

## **ACADEMIC STAFF ATTITUDE AND LABOUR UNION'S PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN STATE-OWNED UNIVERSITIES**

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### **Abstract**

*Labour unions have been handicapped by some factors around the world from their inception till date, and one of the less explored impediments to their performance is the attitude of members towards the causes of the union. The study examines academic staff attitude and their labour union's performance in the Nigerian State- Owned Universities. The objective of the study was investigated through a survey method with a quantitative and interview guide. Data were collected through questionnaire administered on 352 union members of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which were sampled through multi-stage technique in addition to the interview conducted with 12 executive members of ASUU with two from each of the universities surveyed. Data collected were analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics, and thematic analysis. Results showed that academic staff attitude significantly affects membership strength as well as their labour union's performance. In view of the findings, it was concluded that the attitude of union members remains a factor that has over the years weakened labour unions' strength in Nigeria and this has affected their performance. It was recommended that labour union engage in continuous education and enlightenment programs on how to change the negative attitude of their members towards union activities while union executive members are to work together harmoniously and pursue a collective interest that can foster members' positive attitude towards union causes at all times.*

**Keywords:** Academic Staff, Attitude, Labour Union, Performance, Universities

### **1.0 Introduction**

Labour union members' active participation in union activities has been identified and discussed as one of the critical issues central to the vibrancy and effectiveness of labour movements in developed countries (Singh & Chawla, 2015; Tetrick, Shore, Mc Clurg, & Vandenberg, 2007). This narrative is different in many developing countries where labour unions remain frail and unsteady, and this has resulted into little success on their mandate which is to defend labour interests. This development is contrary to labour union's existence predicated on the need to vigorously pursue and achieve what individual employees cannot attain alone (Akinbode & Ebeloku, 2017). Studies have shown that collective interests of labour unions are gradually becoming threatened in African countries due to many reasons among which are obnoxious labour Act, lackadaisical attitude of union members, management's anti-union actions, regulatory framework, union leadership crises, to mention a few (Amwayi, 2015; Asamu, 2015).

A notable factor is the lackadaisical attitude of union members towards union activities. According to Akinbode, Azeez and Isihak (2017), it is a mindset of an individual to act in a particular way. This attitude presupposes a person's behaviour and in the studies of Hettiararchchi and Jayarathna (2014) and Robbins (2003), such behaviour can be favourable (positive) or unfavourable (negative). Academics in the university system as individuals who are members of a labour union are also vulnerable to exhibit either positive or negative attitude, depending on their dispositions to situations or events around them. It is for this reason that an individual will join an association such as a labour union and then decide to be an active or a passive member of such a union. Unarguably, the formation, strength, continuity and performance of a union rely on collective attitude and will of members towards joint interests. Therefore, a union's performance of any kind is strongly associated with the direction (positive or negative) of members towards union activities. In this regard, positive attitude towards union activities is a favourable effort and commitment of members towards union activities. According to Singh and Chawla (2015), and Fullagar, Gallagher, Clark and Carroll (2004), a positive attitude is pro-union because it fosters unionism. A favourable and positive attitude towards unions has been reported among union members in some instances (Singh & Chawla, 2015) while negative attitude would imply actions such as members' non-attendance of union meetings, members' conspiracy with management, and other anti-union acts.

The scenario presented above has been observed in some universities in Nigeria over the years, as labour unions in the Nigerian universities have not been able to further the economic interests of their members adequately. Aside from this, the welfare interest of members which is part of the metrics of labour union's performance has not been achieved as desired. One perspective to this performance issue of a labour union in the sector is the weak collective interest of union members. As revealed by a preliminary literature review, a negative attitude members exhibit might have been responsible for this. It is against this backdrop that the study examined academic staff attitude and labour union's performance in the South-West, Nigerian state-owned universities. To investigate this issue, the following questions were asked:

- i. What is the attitude of academic staff towards union membership?
- ii. To what extent has academic staff's attitude contributed to labour union performance?

