

Internet humour beyond jokes: The perplexity of Nigeria's educational system

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Abstract

Cartoons have become a powerful tool for social commentary in the 21st century, particularly in Nigeria. This new global internet sensation is a revolutionary tool in the Nigerian digital space employed in political, social, and economic criticism. This research investigates how internet humour exposes the complexities and contradictions within Nigeria's educational system, highlighting corruption, poor funding, teacher quality, and governance issues that affect education quality and access. It admits that while humour on the internet often appears casual, it exposes a critical insight into the educational challenges and societal perceptions in Nigeria. Drawing from the Multimodal Metaphor Theory, the study analyses twenty online satirical cartoon texts. It finds that internet humour serves as a powerful outlet for releasing pent-up emotions among students, teachers, and stakeholders as well as to voice concerns, challenge narratives, and advocate for reforms. This work contributes to digital humanities and cultural studies, highlighting the importance of leveraging internet humour for critical thinking and positive change. The study concludes that internet humour is a valuable lens for understanding the perplexities of Nigeria's educational system. Beyond entertainment, such humour reflects societal critiques and calls for reform. It underscores the need to address systemic challenges to improve education quality and restore public trust. Nigerian internet comedy and cartoons offer a continual yet humorous critique of the country's educational system, providing a forum for socio-political discussion and understanding of the implications conveyed by these humorous realities.

Keywords: ASUU, Cartoons, Internet humour, Nigerian education system

1. Introduction

In recent years, the internet has evolved into a platform for social criticism and humour in addition to disseminating information. Different scholars have said that internet humour has generally continued to evolve beyond jokes, viral memes, and funny videos to incorporate clever Facebook posts and tweets, sardonic opinions on social, political, and economic matters, and cultural nuances (Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2022; Procházka, 2016; Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). This online community has also given rise to a new, inclusive, and global sort of humour that has revolutionised communication and allowed us to express ourselves in new ways. Jokes are just one type of internet humour among many others, such as memes, gifs, sarcasm, and irony. This is particularly evident in Nigeria, where the features of the educational system have raised concerns and generated laughter.

The Nigerian education system has been in a terrible state for a long time due to several persistent issues, ranging from poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, poor teachers' remuneration, lack of qualified teachers, limited access to quality education, widespread cheating, and systemic corruption (Ugbo & Duru, 2025; Ewa & Eze, 2023; Birabil & Ogeh, 2020). As a result of this long-term decline in the educational system, Nigerian parents intentionally have sent their children in droves to other countries in search of higher quality education. The situation inspired internet humour, which has taken the form of memes, satirical movies, and hilarious tweets.

This paper examines the Multimodal Metaphor Theory and its relationship with internet humour. It offers insight into how internet humour is used to express dissatisfaction with the Nigerian educational system. The findings show that internet humour can be a useful coping strategy for navigating the challenges presented by the complex Nigerian educational system (Ohieku, 2024; Matamoros-Fernández, et al., 2023; Obadare, 2009). This essay presents a distinct perspective on how the Nigerian social and cultural discourse has been affected by the internet, as well as how humour may be used to both praise and condemn the country's educational system.

2. Cartoons: A canvas for man's thoughts and perspectives

Cartoons have emerged as a significant medium in cultural and public discourse. They are jokes told in pictures, making their works of visual art with powerful tools that employ humour and sarcasm to portray stories or situations with a mixed-code message (Forceville, 2024; Mahmood-ul-Hassan et al., 2021). In addition to being humorous, cartoons are also artistic creations, historical artefacts from journalism, and rhetorical texts. Cartoons are not only forms of humour but also artistic works, artifacts of journalism history, and rhetorical texts. The combination of visual, cultural, and literary allusions in cartoons creates compelling and provocative images of opinion, representing a unique version of storytelling from other media narratives (Forceville, 2023; Conners, 2014; Tsakona, 2009). Cartoons arguably serve a more profound societal function by offering cutting-edge critiques on social, economic, and political issues of the time. Cartoons as a visual medium give birth to an array of powerful expressions for various forms of social commentary. This symbiotic relationship between cartoons and social criticism stretches back ages. In the 18th century, cartoonists such as William Hogarth significantly used their art as a form of social protest, satirizing societal inequalities and corruptions prevalent during that time (Hogarth et al., 2002).

Cartooning is a very versatile means of communication that may be utilised to create a semblance of the original by fabricating, exaggerating, overstating, and distorting the attributes of any character or circumstance. This new trend of modern political cartooning since the 20th century has been used to cover all forms of humorous drawings including caricatures, joke cartoons, comic strips and animation cartoons. It has also become a very significant symbolic tool of propaganda, publicity and release (Becker, 1959). Cartoons, according to some scholars, can be seen as comic art, capturing contentious fears of social reality through distortions and exaggerations (Danjoux 2005; Dines, 1995). Others argue that cartoons invoke truth and a higher artistic level, revealing assumptions and prejudices on a sociocultural level (Yusa et al., 2023; Oriola & Oludare, 2021). They help readers maintain a sense of self, others, and society (Palanimurugan, 2024; Steinberg, 2019). While some contend with the notion that political cartoons represent a particular instance or story of resistance, others argue that cartoons rather than oppose or criticise the elite, actually serve to legitimise and support their powerful position (Prendergast, 2019; Hammett, 2010).

