

Unionism and Workplace Efficiency: A Study of Federal Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study investigates the effect of unionism on workplace efficiency in federal universities in southern Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design method was adopted for the study. A total of five hundred and forty (540) out of six hundred (600) questionnaires distributed were returned. Data collected were analysed and interpreted with the aid of descriptive statistical techniques such as total score and simple percentage, while the chi-square test statistic was used to test all hypotheses at 5% significant levels. The findings reveal that federal universities were not efficient in their activities, as the role played by unions greatly hampered the smooth running of these institutions. The various hypotheses tested showed that matriculation and convocation do not occur as at when due, also public perception about unions' activities in universities were negative and not encouraging, conversely only accreditation process was considered to be efficient in the universities. Accordingly, we recommend among others, that the spate of strikes' (work to rule) by unions' should be greatly reduced and not frequently embarked upon, except as a last resort. Again, public-private sector partnership should be encouraged in federal universities with government ownership hovering between 50 and 70%, so as to reduce bureaucratic tendencies.*

Keywords: *Federal Universities, Workplace, Unionism, Efficiency*

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I. Introduction

Within the last decade, the spate of labour unrest in the country has reached an alarming rate due to its recurring nature amongst public sector workers and civil servants. This incessant labour unrest has its terminus a quo hovering around better remuneration packages, poor condition of service, unfair labour practices and inadequate provision of amenities. These recurring labour strikes which have bedevilled the Nigerian workplace has caused numerous lags and setbacks within the economy as employees, employers and consumers of services are greatly affected.

In Nigeria, the first trade union law "The trade union Ordinances of 1938" defined a trade union as "Any combination whether temporary or permanent, the cardinal purpose of which are the regulation of relation between workmen and workmen, between masters and masters, or masters and servants whether such combination would or would not have been proper, if this ordinance have not come into effect and to be deemed to have unlawful combination; by reason of someone or more of its purpose being in restraint of trade". The notion of unionism in Nigeria began in the early nineteenth century with the formation of the civil service union in 1912, the Nigerian railway native staff union in 1919, the Nigerian Mechanic Union, etc. During this period unionism in the country was still at its infant stage, such that workers did not attach any significant importance to its activities. However with the enactment of the Trade Union Organization Act, 1938 permitting workers to form a union that will influence, likewise protect their rights and interest at any given time, unionism became an active part of workers' lives as the needed legal existence was born. This legal status so conferred on labour unions, gave them the powers to negotiate with employers based on workers' welfare.

The general belief behind trade unionism originates from the idea that by workers coming together as a team they will be able to more effectively right any exploitation and injustice meted on them at their workplace. As such a clear cut leadership structure exists amongst trade unions in which they use in bargaining with employers. Pencavel (2009) argues that elected leaders of trade unions negotiate with employers on behalf of ordinary members of the union for better working conditions, once the parties agree they sign contracts known as "collective bargaining agreements (CBA) and may include wages and salaries, hiring and firing procedures,

promotion, demotion of workers, rules and regulations among others. The agreements negotiated by union executives are binding on all its members as per her constitution.

Unions, especially trade unions due to its sheer size and membership bodies, has continued to be in the forefront against government policies deemed as unfavourable such as the refusal to honour the agreement on wage increase and the deregulation of the oil sector. It is against this backdrop that private institutions have refused their employees to be members of any union/group.

II. Conceptual Framework

The major study variables and their dimensions are as follows:

INPUT	MEDIATOR VARIABLE	OUTPUT
Unions		Work place Efficiency
ASUU	Public perception	Programmes Accreditation
SSANU		Matriculation
NAAT		Convocation

Figure 1. Public perception of unionism and workplace efficiency framework.

Source: Researchers concept, 2018.

The conceptual framework for this as shown in figure.1, considers the study variables, their dimensions and measures. The independent variable is union actions (input), with work place efficiency being the dependent variable (output). By union actions we mean the internal environment/inputs or skills necessary for a conducive and progressive work situation in tertiary institutions for efficiency.