## **2.0 Literature and Theoretical Review**

A labour union is an organization within the organization but it is a voluntary organization of workers or employees, not of employers nor the co-partners, nor independent workers. It aims at protecting and promoting the economic, social and political interest of its members, mainly through shared means (Akinbode & Ebeloku, 2017). From this definition, the essence of a labour union is clear, and this can be adopted as its performance metrics. However, a labour union's performance as a concept is beyond what is expressed in the definition. The multifaceted nature of a labour union's activities and dynamics world of work in this contemporary age is responsible for this definitional challenge (Lewkowicz, 2015; Barry, 2010; Chacko, 1985). The complexity has resulted into some performance metrics such as union density/membership (Kalusopa, 2011), union members' welfare (Odey & Owan, 2014), economic performance (Barry, 2010), among others. For instance, in Africa, labour union performance is sturdily attached to salary related issues because of exploitative tendencies of employers of labour in the employment contract (Mustapha & Aye, 2017; Britwum, 2010).

Labour union's performance can be described as the extent to which the union has provided services and benefits to members. This view was suggested in the study of Clara and Mary (1999) in Ghana which evaluated the ability and capacity of trade unions to provide services and benefits to their members as they discovered that trade unions in Ghana have delivered on collective bargaining, representation and education for the members in achieving both wage and non-wage negotiations. Within the context of this review, therefore, labour union performance is based on the extent to which it's able to meet the aspirations of members such as economic, welfare, and social interests through negotiations timely interventions and resolution of conflicts. The extent identified in the adopted definition of labour union performance is determined by some factors such as labour Act, the attitude of union members, management-union actions, regulatory framework, union leadership, to mention few. The direction of this review is centred on the academic staff attitude.

Attitude as a concept has been discussed in social science literature, and this has made it to attract different meanings (Orok, 2013; Allport, 2005; Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (1991) described attitude as the degree to which an individual has a favourable or unfavourable assessment of the situation. In his view, Allport (2005) defined it as a mental and neutral state of readiness, organised, through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which he is related. Therefore, attitude can be said to be characterised by tendency or state of the willingness of an individual to act or react in a specific manner to certain stimuli (Orok, 2013). A worker as an individual is also subject to this attitude, for instance, an average worker can react in different ways to definite circumstance(s), that is participate, or otherwise, on the one hand, actively participate or passively participate. Union participation implies members' joint involvement in union-related activities (Gamage & Hewagama, 2012). Cohen (1994) identified partaking in union activities as one of the ways through which labour union members display their attitude.

Theoretical grounds exist on the possible relationship between members' union attitude and union performance. One of such explanations is the Theory of Reasoned Action of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) which explored the understanding of individual attitude towards issues. The assumptions were based on the individual sense of reasoning before taking action, that is, the reasons why one would act in a particular way or not. In this case, why would a potential member or existing member of labour union be positive or negative in attitude towards union activities and of what impact could either the positive or negative union members' attitude be to labour union performance. Academic staff attitude toward labour union activities can, therefore, determine labour union performance depending on the nature of behavior (positive or negative) exercised by members. In this regard, academic staff attitude could be positive or negative and would determine the labour union performance level.

Extant studies have established relationships between employees/members related issues and labour union activities such as performance and participation (Amwayi, 2015; Asamu, 2015). The study of Amwayi (2015) admitted a decline in the performance of labour unions in Kenya and highlighted an array of factors which affected the performance such as weak regulatory framework, organisation structure, leadership styles and union-management relations in the survey of one hundred and twenty national officials and employees of the communication workers union. The author did not perceive union members attitude as a determinant of labour

union performance. On the contrary, a study by Gamage and Hewagama (2012) in Sri Lanka to examine the determinants of union participation in public sector revealed that union member attitudes were positively associated with union participation. This implied that union members' attitudes affect labour union performance if union members' attitudes have been found to have positively impacted on union members' participation in union activities.

In a related study carried out in Nigeria by Asamu (2015) on women in labour force and their participation in trade unionism in University of Lagos, Nigeria, it was established in the study that women participation in trade unionism was very low compared to their male counterparts. This apparently shows that a significant cog in the wheel of labour union performance in Nigeria is the attitude of women labour force towards labour union activities. The study of Paragshill (2013) which assessed the perception of railway employees about trade union performance as regard their working conditions in India using exploratory design with both primary and secondary data revealed that salary, benefits, leave, working hours, maternity leave and bonuses were no issues because the management was on top of them, and such these require no labour union intervention. It was on the other hand revealed that employees' promotion remained an issue.