Cartoons impact, whether editorial, social or political, stretches over a variety of sectors including but not limited to politics, health, and education. More often than not, these depictions are compelling and hard-hitting, leaving the audience with thought-provoking criticism or insights into the illustrated subject matter (Alahmadi, 2022; Alghazzy, 2017; Marin-Arrese, 2015). Far from being viewed merely as entertainment, these sleek representations, whether created using modern digital technologies or drawings on paper, are acknowledged as a potent mechanism for enshrining not only the zeitgeist of culture but also man's thoughts, emotions, and philosophies that provoke and inspire viewers towards self-reflection and social consciousness (Hallet & Hallet, 2012). In the same vein, Hammett (2010: 2) posits that:

political cartoons function as a key indicator of the democratic health of a polity. They are a barometer of press freedom, of government tolerance of free speech and critical thought, and of resistance to dominant power relations.

They also critique existing societal norms, foster open dialogues about difficult topics, and encourage proactive engagement. In Nigeria, where the education system has been a debatable topic for many years, these cartoons are shaping perspectives and stirring conversations on an unprecedented scale.

Political cartoons are visual and verbal political jokes with straightforward illustrations and exaggerated characters. They contain both humorous and serious content, fictional and non-fictional elements, and use rhetorical devices to define political and societal culture's actors and processes. These cartoons often address current events and concerns by representing well-known figures in sarcastic stances, employing graphic metaphors, and creating comically distorted pictures to illustrate their points. Cartoons, according to scholars, are a powerful tool for persuasion and propaganda because they emotionally express impressions and draw on general knowledge, emphasising attitudes, values, and bias rather than questioning them (Zarifian et al., 2022; Suryawanshi, 2020; Mateus, 2016).

Cartoons are powerful vehicles for sociopolitical commentary, blending sarcasm, humour, and critical thought as potent critiques of political irregularities and a window into society's weaknesses. Cartoons are a significant paradigm for critiquing society, reflecting societal norms, and conducive to creating societal change. These brief visual stories have a strong emotional impact on the audience, often sparking discussions and debates that increase civic engagement. As a genre of communication, cartoons convey meanings through metaphors and visual depictions to create meaning using different signs and symbols (Abraham, 2009; Lee & Goguen, 2003; El Refaie, 2003). They have the potential to affect users' minds without reference to their will but rather create virtual communities that impact contemporary society. As canvases, therefore, they have become a unique platform for creatives to express their ideas and interpretations of various themes. This art has created a new language that transcends traditional forms of expression and has become an integral part of digital culture. Though they may have their share of controversies, but they continue flourishing and dominating social media and the internet, shaping our understanding of digital and pop culture, politics, and society (DeFazio, 2019).

Today, electronic newspapers and magazines have overtaken the role of printed newspapers. However, a cartoon retains the same function with slight changes in the formal features due to the use of computer programmes in drawing and colouring. Readers still find amusement and humour in such cartoons and understand the satirical comments and humorous manner of cartoons about serious issues. Researchers over the years have emphasized the humorous, artistic, rhetorical, and provocative functions of social and political cartoons. They have also stressed the powerful and effective function of cartoons in conveying the intended message of cartoonists. Edwards (1997: 20) pointed out that cartoons are not only forms of humour but also "artistic work," "artifacts of journalism history", as well as "rhetorical texts".

Additionally, Conners (2014: 247) suggests that the combination of visual, cultural, and literary allusions in a cartoon, along with a text that may take the form of a headline or words spoken by characters, results in “a compelling and provocative image of opinion”. As the author notes, cartoons thus represent “a unique version of storytelling from other media narratives”; yet they are different from other contents of newspapers (Conners, 2014: 247). Likewise, Tsakona (2009: 1171) commented that cartoons may be more appealing and even more effective in conveying the intended message due to the combination of both verbal and visual modes.

3. Internet humour and the multimodal metaphor theory

Internet humour has its roots in the early days of computer networking. In the 1970s and 1980s, university students and researchers started sharing jokes and funny stories through email and bulletin boards. These early forms of online humour were mostly text-based and aimed at a small audience of tech-savvy insiders. However, the rise of the World Wide Web in the 1990s changed everything. Suddenly, anyone with an Internet connection could create and share content on a global scale. This opened up new possibilities for humour as images, videos, and animations could now be easily posted and viewed online; though not been around for long, memes staying power is phenomenal. One of the earliest examples of viral Internet humour was the ‘Dancing Baby’ animation, which became a sensation in 1996. This digital animation made the jump to other forms of media with its famous appearance on the hit television series, such that the three-second clip of a 3D-rendered infant dancing to the song “Hooked on a Feeling” spread rapidly across the Web and spawned countless parodies and remixes (Allebach, 2019). Since then, Internet humour has grown in popularity and diversity, with cartoons becoming a visual shorthand for online communication.

Internet humour involves the use of language play and wordplay. While language involves manipulating language to create a humorous effect, wordplay is a type of language play that involves puns, homophones, and other forms of word games. These forms of communication are also rich in metaphorical content, as they involve the use of language to create meaning. In other words, internet humour uses metaphors (visuals) to convey meaning. In addition to visual metaphors, internet humour also uses linguistic metaphors, such as puns and wordplay (Kmita et al., 2022). These types of metaphors involve linking two seemingly unrelated concepts together to create a humorous effect. Internet humour also uses other forms of multimodal communication, such as gestures, memes, sound, and gifs to create a humorous effect and convey meaning (Zhong, et al., 2023). The concept of a metaphor stretches beyond a simple figure of speech, encapsulating a cognitive operation pervasive in thought and expression. It assists in understanding unaccustomed or abstract concepts by mapping them onto a familiar concept. Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009) developed the Multimodal Metaphor Theory, which provides a more thorough framework to examine metaphors that are generated by a mix of many modalities, such as visual, auditory, and verbal, and that go beyond language representation. The Internet, drastically altering the communication landscape, promotes a multimedia environment where graphics, auditory data, texts, animations, and videos can be synergistically harnessed. This provides fertile ground for multimodal metaphors, constructing enhanced cognitive and affective engagement, which internet humour employs to generate metaphoric meanings.