The independent variables involve the following unions (ASUU, SSANU and NAAT) actions/activities; and by workplace performance, we mean the level of efficiency achieved by the institutions.

Furthermore, public perception of unions was considered as a mediator variable. This moderating factor's relationship with the criterion variable is indirect. This is so because it only moderates the influence of the predictor variable on the criterion variable. This conditioning variable as shown in figure 1 above depicts the external environment of the institutions (workplace) under study; while the "inputs" are regarded as the internal environment. The workplace output is the efficiency measured by accreditation, matriculation and convocation.

III. Review of Literature

3.1 Theoretical Review

A plethora of theories exist on trade unionism by different scholars. But this study is guided by just three of such theories.

3.1.1 Industrial Democracy Theory

This theory was developed around 1897 by Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb who were British reformers of the socialist wing. According to Devinatz (2011), the Webbs looked at trade unions as an extension of democracy from politics to industry. Looking through the eyes of democracy, trade unions are classified under pressure groups, whose method of achieving their goals is based on democratic process, as its members elect their representatives who undertake bargaining on their behalf. In a democratic society decision making does not lie in the purview of a single person, instead decisions are made after consultations with all stakeholders involved to ensure a wider input. Similarly, trade unions provide avenues through which employers are engaged in dialogues and negotiations with their employees in order to find a common ground.

3.1.2 Standard Economic Theory

Also known as the expected utility theory. The advocates of this theory were eighteenth century economists; Gabriel Cramer (1728) and Daniel Bernoulli (1738). Later on in the twentieth century John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern (1944) elaborated on this theory. The theory argues that humans are rational in their decision making process, since resources are limited they seek optimization. According to Hafford and Koops (2009), trade unions exist specifically to fight for the welfare of employees especially for good working conditions and better remuneration packages. Henry Simons in 1944 expatiating on this theory considered trade unions to be organized monopolies. According to Simons, trade unions limit the productivity of organizations and increase the cost of production which is borne out of the fact that trade unions are able to resort to violence and sabotage to achieve their aims. However the monopoly view of trade unions argues that in reacting to an increase in wage demand, firms adjust capital and other production inputs until marginal labour equates the wage rate

determined by the trade unions (Williams, 2004). This theory therefore assumes the stance that trade unions can optimize their benefits from their employers.

3.1.3 Group Theory

According to Chikendu (2002) & Nwokoye (2008) this theory is believed to have been opined by Arthur Bentley and developed by David Truman. The theory seeks to explain social phenomena (e.g. labour unrest) with reference to groups (Trade Unions). The group theory posits that interaction and struggle amongst groups is the pivot of political life, as such the theory stresses on the role of the group rather than the society or individual as the basic unit of politics. It sees the group as not a mere collection of individuals which does not emerge, unless interactions among the individual members are both sufficiently patterned and frequent in producing a defined objective. The relevance of this theory to this study lies in the fact that groups within every settings will use every tool at its disposal to project its interest over others, as can be seen with the activities of unionism, also trade unions are not a mere collection of individuals who share one or more features and do not interact with any degree of frequency, but rather, it is a group that frequently interacts with other stake holders with a clear sense of direction in furtherance of its objectives.

3.2 Empirical Review

According to Dauda (2010) in enhancing better performance of an organisation, unionism may be recognized and used by management to invigorate creativity among its employees. Sienghtal and Beckter (2001) also finds out that unions in workplace promote harmonization and cooperation between employees and management thereby enhancing better productivity. Freeman and Kleiner (1999) state that unionism has a statistically insignificant effect on firm solvency and that unions on an average do not drive firms or business lines out of business or produce high displacement rates for unionised workers.

