

Trade Union Activism among Academic Staff and Employee Morale in Selected South-South Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated trade union activism among academic staff and how this affects their morale in selected South-South universities in Nigeria. The theoretical basis for this study is the Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory. The application of the Taro Yamen formula gave the researcher 381 lecturers as the sample size out of the 8,180 lecturers of the 8 randomly selected universities that formed the population and 174 Appointment and Promotion Committee (A&PC) members out of the 307 members that constitute the A&PC of the 8 randomly selected South-South universities. The A&PC members were interviewed to get a balanced view. The Regression Analysis and the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient tools were used to test the research objective and hypothesis. The findings shows that academic staff activism in ASUU activities reduces their morale by 9.40%. It also revealed that antagonism and victimization of academic staff who oppose the policies of the university where they work as well as those who are ASUU activists is an ongoing occurrence. This study recommends among others that there should be a standing committee to handle grievances and face-offs, promotion of lecturers should be based on laid down criteria, unbiased and fair appointment of lecturers into senate and other key offices, removal of the Vice Chancellor as a member of the Governing Council and A&PC so that he does not become the prosecutor and judge at the same time as well as increment in ASUU check off dues.

Introduction

Trade unions are formed for the purpose of guaranteeing conducive working conditions as well as material well being for their members, mainly by means of collective bargaining and consultation with employers. They originated and are formed in modern times as avenues for protecting the individual worker against the rapacity and recklessness of employers/management and even the state. All university teachers in the federal and state universities in Nigeria supposedly belong to an umbrella body called the academic staff union of universities, ASUU.

The word 'morale' was originally used in a military sense to denote the moral condition, the spirit, the faith, the mood and the belief of the troops for a particular assignment or mission, but it has now taken a broader meaning and its now applicable to organizations (Denyer, 1980). Denyer defined it as the collective attitude of worker towards one another, their employer, the management and their work. Xi (2014) sees morale as the employees' level of engagement in the activities of the institution or organization. Neely (2014) pointed out that the happier the employee or worker, the higher the productivity. Employee morale according to him is one at

the corner stones of business and recognized by employers to be as important as the institution itself; employee morale plays a decisive part in any business.

According to Denyer (1980) good morale means that staffs are happy in their work. It is an established fact that the productive efficiency of workers increases with a rise in their interest and morale, they do more and better work when they are enthusiastic and have confidence in the jobs they do. A low level of morale can lead to high turnover rate, inadequate output, absenteeism, waste of materials, unnecessary disputes over discipline, reduced concentration, poor customer service, missed deadlines, and extra cost of placing persons on the seats of the staff who are absent. The effect of expensive welfare schemes can be completely vitiated if morale is upset by some act of injustice, or even of only apparent injustice. It is essential for morale to be kept at a high level.

Ewton (2007) pointed out that the relationship between employee morale and organizational or institutional performance is straight forward. When employee morale is high, they are motivated to work harder and contribute the best of their abilities toward the achievement of organizational goals. They feel appreciated, important and significant members of the organizational chain and as such they are ready to maintain a positive action with colleagues, clients and anyone they come in contact with. By putting their face forward, not only makes them more attractive, but they are also able to complete their tasks more efficiently.

Neely (2014) is of the view that the moment employees feel their jobs are not secure and they are not appreciated, low morale sets in. Some bosses also believe and create the impression that employees are lucky to have a job, and should therefore keep their noses to the grindstone. The moment these feelings are created in the minds of employees, low morale sets in. Also in the absence of trust between staff and management, morale is of its lowest and self protectionism becomes the rule. It does not take a doctorate degree in psychology to realize that this will limit productivity and make work a lot less rewarding for both employees and management. This “every man for themselves” attitude destroys teams and makes it impossible to optimize goal setting and achieve objectives in a timely manner, if at all.

The cause of low staff morale is so simple that it is so often missed, but without the staff believing that management is genuine, honest and practicing high levels of integrity, any efforts to improve morale will be looked at with suspicion. If management keeps this in mind in all its dealings with their employees, one would be surprised how easy it is to improve morale and enjoy the benefits of higher productivity, better retention of staff, lower costs and an overall happier and more satisfying workplace. Xi (2014) stressed that bad management is the main cause of poor morale, particularly if employees view management as unfair, disrespectful, bias, giving preferential treatment to certain staff and engages in selective prosecution.