The domain of cartoons is an ideal medium to observe and analyze the usage of multimodal metaphors. A multimodal metaphor is a metaphorical notion that is communicated through multiple semiotic modes, which include visual, auditory, and other forms of representation. In cartoons, this can include illustrations, dialogues, music, and sound effects, all of which add to the overall storytelling process (Forceville, 2020). The Multimodal Metaphor Theory underscores the adoptive nature of metaphors, asserting that they are not confined to verbal or textual forms but can seamlessly extend to multimodal forms of communication. Significantly, visual metaphors present in multimodal texts such as comics and cartoons contribute to meaning-making. The ability to interpret such metaphors often depends on one's understanding of the interplay between different modes or sign systems, such as visual cues, colour, and text (Forceville, 2007). This theory argues that meaning is generated not only via verbal language but also through various non-verbal modes like visual images, sound, gestures, or even space (Jewitt, 2012). In essence, it claims that metaphoric representations pervade all semiotic modes, establishing a symbiotic relationship to deliver a holistic meaning.

Cartoons actively employ both auditory and visual metaphors, from character designs to scene settings, and in the form of dialogue and music. Characters, their environment, and dialogue regularly depict and convey abstract concepts and emotions through the use of metaphorical language. Multimodal metaphors are used in cartoons to narrate stories, express emotions and abstract ideas, and enhance the viewer's aesthetic experience. As a culturally specific medium, they use a range of semiotic modes that have a significant impact on how well the cartoon is understood and appreciated by the audience. The Multimodal Metaphor theory states that metaphors, including gifs, sounds, images, and motions, are used to connect concrete experiences to abstract concepts. By projecting the source domain onto the target domain, this linking process creates a metaphor that aids in our understanding of abstract concepts. To further enhance the humorous effect, non-linguistic clues like pictures and subtitles are used. When analysing political cartoons that examine societal issues, like the challenges in the Nigerian educational system, the Multimodal Metaphor theory is essential.

Cartoons and internet comedy have gained popularity in Nigeria's social media in recent years and are now widely used to convey social issues. The emergence and growth of internet humour and cartoons were facilitated by a creative class of people who took advantage of these platforms' widespread use to produce and share humorous content that awakened Nigerian society and clarified the many aspects of the education system's failing state. They illustrate the alarming condition of the infrastructure in Nigerian schools and offer satirical commentary on the inconsistencies that

have plagued the education system. This inventive aspect of internet humour subtly but effectively highlights the infrastructure problems the education sector faces.

4. ASUU and FG: The 2022 strike wahala

Nigeria's education system, the largest in Africa, faces numerous difficulties ranging from inadequate infrastructure, incompetent teachers, and proper curriculum implementation, to inadequate funding, and widespread corruption (Sanchi et al., 2022; Jacob & Josiah, 2021; Odia & Omofonmwan, 2007). These problems act as catalysts for the emergence of a new and unique form of internet humour. Among the countless problems that Nigerian education faces, some cartoons have highlighted the drop in academic standards, poor facilities, corruption, and insufficient teaching staff. Rather than laugh, these cartoons make one reflect on and reckon with the biting reality of the education crisis from the basic primary to the tertiary level in the country.

There is a growing trend for humourous tweets, videos, memes, and cartoons, which have become so fashionable that they are an embarrassment to the nation. Today, humour has evolved globally beyond traditionally crafted jokes to the creation of influential social commentary through the medium of cartoons, and Nigeria is not an exception. Interestingly, cartoons have become a powerful tool for communicating thoughts, showcasing situations, and voicing critiques of various societal issues, including the Nigerian education system. In the vast and eclectic world of the internet, humour has emerged as a significant way of expressing social and political commentary. It serves as a mirror for society, reflecting current difficulties and providing comic relief for those who are conscious of them. The humour targets the situation's extreme ridiculousness and sombre reality while also giving the public a forum to air their frustrations and have their voices heard. There is a lot of visual, written, and audio commentary highlighting the shortcomings of the country's educational system that have flooded the internet in recent times. Popular social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become arenas where people may share jokes, satirical cartoons, and memes from the internet. These humorous pieces were not created randomly; but are a symbol of collective disenchantment that speaks volumes about the perceived inability of the government to effect any significant reform in the sector.

In Nigeria, humorous cartoons have developed into a platform for expressing grievances and criticising the shortcomings of the country's educational system, going beyond their original use as a form of entertainment. They highlight the laughable nature of Nigeria's educational system by drawing attention to everyday incidents that are inherently humorous. In these memes, videos, and cartoons, characters are used to portray the inefficiencies of Nigeria's education system in a comical and sometimes satirical way (Usman & Nuhu, 2016). The media characters poke fun at a range of issues, from the ineffectiveness of educational policies to the deliberate suffocation of education, especially public institutions, and the corrupt practices found in the country at the detriment of education. Presently, the comedic lamentation of the shortcomings in Nigeria's educational structure has developed into a very distinct subculture within the realm of internet humour. For instance, a remarkable cartoon that made the rounds on social media depicts a Nigerian classroom with students crammed up, sitting on the floor due to the scarcity of desks, chairs, and other infrastructure. Another cartoon presents a dilapidated school with crumbling classrooms, no chairs for students, and a barely functional blackboard, while a government official donning a suit in the background oversees the pitiful state of affairs.