Bernhardt, Dresser and Rogers (2002) citing the example of Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership explain that unions also play a positive role in economic development. They argued that members of the WRTP have stabilised manufacturing employment and contribute about 6,000 additional industrial jobs in the last five years then; that among member firms, productivity is very high compared to the productivity growth of nonunion members firms. Shaiken (2004) sees unions as been associated with higher productivity, lower employee turnover, improved workplace communication and a better trained workforce. With all these, one could easily assume that efficiency will be optimal in organisations

Furthermore, Rose (2001) states that non-union phenomenon has always been with us (in industrial relations) even at the heights of unionisation where almost half of the work-force was nonunionised. Larger nonunion companies have well-developed strategies designed to avoid union recognition; employees are provided with superior working environments and better pay than their unionised counterpart. Hirsch and Bonn (2010), contends that trade union governance are formal, deliberate, sluggish and unionised companies often fare poorly in dynamic and highly competitive economic settings. They explain that there is poorer economic performance among union than non-union establishments and firms. Steelman (2002) says the goal of „doing good“ is typically a more important objective in government than profit. Therefore, measuring „successful“ performance in government is usually different from using profit measure that is often critical to private business.

Rose and Woolley (1992) opine that high levels of unionisation encourage productivity. Rose (2001) explains that discouraging union involvement and representation is inappropriate as this would hamper organisational performance. In contrast, Flood and Toner (1977) find out that trade unions promote adversarial climate ultimately leading to strikes and stoppages.

In spite of the numerous studies carried out on the effect of trade unions on institutional efficiency from the empirical studies above, it is quite evident that there is no widely accepted relationship between trade unions and institutional efficiency as the results are either antipodal or inconclusive. This research is therefore a concerted effort to add to the growing body of knowledge as to the true nature of the impact of trade unions on institutional performance.

IV. Methodology

In undertaking an in-depth investigation of unionism and workplace efficiency in federal universities, located in the south-south geopolitical zone of the country. The survey research method was adopted. The population of this study comprises of senior staff [teaching (ASUU – Academic Staff Union of Universities), non-teaching (SSANU – Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, NAAT– National Association of Academic Technologists) and residents living nearby the university community.

One hundred respondents from six federal universities; University of Benin (UNIBEN), University of Calabar (UNICAL), Federal University Otuoke (FUO), Federal University of Petroleum Resources (FUPRE),

University of Port-Harcourt (UNIPORT) and University of Uyo (UNIUYO) in south-south geopolitical zone were stratified and randomly selected as participants with 25 respondents per each strata.

Questionnaires were administered to 600 respondents from the six federal universities of which five hundred and forty (540) i.e. 90% were returned. The research instrument used a five point Likert scale which ranged mode of responses for the respondents from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D) to strongly disagree (SD). The information gathered from the questionnaire was analysed using percentages, while the Chi-square test statistic was used to analyse the various hypotheses. The chi-square statistic is represented by the formula;

$$x^2 = \frac{\sum(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

Where; f_o = Observed Frequency f_e = Expected Frequency x^2 = Chi-square distribution df = Degree of freedom. The degree of freedom "df" is computed thus: $df = (R-1) (C-1)$

Where;

R = Number of rows in the table

C = Number of columns in the table

$$\text{expected frequency } (f_e) = \frac{(\text{row total})(\text{column total})}{\text{grand total}}$$

The test of hypothesis will be carried out at 5% level of significance, the decision rule is that if x^2 calculated is less than (<) the critical value, we accept the null hypothesis (H_0) and reject alternate hypothesis (H_1).

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument: The content validity and reliability of the research instruments, where done using the test-re-test and Cronbach alpha tests. Finally all statistical estimations were done using SPSS version 21.

The formula for Cronbach Alpha test is given by

$$\alpha = \frac{n \cdot \hat{c}}{\hat{v} + (n - 1) \cdot \hat{c}}$$

Where;

n = the number of items \hat{c} = average covariance between item-pairs \hat{v} = average variance

V. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section deals with the presentation and analysis of data collected from the respondents through the questionnaires administered. The first data to be presented and analysed is based on the respondents' age.