Heath field 2014, added to boosting morale by stressing that factors that can contribute to positive employee morale include; treating employees with respect, providing regular employee recognition, promoting fair promotion practices, empowering employees, and avoiding micro managing. Akinmayowa (1993), pointed out that every union has executives and members who play dominant and active roles, though the complicity of the organization will determine the kind of leadership they ought to have. The activeness of an employee in a union sometimes

determines his/her eligibility for promotion, security of the job as well as the employee's job satisfaction.

The co-existence between the governments, the management of universities and ASUU has not been cordial. Governments have continued to ignore agreements it enters into with ASUU. ASUU activists and some staff criticize the policies of the government and also the policy of the university's where they work. This has made their relationship frosty, and has led to face-offs, disagreements and strikes between government, ASUU and the management of universities (Anele, 2011).

Government and the management of universities respond by antagonizing and victimizing ASUU activists. Government alone is not guilty of the harassment, victimization and termination of lecturers' appointments (Anele 2011). Some Vice Chancellors stop lecturers' salaries, deny them promotion, and sack ASUU members in connivance with the Governing Councils. Anele (2011) went on to stress that apart from Government,

"Vice Chancellors also victimize and antagonize their staff. They hurriedly implement government anti-ASUU policies and decisions such as immediate stoppage of salaries, non-payment of salaries, signing of attendance registers to consolidate their positions, termination of appointment of union Exco members, refusal to award them degrees (where some academics are involved in higher degree programmers in universities) and manipulation of promotion of ASUU activists among others" ... Pp64.

Ahiauzu and Adoki (1986) pointed out that the Nigerian manager does not tolerate opposition in the workplace. Management believes the employee should show allegiance to them and not to their union. Anikpo (2011) pointed out that there are some Vice Chancellors who cook up charges to stifle the promotion of staff and terminate the appointments of ASUU activists and staff who criticize their policies. Vice Chancellors hand pick members of their investigation and disciplinary committees which most of the time are his strong loyalists and they use the committee to victimize staff. They subject their perceived enemies and the perceived enemies of their 'kitchen cabinet' to more than two trials for the same offence just to get a guilty verdict. Some head of departments and senior teaching staff do not feel comfortable employing and retaining lecturers with a first class degree or retaining staff who have more degrees than themselves and would do everything possible to get that staff's appointment terminated because they feel threatened.

Experience has shown that the Vice Chancellor has more powers and influences the Governing Council greatly. The Vice Chancellor as the Chief Executive officer of the university controls the funds of the university which includes internal generated revenue, subventions and grants from Governments and other institutions. We find Governing Council members begging for contracts and executing same, and as a result some of them become 'toothless bulldogs'. Vice Chancellors employ the children and relatives of Governing Council members as well as the children and relations of members of his 'kitchen cabinet' and as a result they watch helplessly as the Vice Chancellors victimize and antagonize staff since they have compromised themselves.

The Vice Chancellors victimize, antagonize and sack staff at will under the watchful eyes of the Governing Councils and academic staff union which appears helpless (Tantua, 2015). Head of departments are not elected but appointed by the Vice Chancellors. Lecturers do all they can to be in the good books of Vice Chancellors and therefore they serve as stooges to the Vice Chancellors. Head of departments in agreement with Vice Chancellors hand pick external examiners to remark scripts. Some Vice Chancellors in connivance with some head of departments influence the external examiners who might want adjunct ship to get negative reports about their perceived enemies to victimize him/her.

The National scholar of April (2005) pointed out that “by 1987, every radical lecturer had been penciled down for hounding, serious harassment, imprisonment, exile or assassination...” Dr. Patrick Wilmot and Dr. Bala Usman of Ahmadu Bello University had their appointments terminated in 1986 and 1989 respectively for engaging actively in ASUU activities and criticizing the policies of the government. Also in 1987, Dr. Festus Iyayi, the then president of ASUU and Dr. Peter Agbonifoh, both of the university of Benin, and who were executive members of ASUU had their appointments terminated because they opposed the imposition of Prof Grace Alele Williams as the Vice Chancellor and also opposed her policies. A follow up was the making of the check-off dues voluntary by the Babangida Administration to make the union weaker.

Also in 1996, the ASUU president Dr. Assibi Asobie was also dismissed from service as a result of actions by ASUU (Ezike, 2012). The recent happening in Rivers State University of Science and Technology where the researcher is a lecturer is of interest. The Governor of the state who is the visitor of the university brought and imposed a Vice Chancellor on the university which was challenged by the Rivers State University of Science and Technology ASUU. A total strike was declared and our branch of ASUU broke into 2 factions. Re-engagement registers were opened for all lecturers to sign if you are still interested in your job and to work with the imposed Vice Chancellor. All those who signed the re-engagement register were paid their withheld salaries and re-absorbed, while those who did not sign had their appointment terminated by the Governing Council. The sacked ASUU activists and other lecturers who were sacked proceeded to the National Industrial Court, but all they had were adjournments upon adjournments. They had to seek a political solution to the problem since its obvious they might not get justice from the courts.