In a similar vein, another cartoon shows a group of professors wearing around their necks copies of their academic degrees with brooms in their hands, sweeping the streets. This cartoon mocks the devalued nature of Nigeria's educational investments and the rising unemployment rate among present university graduates. Although the cartoons initially evoke laughter, a closer examination reveals a different reality; they are a visual depiction of the appalling condition of the Nigerian educational system, which satirises the situation of rural Nigerian schools that have been consistently neglected and marginalised in terms of infrastructure and resources. It is a call to action for the improvement of the sector. It's important to note that the purpose of these cartoons is not to ridicule the education sector but rather to draw attention to them, ignite meaningful discussions, and encourage individuals or groups to come up with plausible solutions.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria has gone on strike again, causing more havoc and confusion throughout the tertiary educational system. As usual, the reason for the strike that started in August 2022 was the disagreement between ASUU and the federal government (FG) over the non-implementation of previous agreements (Chukwudi & Idowu, 2021). ASUU has accused the FG of revoking its promises of funding the universities, improving staff welfare, and enhancing institutional infrastructure. But with the failed and broken promises, ASUU says that the Nigerian education system has continued to decline in quality. Conversely, the FG states that it has been unable to meet all of ASUU's demands because of the economic downturns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The FG declared that it has been attempting to resolve these problems within its resources (Ukpong, 2021; Olawale, 2021).

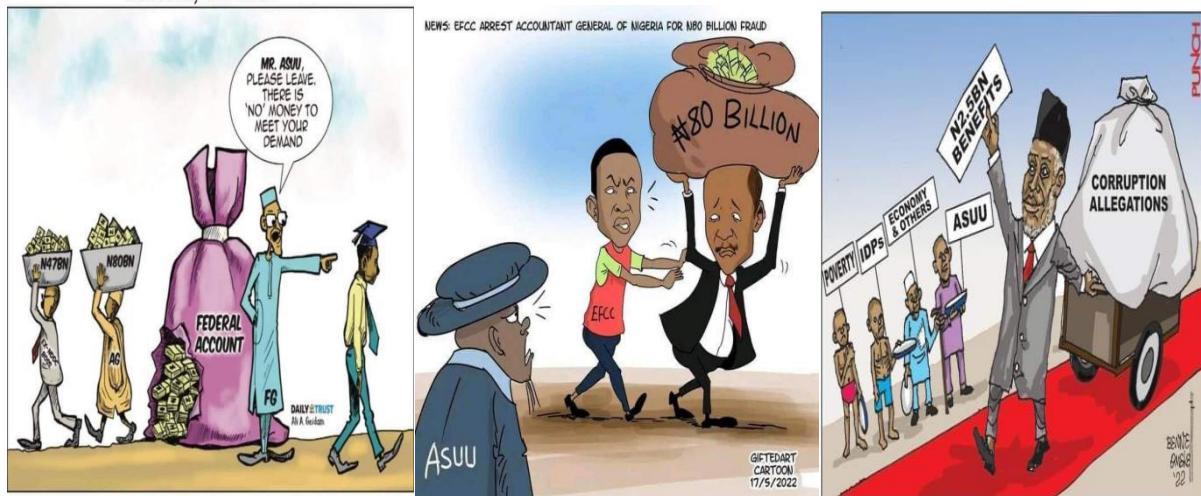
The strike has negatively affected numerous students across the country, as they are unable to receive lectures, attend classes, or acquire a proper education. This has adversely impacted the students' mental and emotional health and stunted their academic progress. The strike has not only led to revenue losses for universities but has also made parents and students hesitant to pay tuition for a semester that they might not complete. As the strike drags on, both ASUU and the FG seem unwilling to shift their positions. ASUU has stated that it will continue the strike until the FG meets its demands, while the FG has stated that it cannot meet all of ASUU's demands under the present economic circumstances (Duru, 2022; Aina, 2022). This has left many, questioning why the education sector in Nigeria seems to be constantly plagued by a cycle of strikes, agreements, and disagreements that are yet to be resolved and without any visible solution in view. For instance, in some cartoons below, issues of glaring corrupt practices are not treated with stiff punishments, even when

such monies would have taken care of the issues raised by ASUU. Rather, lecturers are told to wait so the FG can think of ways to solve the issues raised.

The Nigerian education system is plagued by systemic corruption, which poses a formidable challenge that hinders productivity, curtails growth, and undermines the systemic infrastructure. This corruption involves the embezzlement of funds, with officials like ministers, education ministries, and school administrators acting as agents. Irregular appointments of educational officials and the issue of 'ghost workers' to embezzle funds and teachers often trade grades for bribes, promoting academic dishonesty and lowering educational standards (Offor et al., 2024; Adeyemi, 2012). These corrupt practices erode the quality of education, fuel inequality in accessibility, and perpetuate a cycle of underdevelopment (Obasi, 2007). However, online spaces, like the cartoons below where the FG is seen burying the Nigerian education sector, especially as their children are all overseas, studying; have become breeding grounds for critical social commentary through humour and the Multimodal Metaphor Theory, highlighting the prevailing corruption and its implications on the education system. The representation of these issues through internet humour highlights the uncanny marriage between pervasive corruption and its normalisation in the public thought process.

The Multimodal Metaphor Theory unpacks and deconstructs the semiotic elements of this humourous digital content to unveil nuanced commentaries on corruption in Nigerian education. The noted analogies, hyperboles, and ironies used in these internet artefacts subtly influence and shape public perceptions of the issue. While the use of internet humour and multimodal metaphor theory in the cartoons offers a unique perspective on systemic corruption in Nigerian education, the role of these pictorial metaphors in instigating change remains an open question (Forceville, 1996). Nevertheless, they provide a vibrant dialogue platform for interrogating systemic corruption, encouraging a collective demand for transparency and accountability as well as amplifying the scale of the issue, to provoke discussions geared towards tangible reforms.

