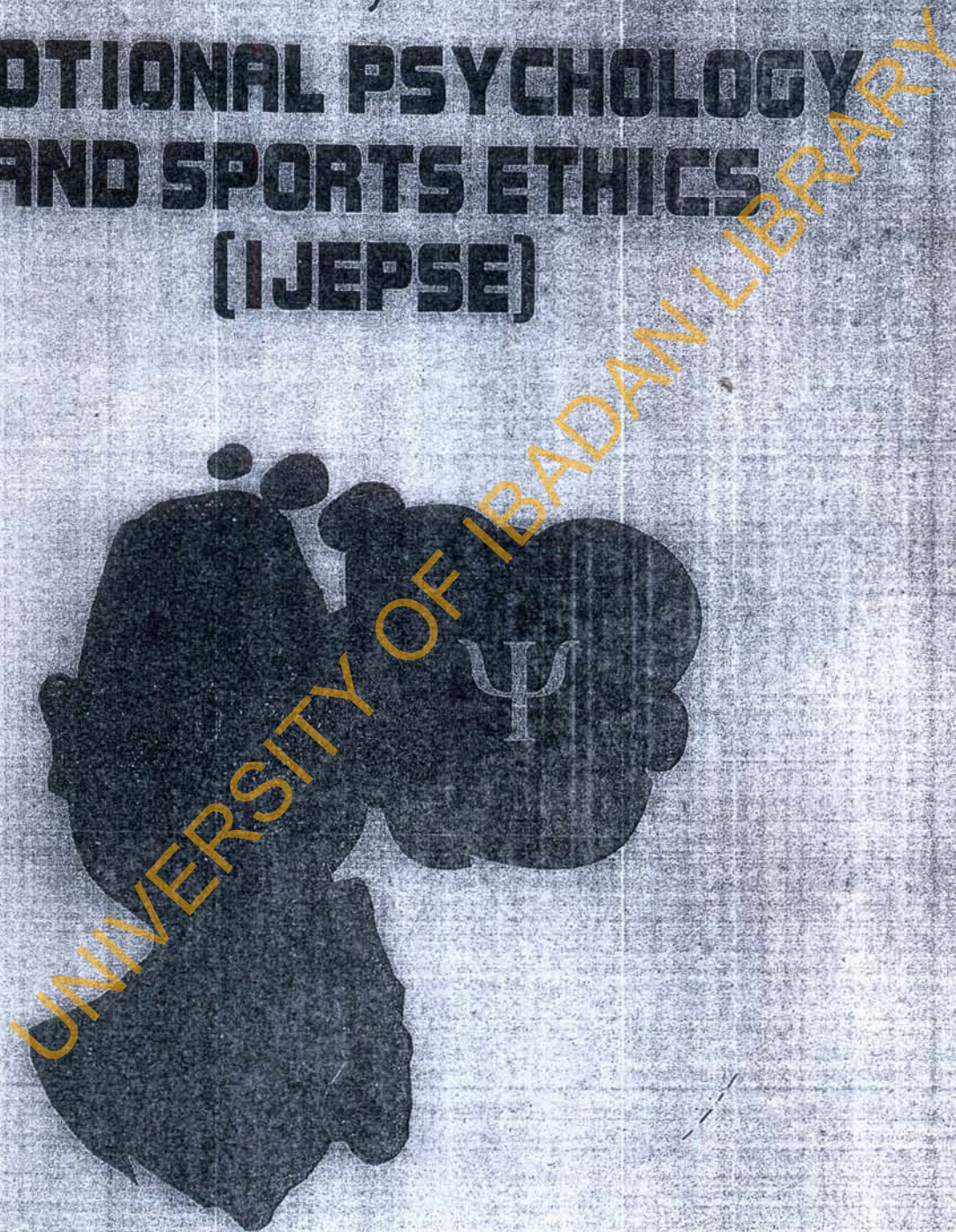


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## **Job Satisfaction and Gender Differences in University Employees' Attitude toward Labour Union**