Tantua (2015) carried out a study on ‘Trade Union Activism among Academic Staff and Career Advancement in South – South Universities in Nigeria’ and certain interesting revelations were brought to limelight. The management of the South – South Universities stressed that ASUU see themselves or the union as a parallel government or administration, and as such the management of the universities do not want any body or union to rob shoulders with them and so they resort to victimization possibly to silence any opposition. The disposition of a lecturer over the years in his stay in the university plays a role. According to the management, if any lecturer has been confrontational or has been critical of the policies of the university, then when it comes to promotion and to enjoy other benefits and perquisites of the job, the lecturer should expect it to be pay back time. The management of south-south universities also gave the alibi of not having a enough funds in the budget for denying academic staff their promotion. The Guardian Newspaper of June 23, 2016 pointed out that promotion in some universities in Nigeria is based

on religion, ethnicity, state of origin, gender, membership of open and secret societies amongst others.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – Ralf Dahrendorf’s Conflict Theory

Conflict theory was adopted for this study and the reason for this choice of theoretical framework is based on the fact that society is always in a state of continuous and perpetual bargaining, the resolution of one conflict tends to breed another (Ekpenyong, 2003).

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of everyday life. Whether it is with others, yourself or an organization, conflict is an inevitable aspect of life experience. Conflict can occur when people have opposing personalities or hold differing ideas. It may arise when people disagree about which tasks they must complete. People can also clash when they disagree about the best way to achieve their goals (Giddens, 2000).

According to Peil (1976), conflict theory has various roots, such as Marxian theory, the work of Georg Simmel, Ralf Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser and also the work of the disciples of the Frankfurt school including Herbert Marcuse and Jorgen Habermas. But Ralf Dahrendorf’s work suits the study.

Ralf Dahrendorf, like other conflict theorists contend that social practices continue because powerful groups have the ability to maintain the status quo. Change has crucial significance, since it is needed to correct social injustices and inequalities. Leaders are only interested in longevity and not always responsive to the needs and demands of membership and seem more concerned with maintaining their own positions and power as long as it is in their interest (Schaefer, 2001).

Dahrendorf stressed that in organizations, there should be a career structure in which personnel should be hired on merit, promoted when due and should be given security of tenure to protect them from outside pressure. Authority is not a constant as far as Dahrendorf was concerned, because authority resides in positions and not persons. Authority within each association is dichotomous; thus two and only two conflict groups can be formed within an organization. Those in authority and those in positions of subordination have certain interests that are contradictory in substance and direction. This sums up the Dahrendorf’s theory of conflict.

There are two conflict groups here – Government in partnership with the university’s management made up of the Vice Chancellor, the Deputy Vice Chancellor and the Registrar who are Governing Council members in addition to all other Governing Council members on one hand with their interests to protect and all academic staff belonging to ASUU with their own interests on the other hand.

Methodology

The cross-sectional survey method of research design was employed by the researcher. Primary source of data (information acquired directly from the respondents) and the secondary source of data (collection of already existing data) was used for this study. The study population consisted of all teaching staff of the 8 randomly selected universities used for this study which comprised of 4 Federal Universities; university of Benin, university of Port Harcourt, University of Calabar and university of Uyo, as well as 4 state universities which are Delta State University, Ambrose

Alli University, Rivers State University of Science and Technology and Cross River State University of Technology; Past and Present ASUU Executives, and Appointment and Promotion Committee (A&PC) members of the selected universities.

The application of the Taro Yamen formula gave the researcher 381 Lecturers as the sample size out of the 8,180 lecturers and 174 staff out of the 307 members that constitute the Appointment and Promotion Committee (A&PC) of the 8 randomly selected South-South universities. Two sampling methods were adopted; the simple random sampling and the purposive sampling. The main instruments used for the collection of data include questionnaire, personal interview and observation. The Regression Analysis and the Spearman Correlation Coefficient were used for testing and analyzing the research objective and the research hypothesis.