Figures 1a, b & c: The Impact of Systemic Corrupt Practices on the Nigerian Education System
CARTOON by Ali A. Geidam

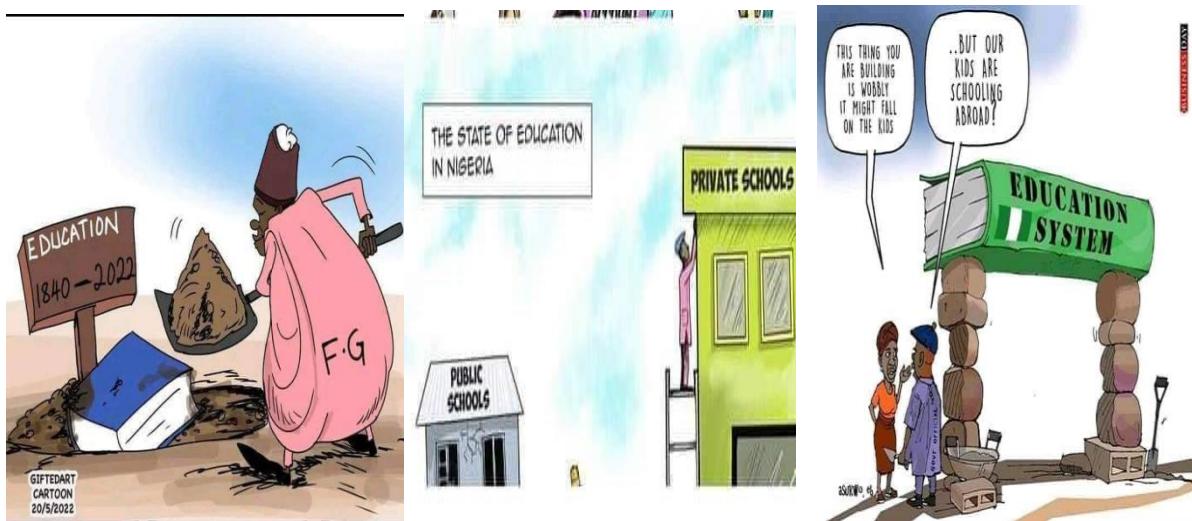


The public education system, once considered the great equalizer, is increasingly regarded with scepticism and disillusionment. Among the many factors at play, one disheartening trend is the deliberate erosion by the political class, a caricaturized phenomenon best portrayed by the contemporary tools of internet humour and multimodal metaphor theory (MMT). The public education system is facing significant strain due to concerted efforts by the political class to deliberately undermine its integrity. This erosion is not a result of fiscal pressures or abstract policy pivots but rather a calculated strategy aimed at dismantling the cornerstone of society: education. The most glaring manifestation of this calculated assault is the chronic under-funding of public education systems. The FG is deliberately eradicating public institutions and education, especially with conscious intentions of under-funding or complete non-funding of the education sector with the constant establishment of private schools, and primary, post-primary, and tertiary institutions. This disparity sharply contradicts our pledge for equal opportunity for all citizens. While teacher's rights have been curtailed, there is curriculum manipulation that presently tampers with educational content, leading to a divisive citizenry and a lack of objective, rounded education. The erosion of education is an erosion of democracy and must be recognized, exposed, and resisted to ensure a balanced and inclusive education for all citizens. In some cartoons below, the FG is seen burying the Nigerian education sector, especially as their children are all overseas, studying.

Even when education is vital for personal and societal growth, the Nigerian political class uses it as a political tool to increase inequality and disunity rather than foster national unity and development. These people inadequately mismanage the sector, which has led to high unemployment rates and unemployable youth. Despite these challenges, Nigerian youth are actively engaging in discussions about their country's future and demanding accountability from leaders. To achieve

Nigeria's potential, the political class must prioritize education, encourage youth participation in governance, and adhere to policies that prioritize national development. Internet humour highlights this issue with uncanny accuracy. A swarm of memes, cartoons, and satirical posts emerges frequently, targeting the socio-political strategies undermining public education (Thierry & Winny, 2016). The mutual union of internet humour and MMT presents a valuable tool for spotlighting the insidious erosion of the public education system while building metaphoric interpretations of the actual situation. However, in these challenging times, it is paramount to recognise and address these issues proactively while ensuring that future generations receive the quality education they richly deserve, unaffected by political manoeuvres. By uniquely leveraging the potency of visual metaphors and satire, internet humour seems well-equipped to continue thrusting this issue into the spotlight. It voices the public's concern, highlighting an alarming reality masked by political rhetoric and empowering citizens to demand change.