Based on the above review, two hypotheses were developed:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the attitude of academic staff and union membership strength.
- H<sub>2</sub>: The attitude of academic staff is not significantly related to labour union performance.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study adopted a survey research design to investigate the effect of the academic staff's attitude to labour union performance. As identified in the topic, the domain of study covered all the state-owned universities operating in the south-west geo-political zone of Nigeria, comprising of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Ondo States. The choice of this geo-political zone is because it has the highest number of state-owned universities in Nigeria. Accordingly, six (6) of those universities namely Lagos State University, Ojo; Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye; Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso; Osun State University, Osogbo; Adekunle Ajasin University, and Akungba; Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti were chosen. The choice of state-owned universities for this study was informed by reasons of prolonged pockets of labour issues and ASUU's inability to have delivered their essence of existence in those chapters.

The target population of the study was made up of all members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in the universities listed above which ranged from the Professors, Readers, Senior lecturers, Lecturers I, Lecturers II, Assistant lecturers to Graduate Assistants. Requests were made to each of the ASUU secretariats of the universities on the membership strength and the final compilation gave a sum of three thousand nine hundred and forty-two (3,942). From this population size, the researcher considered the option of sample size which was calculated for with Yamane's (1967) statistical formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where:  $n$  = sample size,  $N$  = estimated population,  $e$  = error margin level of significant 0.05 or 5%.

$$n = \frac{3942}{1 + 3942(0.05)^2} = 363$$

The multi stage sampling technique (purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques) was adopted to arrive at the 363 sample. Academic staff was purposively selected, the academic staff was stratified along their cadres and simple random sampling was used to pick respondents.

To achieve a thorough investigation, the mixed method was used to collect data with the use of a questionnaire and interview guide. The first instrument 'questionnaire' was made up of two parts namely; demographics of the respondents and academic staff attitude about labour union performance. For the second instrument 'interview guide', basic interviewee personal data made up part A while 10 items related to issues on staff attitude and labour union performance were itemized in part B. The two instruments (questionnaire and interview guide) were piloted with two executive members and ten members of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Federal University, Oye-Ekiti Chapter to test the reliability and validity of the instruments. Results showed that items in the research instruments were valid and reliable with KMO measures obtained higher than 0.6. Also, coefficient value was close to 1. Academic staff attitude KMO obtained was 0.724 @ .000 level of significance and labour union performance KMO was 0.822 @ .000 level of significance.

Data were collected through the administration of a questionnaire to members of ASUU who were willing to participate. Out of the three hundred and sixty-three sampled and distributed copies of the instrument, only three hundred and fifty-two (352) of the copies of the questionnaire were duly completed and returned. However, twelve (12) in-depth interviews as envisaged were conducted with two executive members from each of the ASUU chapters of the state-owned universities in south-west. The in-depth interviews were conducted in English language with consent to tape-record the interview granted by all the interviewees. Data collected from the questionnaire were presented with descriptive and inferential statistics while those from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis.

#### 4.0 Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretations

##### Respondents Demographic Data

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents' Demographic Data

Filters		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	244	69.3	69.3	69.3
	Female	108	30.7	30.7	100.0
	Total	352	100.0	100.0	
Valid	25 – 34 years	11	3.1	3.1	3.1
	35 – 44 years	73	20.7	20.7	23.8
	45 – 54 years	208	59.1	59.1	82.9
	55 – 64 years	54	15.3	15.3	98.2
	65 years above	6	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	352	100.0	100.0	
Valid	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	6	1.7	1.7	1.7
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree	292	83.0	83.0	84.7
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Degree	54	15.3	15.3	100.0
	Total	352	100.0	100.0	
Valid	Graduate Assist	6	1.7	1.7	1.7
	A/L	55	15.6	15.6	17.3
	L II	86	24.4	24.4	41.7
	LI	153	43.5	43.5	85.2
	SL & above	52	14.8	14.8	100.0
	Total	352	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents' demographic data. Gender of respondents shows that 244 (69.3%) were male and 108(30.7%) were female. Evidently, there are more males lecturers in the university system than females, and this could be the reason why academic staff were so rigid in attitude. Furthermore, age group of respondents shows that the majority of the respondents were within 45 – 54 years (208) representing 59.1%. This implied that they are matured and cannot be manipulated anyhow because they know what they desire. Therefore, their attitude is not mistaken but intentional.