Table 1. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-30 years	127	23.5
31-40 years	117	21.7
41-50 years	175	32.4
over 50 years	121	22.4
Total	540	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

From table 1 above, 127(23.5%) of the respondents are within the age range of 20-30 years, 117(21.7%) are within the age range of 31-40 years, 175(32.4%) are within the age range 41-50 years while the remaining 121(22.4%) of the respondents where over 50 years respectively. We therefore deduce that majority of our respondents fell in the age bracket of 41-50 years.

The next data presented deals with the membership distribution of the respondents.

Table 2. Membership Distribution of Respondents

Membership	Frequency	Percentage
ASSU	169	31.3
SSANU	144	26.7
NAATS	119	22.0
Residents	108	20.0
Total	540	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 2 shows that 169(31.3%) of respondents are members of ASSU, 144(26.7%) are members of SSANU, 119(22%) are members of NAATS, while the remaining 108(20%) were residents who lived nearby the university environment. Thus majority of our respondents were members of ASSU.

Table 3. Institutional Distribution of Respondents

Institution	Frequency	Percentage
UNIBEN	97	18.0
FUPRE	72	13.2
FUO	95	17.6
UNIPORT	94	17.4
UNIUYO	91	16.9
UNICAL	91	16.9
Total	540	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Table 3 reveals that 97(18%) of the respondents are staff of UNIBEN and residents around UNIBEN, 72(13.2%) are staff of FUPRE and residents around FUPRE, 95(17.6%) are staff of FUO and residents around FUO, 94(17.4%) are staff of UNIPORT and residents around UNIPORT, 91(16.9%) are staff of UNIUYO and residents around UNIUYO, 91(16.9%) are staff of UNICAL and residents around UNICAL. Hence a majority of the respondents were staff of UNIBEN and residents around UNIBEN.

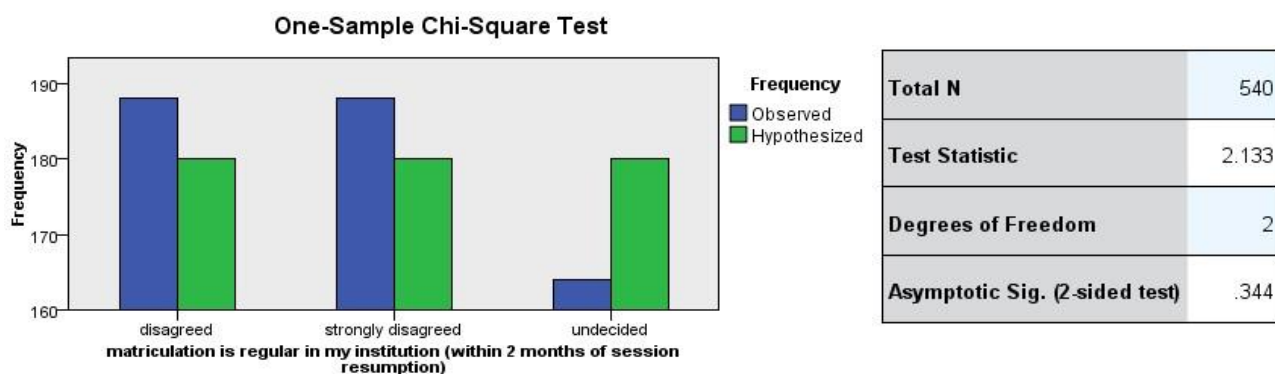
Testing of Hypotheses

All hypotheses for this study are stated in the alternate form.

Hypothesis 1:

H_1 : Matriculation is regular in Federal Universities (i.e. within two months of every new session).

Figure 5.1



Source: SPSS Analysis from Authors fieldwork, 2018.