Figures 2a, b & c: The Deliberate Erosion of the Public Education System by the Political Class

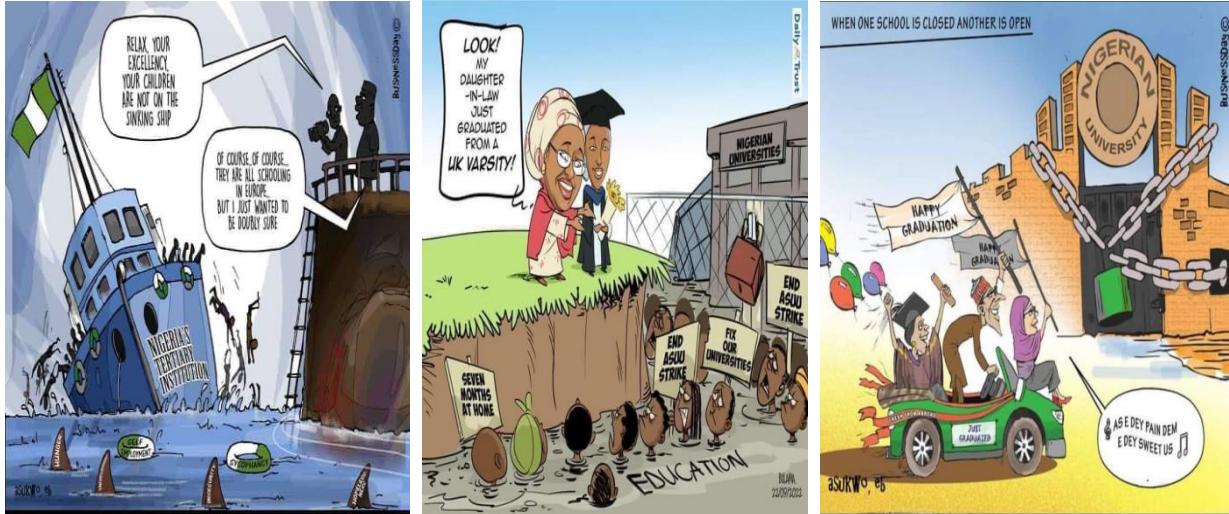


The Nigerian political class has faced rigorous critique and analysis through metaphors developed by the youth via Internet humour in cartoons. This has been especially true in instances where social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have been used to generate comical interpretations of political happenings. This growing Internet humour trend presents a new space for political discourse, which in turn allows for a unique connection between the Nigerian political class, education, and youth (Fadeyi & Ola, 2023). Even when education is vital for personal and societal growth, the Nigerian political class uses it as a political tool to increase inequality and disunity rather than foster national unity and development. These people inadequately mismanage the sector, which has led to high unemployment rates and unemployable youth. Despite these challenges, Nigerian youth are actively engaging in discussions about their country's future and demanding accountability from leaders. To achieve Nigeria's potential, the political class must prioritize education, encourage youth participation in governance, and adhere to policies that prioritize national development.

Internet humour presently plays a significant role in how youths view politics, as it has greatly influenced them. Young people's perceptions of politics are largely shaped by satirical representations seen on social media platforms, which often depict politicians and bureaucrats as ineffective, corrupt, or dishonest. This perception aligns with the Multimodal Metaphor Theory (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), which posits that metaphorical representations can be created by combining visual and verbal elements. Internet humour, therefore, aids in the improvement of the educational value of political discourse by making difficult socio-political issues approachable and engaging for a generation that is generally disengaged from traditional forms of political debate. It redefines the relationship between politics, education, and youth by encouraging them to participate in political discourse and raise awareness about societal issues.

Applying the Multimodal Metaphor Theory to internet humour in Nigerian politics and education provides a viable avenue for youth engagement. However, a delicate balance must be struck to prevent false information from spreading via this rapidly expanding communication channel. As such, it is important that the political elite and academia dialogue towards establishing the legitimacy of media. In the end, the Multimodal Metaphor Theory and internet humour do more than simply make politics appetising to Nigeria's youth. They reflect the intersection of politics, education, and the aspirations of a technology-driven generation, with the potential to reshape the future of Nigeria's socio-political landscape.