The test was computed with the aid of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistical tools were used for presentation and analysis. This also involved the use of frequency distributions and percentages. In this study, the instrument for primary data collection (questionnaire) was subjected to a face and content validity before professors in my university and its reliability was determined and ascertained through a pilot survey of thirty lecturers drawn from where I teach – Rivers State University of Science and Science, Port Harcourt other than those in the South-South zone of Nigeria. A test-retest method was adopted.

In measuring trade union activism based on whether the respondent was vocal and active in the union, presents alternative views and criticizes the policies of their university, the respondents were required to rate the test items on a five point likert scale of; Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The first part of the scale (left side) indicates a positive strength, while the second part (right side) indicates a negative strength.

In measuring employee morale based on the moral condition, the spirit, the faith, the mood, the belief of the employee as well as the collective attitude of workers towards one another, their employer, the management and their work, the respondents were required to rate the test items on a five point likert scale of; Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The first part of the scale (left side) indicates a positive strength, while the second part (right side) indicates a negative strength.

Research Objective

To highlight the extent to which trade union activism of academic staff affects their morale.

- Here, staff morale is regressed against trade union activism.

Table 1.1: Model summary for trade union activism and staff morale

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.307 ^a	.094	.091	.45726

a. Predictors: (Constant), Active Trade Union Participation (Tolerance)

From the regression model summary table above, multiple correlation coefficient (R) = 0.307 indicates a weak positive linear relationship between the independent variable, trade union

activism, and the dependent variable, staff morale. Coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.094 indicates that about 9.40% of the variance in staff morale can be explained by variations in active trade union participation. This figure measures the goodness of fit of the model and because of the low value of 9.40%, this model is said to be not a good fit.

Table 1.2: Coefficient of trade union activism as a function of staff morale Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	2.996	.059		50.810	.000
Active Trade Union Participation (Tolerance)	-.127	.023	-.307	-5.474	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Staff Morale

Table 1.2 above shows that for 1 unit change in active trade union activism, staff morale decreases by 0.127 units. This result is significant as the p-value (= 0.000) is less than α (= 0.05) making the variable, trade union activism, an important and reliable predictor of staff morale.

Testing the result for overall significance, we find from the F-distribution table in Appendix G, the critical value obtained at $\alpha = 0.05$, d.f.Nsss = 1, and d.f.D. = 289 is 3.92. Since F (= 29.969) is greater than the critical value (=3.92), and also since, the p-value (= 0.000) is less than α (= 0.05), the decision is to conclude that trade union activism significantly influences staff morale among academic staff of universities in South-south Nigeria.

Therefore, a co-efficient of determination (r^2) of 0.094 showed that about 9.40% of the variance in staff morale can be explained by variations in trade union activism, which was found to be a reliable predictor since its F statistics returned significant, F calculated being more than F tabulated.

Hypothesis Testing: trade union activism and Staff morale

There is no significant relationship between trade union activism and Staff morale in the South-South universities.

Table 1.3: Result of Spearman correlation coefficient on trade union activism and Staff Morale

Correlations

			Trade Union Activism (Tolerance)	Staff Morale
Spearman's rho	Active Trade Union Participation (Tolerance)	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.323**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	291	291
	Staff Morale	Correlation Coefficient	-.323**	1.000
			.000	.

Sig. (2-tailed) N	291	291
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****Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Source: SPSS ver. 20.0 Output window

A low coefficient score of -0.323 resulted because Staff morale was low as long as trade union activism was high.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- This section of the study focused on the data generated during the field survey where the researcher subjected them to statistical analyses.
- The researcher used the Simple Linear Regression Analysis and the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient in determining the extent to which trade union activism affects employee morale.
- Results from each analysis were tested for significance of alpha (α) = 0.05 level of significance and the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20 was the software package employed in analysis of data.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has shown, using major findings as a basis that the more an academic staff engages in trade union activism, the lower the level of morale of that lecturer in universities of South-South Nigeria. Trade union activism significantly affects staff morale, and also that there is a high rate of victimization as perceived by colleagues. Empirical analysis used two perspectives to present the nature of the relationship between trade union activism and morale. The first analysis enabled us to understand that trade union activism have significantly affected staff morale.

The second analysis made us understand that the nature of the relationship was negative. What this implies is that the more an academic staff engages in trade union activism, the lower would be the level of his/her morale in universities of South-South, Nigeria. Based on the findings and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made; raising a standing reconciliation/grievance handling committee which should have religious body leaders as its members, unbiased and fair appointment of principal officers and to key positions, removal of the Vice Chancellor as a member of A&PC and governing council so that he does not become the prosecutor and the judge of the same time, as well as increment in ASUU check off dues.

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