves. Personalities, organisations and staff of the University receive awards to appreciate their contributions to student life. Students are also celebrated annually by the Union as it organises the Students' Union Dinner towards the end of every session. Award nights are also organised at the faculty and departmental levels.

In conclusion, the Students' Union ensures that it provides academic support for the students. It also keeps the campus connected to the off-campus community through the off-campus outreach. The Union promotes and celebrates innovation, creativity and the Nigerian Culture.



Plate 1: Student Union Building



Plate 2: Student Union's Electronic Score Board for e-voting

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