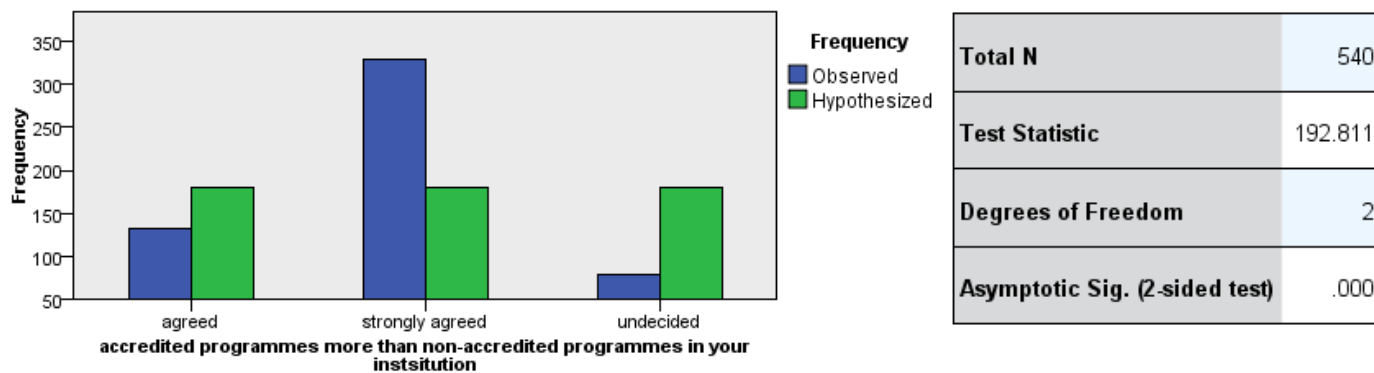
Decision Rule: The decision rule here is to reject H_1 if the p-value is greater than 5%. From the figure 5.1 above the p-value (0.344) with a test statistic of 2.133 is greater than 5%, we therefore fail to accept the alternate hypothesis. Hence matriculation is not regular in federal (within two months of resumption of a new session).

Hypothesis 2:

H_2 : Accredited programmes are more than non-accredited programmes in Federal Universities.

Figure 5.2

One-Sample Chi-Square Test



Source: SPSS Analysis from Authors fieldwork, 2018.

Decision Rule: The decision rule here is to reject H_2 if the p-value is greater than 5%. From figure 5.2, the p-value (0.000) with a test statistic of 192.811 is less than 5%, we therefore reject the null hypothesis. Hence accredited programmes are more than non-accredited programmes in federal universities.

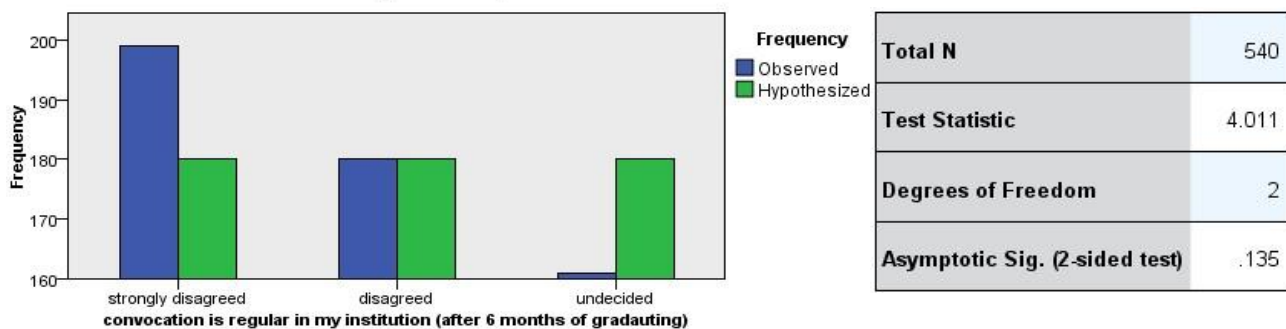
Hypothesis 3:

H_3 : Convocation is regular in Federal Universities (i.e. after six months of graduation).

Decision Rule: The decision rule here is to reject H_3 if the p-value is greater than 5%. From figure 5.3, the p-value (0.135) with a test statistic of 4.011 is greater than 5%, we therefore accept the null hypothesis. Hence we conclude that convocation in federal universities is not regular (after six months of convocation).