As regard respondents highest educational qualification, majority of the respondents were second-degree certificate holders (292) representing 83%. This is a well-informed respondents', and whatsoever they said they were factual on the issue investigated and could be relied upon. Lastly, respondents' designation was considered. Lecturer I had the highest number of respondents (153) representing 43.5%. This revealed that the middle of the university academic structure is often more robust than the bottom and peak, and reasons why the majority of union members are also in this category. This group of respondents' responses would have been historical about the issue investigated as they had stayed with their respective institutions over a long period.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis One**

There is no significant relationship between the attitude of academic staff and union membership strength.

Table 2: Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.641	.081		26.134	.000
	Positive	-.108	.040	-.142	-2.822	.006
	Negative	.092	.080	.066	1.266	.204

a. Dependent Variable: Union Membership Strength

Table 3: ANOVA (b)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.71	2	2.355	4.582	.016(a)
	Residual	179.27	349	.514		
	Total	183.98	351			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Positive, Negative

b. Dependent Variable: Union Membership Strength

The coefficient result in Table 2 shows whether positive or negative attitude of union members' attitude contribute to union membership strength. The t values were found to be significant. Positive attitude (t-value = -2.822, p-value < 0.006, with -14.2% prediction), and negative attitude (t-value = 1.266, p-value < .204, with 6.6% prediction). It was however revealed that academic staff have negative attitude towards their union and this has impacted negatively on the strength of the union.

The ANOVA results as presented in table 3 shows that the value of F cal. is 4.582 with a significant value of 0.016. Since the significant value is less than 0.05, attitude of union members (positive or negative) have a significant relationship with union membership strength. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the attitude of academic staff and union membership strength is rejected and by implication, the alternate is accepted.

**Hypothesis Two**

The attitude of academic staff is not significantly related to labour union performance

Table 4: Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.336	.141		9.472	.000
	Attitude of Academic Staff	.651	.056	.469	9.622	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Labour Union Performance

Table 5: ANOVA (b)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	28.314	1	28.314	70.084	.000(a)
	Residual	141.225	350	.404		
	Total	169.539	351			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Academic Staff Attitude

b. Dependent Variable: Labour Union Performance

Results on Table 4 show that the attitude of academic staff coefficient 0.469 indicates that it is significantly related to labour performance, which is statistically significant (with  $t = 9.622$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternate statement is accepted. Table 5 results of ANOVA shows that the regression sum of squares (28.314) is less than the residual sum of squares (141.225), which indicates that more of the variation in the dependent variable is not explained by the model and because the significance value of F statistics (0.000) is less than 0.05, the variation explained by the model is due to chance.

## Interviews Analysis

### Participants Personal Data

Twelve (12) labour union executive members participated in the interviews as designed with two from each of the universities ASUU Chapters. Ages of participants ranged between 32 and 55 years with an average age of 43.5 years. Their positions ranged from the chairman, general secretary, treasurer, and financial secretary. Nine out of the twelve participants were males and with the highest designation of Senior Lecturer and six of the participants had second degrees while others had their doctorate degrees.

### Themes on Academic Staff Attitude and Labour Union Performance

#### i. Labour union performance

*Participants rated labour union performance average considering factors such as government attitude, employers of labour philosophy and employees' disloyalty to the union because of fear. They however strongly opines the need for improvement in union performance level. A chapter chairman remarked, "Labour union performance is reasonably impressive considering where we were coming from".*

#### ii. Factors identified as challenging Labour Union Performance

##### a. Poor members' commitment

*Eight of the interviewees identified poor members' commitment to union activities as the major issue confronting their respective chapter activities. One of the chairmen remarked "Some members' wine and dined, as such, they sit on the fence when it comes to loyalty to the union".*