Figures 3a, b & c: The Nigerian political class, education and the youth

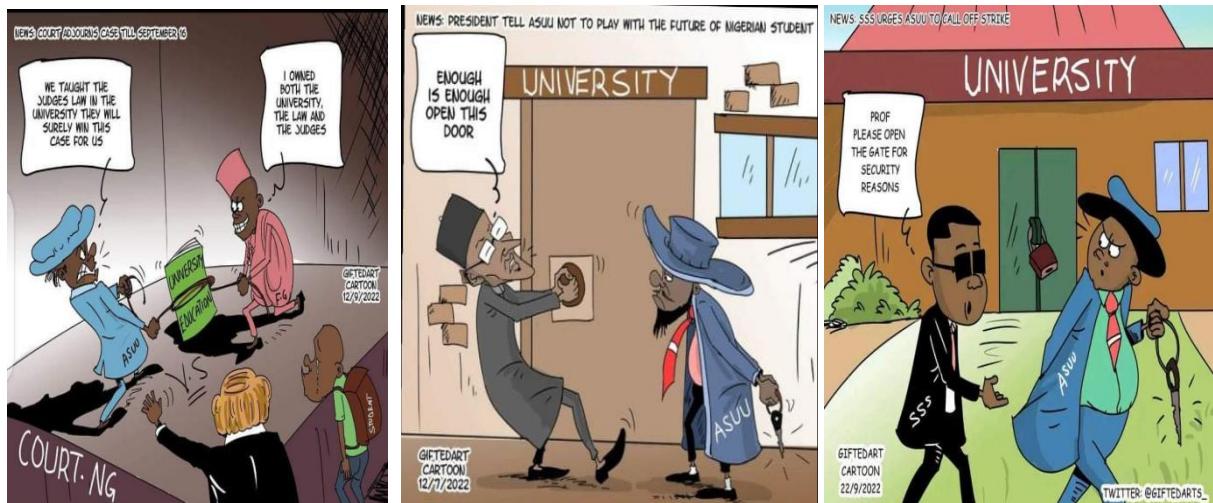


Since the establishment of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in 1978, ASUU has been in perpetual battle, with numerous legal, physical, and financial challenges and different facets of bureaucracy, arising concerning conditions of service, wages, and university autonomy. Legal issues include the government's failure to implement agreements signed in 2009 to improve lecture conditions and facilities. Physical battles involve harassment and threats towards members, particularly during strikes. Financial struggles are the biggest obstacle for ASUU, as they struggle to secure adequate funding for universities. They also battle with issues of good remuneration. These battles often result in prolonged strikes that disrupt the academic calendar, thereby affecting the quality of education. The ongoing battles highlight the need for a comprehensive restructuring of university education in Nigeria, emphasising improving service, upgrading infrastructure, and addressing staff welfare. Thus, the Nigerian political class has faced rigorous critique and analysis through metaphors developed by the youth via Internet humour. However, in the age of digitization, the implications of internet humour and multimodal metaphor theory have provided a unique perspective on these struggles, thus shaping public opinion and discourse on the issue.

The Internet has radically transformed the nature of communication and discourse. With its advent, Internet humour has become a tool for individuals to express their perspectives, discuss societal issues, and drive social change (Kapucu1i & Özcan, 2022). In the scenario of the incessant face-offs between ASUU and the government, internet humour has emerged as a powerful medium for social commentary, primarily through cartoons. Metaphors have become a fundamental communication tool that is inherent in this medium. By equating seemingly unrelated objects, metaphors provide insights into how people view the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). With the help of humour and these metaphors, the Nigerian citizens can express their displeasure about the recurrent ASUU strikes. The idea behind the multimodality theory is that these several communication modalities combine to create a single, coherent message (Forceville, 2020). These are reflected in ASUU-related cartoons seen on social media platforms, where the combination of text and images portray sarcastic and ironic perspectives on the current struggles.

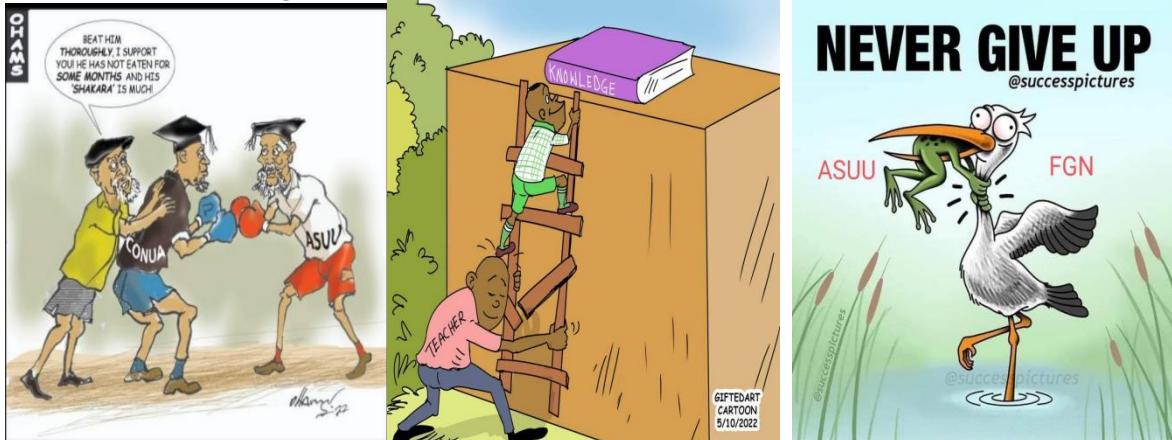
These cartoons filled with multimodal metaphors not only make people laugh, but also expose the frustration of parents, students, and lecturers with the strikes. Through these humour and metaphors, the public is made aware of the repetitive and seemingly unending nature of ASUU's struggle. The purpose of ASUU's advocacy against all of these well-known human battles is to protect the standard and integrity of Nigeria's higher education system. Their initiatives show their commitment to progressive reform for the advancement and sustainability of the Nigerian university education system.

Figures 4a, b & c: ASUU and the many battles



The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), a sub-set of the Nigerian trade union; that represents academia in public universities, has been working hard to uphold the quality of higher education in Nigeria. Despite of the challenges faced, ASUU has remained steadfast and committed to preserving the higher education industry and advancing sustainable development by utilising modern methodologies, such as Internet humour and the multimodal metaphor theory, to improve the teaching and learning processes. To improve universities' facilities, research centres, and infrastructure, as well as adequate funding, ASUU's efforts have resulted in agreements and strike actions with the Nigerian government. To overcome the shortcomings of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), they also advocate for the University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS). Another major purpose of ASUU's campaign is against the casualization of academic staff to protect the integrity and quality of Nigeria's higher education system. These initiatives by the union show their commitment to the change, reform and sustainability of the Nigerian higher education system.

Figures 5a, b & c: ASUU's conscious efforts to sustain university education



While it is possible to interpret the humour surrounding Nigeria's educational system as a reflection of popular opinion, it also draws attention to some societal areas that are problematic. Even if these problems are life-threatening in reality, they continue to be very important to Nigerian internet culture, which makes humorous jokes and trivialises the reality they depict. Despite its serious nature, Nigeria's educational system has continued to be a recurrent source of internet humour; it is a kind of discomforting satire that draws attention to the sector's perplexing situation and the urgent need for reforms. Social media has magnified the impact of cartoons with platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, which have become avenues by which cartoonists create awareness and start debates on critical issues. Importantly, this widespread use of digital media has raised public consciousness about the problematic state of the Nigerian educational system. This type of internet humour is of greater impact than mere conversation especially as it encourages people to seek greater responsibility and commitment from the government. These humorous cartoons via text, graphics and illustrations convey the distressed state of Nigeria's education system, which is not just to satirise the sector but to ensure that the predicament of the sector is taken seriously and tackled. This ridiculous state of the sector has become pitiful, as the jokes have also become a satirical piece used to critically critique the situation of Nigeria's educational sector.