Figure 5.3

One-Sample Chi-Square Test

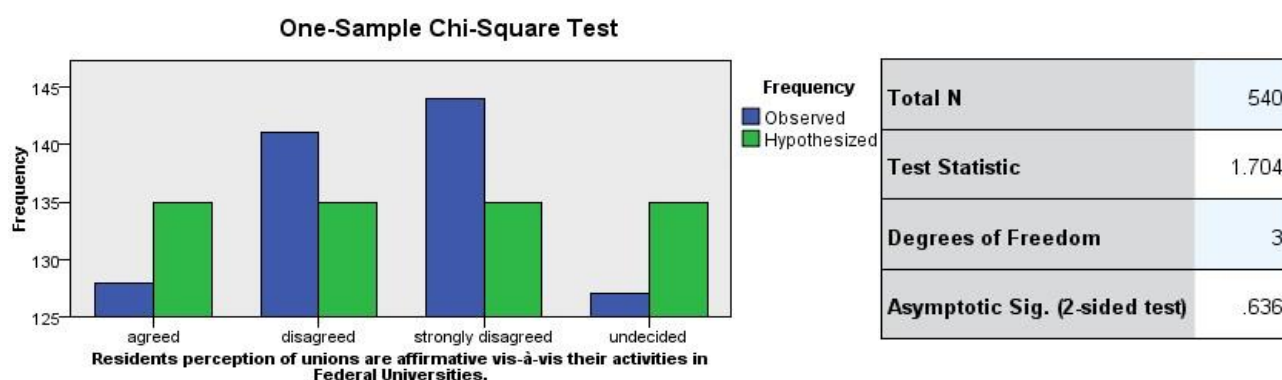


Source: SPSS Analysis from Authors fieldwork, 2018.

Hypothesis 4:

H₄: Public perceptions of unions are in the affirmative vis-à-vis their activities in Federal Universities.

Figure 5.4



Source: SPSS Analysis from Authors fieldwork, 2018.

Decision Rule: The decision rule here is to reject H₄ if the p-value is greater than 5%. From figure 5.3, the pvalue (0.636) with a test statistic of 1.704 is less than 5%, we therefore reject the alternate hypothesis. Hence public perceptions of unions are not in the affirmative vis-à-vis their activities in federal universities.

Reliability Test of the Research Instrument

According to rule of thumb, a Cronbach value of 0.7 and above is generally considered as acceptable. Hence, from table 1 below the Cronbach alpha test statistics with a value of 0.722 indicates that the questions applied to testing the hypotheses of the efficacy of unionism in relation to workplace efficiency in federal universities where reliable.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.722	4

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of unionism on workplace efficiency in federal universities in Nigeria. Based on the data compiled from questionnaires distributed to various respondents within the university communities, we found that federal universities were not efficient in their activities, as the role played by unions greatly hampered the smooth running of these institutions. The various hypotheses tested showed that matriculation and convocation do not occur as at when due. Furthermore, public perception about unions' activities in universities were negative and not encouraging, conversely only accreditation process was considered to be efficient within the universities studied.

Based on the findings from the analysis of the data collected through questionnaires, the following suggestions have been offered to improve workplace efficiency in federal universities;

1. The spate of strikes (work to rule) be greatly reduced and not frequently embarked on by unions but should only be used as a last resort when all other available means of negotiation fails.
2. Public-Private sector partnership should be encouraged in federal universities with government ownership hovering between 50 and 70%, so as to reduce bureaucratic tendencies.
3. Non-technical jobs (like menial, clerical, admission and convocation processes) should be outsourced to contracting firms.

Appendix

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected ItemTotal Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Public perceptions of unions are in the affirmative vis-à-vis their activities in Federal Universities.	9.97	9.565	.308	.767
Convocation is regular in Federal Universities (i.e. after six months of graduation)	10.08	7.240	.738	.529
Accredited programmes more than non-accredited programmes in Federal Universities	10.60	7.925	.476	.683
Matriculation is regular in Federal Universities (i.e. within two months of every new session)	9.93	7.342	.561	.629

Source: SPSS Analysis from Author's fieldwork, 2018.

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