##### b. Poor union executive relations

*The privilege of being an executive member of the union has made some members very close to management and made them inaccessible to other*



*members in the union. Also, there are ill feelings among executive members because of some reasons.*

**c. Members' Behaviour**

*The majority of the interviewees regretted lack of understanding of members especially when it comes to their personal interest such as access to training fund, confirmation, promotion and salary issues.*

**iii. Academic staff attitude**

**a. Meaning of Academic Staff Attitude**

*Majority (10) of the interviewees described academic staff attitude as the behaviour of academics towards a course. For instance, "I see this as the extent to which our colleagues are up and doing with their job".*

**b. Academic Staff Attitude towards Labour Union**

*An average number of the interviewees (6) were sceptical about members' positive disposition towards labour union activities while others see this I don't care attitude of members as normal because of the environment. Furthermore, three interviewees' state that high handedness of management has weakened members' faith in union struggle.*

**iv. The relationship between academic staff attitude and labour union performance**

**a. Positive Relationship**

*All the participants were of the view that positive attitude of members would have strengthened labour union performance but regrettably, this has not been, and this has been one of the stumbling blocks against expected labour union performance. In the words of an executive member "If academic staff attitude towards union activities have been positive, we would have seen a strong and formidable union".*

**b. Negative Relationship**

*Ten out of twelve participants sturdily admitted the negative behavior of members towards union activities. They explained that negative attitude of members have been a challenge and remains a challenge.*

**4.1 Discussion of Findings**

Findings from this study have shown that academic staff's attitude has significant impact on labour union performance. The state-owned universities in Nigeria studied in this regard have revealed two vital issues. The first finding identified attitude of academic staff as the reason why union membership strength is weak in the state-owned Nigerian universities based on hypothesis 1 tested. Aside this, responses from the interview conducted also put it straight that union members' attitude has been a cog in the wheel of union strength which goes beyond number but members commitment and support for union activities. This finding supports the claim of Gamage and Hewagama (2012) which revealed that union member attitudes were positively associated with union participation a strong determinant of union membership strength. It is obvious that when members' participation is high, it implies sturdy union membership strength and where otherwise, it implies weak union membership strength.

Furthermore, the study subsequently established it in the second hypothesis tested that attitude of the academic staff is significantly related to labour union performance in the Nigerian State-owned universities. This was evident in the responses provided by interviewees on academic staff attitude as many claimed members loath attitude towards union activities have been discouraging. Also, views of interviewees' corroborate this tested hypothesis as the majority of them acknowledged negative attitudes of members' and executive members' to have threatened the chances of union achieving improved performance. This finding agrees with the study of Asamu (2015) which partly attributed the low performance of union to women attitude towards union activities. This implied that when a male counterpart becomes inactive with union activities, the situation would be worse than when it is women alone. Similarly, the result of this hypothesis supports earlier studies of Barling, Kelloway & Bremermann (1991) and Desphante & Fiorito (1989) which attributed positive attitudes of union members' too strong unionisation an indicator of active participation in union activities that determines labour union performance.

## **5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study has examined the overall performance of labour unions in the south-western Nigerian state-owned universities via the academic staff (members) attitude. It is evident from the outcomes of the study that academic staff union membership strength is weak. This is not regarding membership number but concerning commitment and support for union activities. Moreover, negative staff attitude towards union activities is responsible for the unimpressive labour union performance, and this is the reason why it has been difficult for the unions to have achieved the majority of their agitations with their respective employers. It is therefore imperative for ASUU to work on their members' negative attitude towards union activities as this is fundamental to pursuing and furthering their interests as a group and that of the individual. If this is done, ASUU will to some degree be well positioned to challenge and defend their interests at any level and to a reasonable point.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- i. It is evident that labour union members' negative mindset towards union activities have resulted in weak membership strength. To change this mindset, labour union education is necessary. Therefore, continuous education and enlightenment campaign must be initiated by the union at all chapters' level to change negative union members' attitudes towards union activities.
- ii. Cracks among union executive members have also been the main threat to unions' impressive performance. To achieve improved union performance, therefore, executive members must work together harmoniously and always pursue a collective interest that can foster members positive attitudes towards union course at all times.

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