5. Research method

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, which combines digital ethnography and content analysis to examine education-related humour in Nigerian digital spaces. The methodology was designed to capture both the content of humorous expressions and their contextual significance from data collected on social media platforms within the eight-month (March-October 2022) ASUU strike. This work used purposive sampling to pick diverse range of cartoons that captures the wide range of students, parents and stakeholders experiences during the period of the strike as depicted online. The researcher collected and analysed 20 text-based satirical posts, looking at the thematic content with recurring themes, subjects, and targets of educational humour. This process yielded five thematic categories, including politicisation and mismanagement of educational institutions, chronic underfunding and poor resource allocation impacting infrastructure and teacher welfare, administrative fraud and corruption allegations, policy inconsistencies and implementation gap, and fight for survival of the university. These themes are often subtly or overtly communicated through cartoons or memes, resonating with the shared experiences and frustrations of Nigerians.

6. Findings

The findings reveal that internet humour serves multiple functions; as a potent tool for social commentary, coping mechanism, community solidarity, and awareness creation that reflects the dissatisfaction with Nigeria's educational system. Importantly, the humorous contents examined in this study serves as a credible lens through which to view the realities of Nigeria's educational system. The prevalent recurring themes of infrastructural deficiencies, teachers' poor welfare, inadequate funding, and corrupt practices among others, highlight areas of particular concern in public consciousness. Additionally, the rapid spread of this humour across digital platforms signals a shared understanding of the issues, revealing collective awareness with the perplexities of Nigeria's educational system.

7. Contribution of the study

This research has brought to the fore the benefits of internet humour for societal change, public awareness, policy decisions, and cultural preservation while contributing to existing knowledge of Nigeria's educational system. The study also shows the intersection between digital media, social criticism, education, and internet humour at an interdisciplinary level.

8. Implications of the study

Internet humour has been used to expose critical societal issues and cultural dynamics in Nigeria, calling attention to the inadequate infrastructure and curriculum deficiencies in the Nigerian educational system. It implies that the medium provides teachers, students, and other stakeholders the forum to express their frustrations and concerns while inciting educational policymakers to take the necessary actions. Findings show that satirical videos, cartoons, and animations are intricately woven within cultural contexts that provide valuable insights into attitudes, values, and perceptions that are accessible to a wider audience. This multimedia content acts as a catalyst for not only creating awareness but also advocating for educational reforms. It also acts as a coping mechanism used to ignite discussion, create spaces for shared experiences and empowerment as well as mobilizing communities for educational equity. Internet humour via diverse platforms can be used to advocate for educational reforms, persuade policymakers, and develop critical thinking skills among Nigerian youth.

9. Recommendation and future studies

This study examined how internet humour has played a major role in creating awareness about the deplorable state of the Nigerian educational sector. It is, therefore, important that these memes, viral videos, and social media discussions be properly analysed for future use. Aside from the above, the sector must build a synergy between educators, policymakers, students, and parents to understand their perspectives on Nigerian educational challenges and how humour can be used to address them. The study also compares online humour across various cultural contexts to understand the universality of themes as well as the ways cultural nuances shape the humour. This will aid behavioural change through educational engagements, which will enhance critical thinking, media literacy, and cultural awareness. This research advocates for interdisciplinary collaborations in the domain of education, psychology, linguistics, and digital media studies, which will provide a thorough understanding of the impact of humour on learning. New forms of humour can be created from emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality.

10. Conclusion

This study has made it clear that, in Nigeria, the internet has become a site where youths find solace and have fun as well as a platform where people express their discontent about the educational state of the nation. The humour is used as a tool of communication and an outlet for releasing pent-up emotions. It has become a common and popular agency used to draw attention to and highlight important topics, as well as call and challenge policymakers to address areas of concern for radical change. The tendency to use internet humour as a tool for social criticism is not unique to Nigeria but a global phenomenon; a reflection that humour has expanded beyond jokes to include more important and sensitive societal issues,

making poignant and unconventional types of social commentary. In conclusion, this internet humour is re-configuring the discourse on Nigeria's educational system with its social commentaries, which has kept the discussions running as well as encouraging stakeholders to be involved to address the glaring inadequacies in society.

The cartoons that ensued and went viral during the ASUU/FG crisis created feelings of uncertainty about the impact of the strike on the nation as well as its adverse effects on lecturers, students, and parents. These cartoons that were circulated served as a tool for social criticism, reminding the masses of the nonchalant attitudes of the political elite towards the nation's educational system. It has become an agency for highlighting critical issues, advocating for systemic reforms and fostering interaction with underlying societal concerns in ways that are accessible and humorous. Since they influence public opinion, they are capable of mirroring societal sensitivity and sparking transformative change. Aside from being an aspect of entertainment, cartoons are a vital tool of a society's sociopolitical territory. It critiques, illuminates, shapes and creates a sense of solidarity in new ways in the world.

In conclusion, Nigerian internet comedy and cartoons offer a continual yet humorous critique that bluntly tackles the complex issues with the country's educational system. Their inherent humour and creativity often shroud the seriousness of the problems they depict. But they also provide a forum for socio-political discussion about the necessary changes that Nigeria's educational system requires, allowing stakeholders in the education sector to understand the implications conveyed by these humorous realities.

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