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### **Abstract**

University labour unions are seen as powerful in Nigeria. Most of the industrial actions they embark upon on behalf of members have successfully brought about improvement on members conditions of service. But what is rarely understood is the university employees' attitude toward their unions and the possible roles played by individual and job factors. The study involved a survey design with sample size of 240 purposively drawn from staff members in the three main unions at the University of Ibadan. Results showed that female staff have more favourable attitude toward unions than their male counterparts. Similarly, those who indicated higher level of job satisfaction also reported more favourable attitude toward unions. Finally, the non-academic members of staff showed more favourable attitude toward their union than the academic staff. It was concluded that female members of staff, those higher on job satisfaction, and non-academic members of staff have more favourable attitude toward labour union. A major implication is that apart from the non-academic staff members being more cohesive, labour unions can promote their effectiveness by having females take up leadership positions. It was therefore concluded that there is the need to encourage females to take up leadership positions in university labour unions, while the academic staff union also need to learn from its non-academic counterpart on strategies for building cohesion among members which results in favourable attitude toward their union. Despite the major contribution in providing insight to attitude toward university's labour unions, future studies in the area should be encouraged to broaden the scope in order to enhance generalization of findings.

**Keywords:** Job satisfaction, Gender, Employees, Attitude toward unions.

### **Introduction**

Management of human resources is an important and challenging function for every organisation. Human resource cannot be utilized like machines because people are dynamic: they feel, they think, and act. As organizations develop along economic evolutionary trend, it became increasingly clear that labour as a resource offered by employee is no longer a commodity of commerce which can be bought and disposed at the whims and caprices of an employer. This view brought about the

formation of labour unions, which are voluntary associations of workers with the primary aim of securing and improving the wellbeing of members through collective action. Labour union is an association of employees operating on the principle of unity, equity and security for the benefit of members. It is not only beneficial to the members but also for the management, the organisation, and the society as a whole when effective. The union help to strengthen organisational processes in order to ensure the survival of the organisation and job security for its members.

History of labour unionism in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era. At the time, workers organised themselves in order to have a common voice to demand for their due entitlements. Over the years, unions have helped members to achieve their demands from employers. In Nigeria, all employees in unionized organizations are obligated to become members of the labour union though membership is assumed to be voluntary. The argument is that benefits from any process of bargaining with employers apply to all. The obligatory nature of membership makes it necessary to examine the attitude of members. Moreover, labour leaders often assert that members' satisfaction with their jobs emanate from the activities of the union. This is the case with unions in Nigerian universities where membership is somewhat automatic for every staff (male and females) in different career areas.

Attitude toward unionism concerns the disposition of workers to favour or not to favour their unions, in terms of attachment and perception. Understanding their attitude is a precursor to their tendencies, such as willingness to participate in strike action that is synonymous with university workers in Nigeria. People's attitudes are known to predict their behaviours. It is also the case that attitude towards union may be used by the university management to engender positive work behaviour among the staff who are members of academic staff union (ASUU), senior staff association of universities (SSANU), and Non academic staff union (NASU). Previously, researchers have identified certain factors as the antecedents of attitude toward unions (Jinadasa and Opatha, 1999; Parkes and Ravazi, 2003). However, not much literature has included Nigerian university employees' attitude towards their unions while considering nature of employment, gender, and job satisfaction as potential factors that may play key role. More so, attendance at union meetings at the University of Ibadan has been less than satisfactory over the years. Yet, almost every member of staff is a nominal member and financial contributor. The following questions are then necessitated: What is the attitude of male and female staff toward unionism? Will job satisfaction be an important factor in employees' favourable attitude toward their union? Is the academic staff different from the non-academic colleagues in attitude toward unionism?

The above questions guide the objective of this study which set to investigate job satisfaction, differences in gender, and job category in attitude toward their unions.

### Literature

Job satisfaction according to Robins (2005), may be examined from the perspective of employee's affectivity towards certain components of their job. In the current study, job satisfaction is conceptualized as the level of affectivity of employees towards the job they do. It is one of the most emphasised topics in organisational behaviour research (Spector, 1997). The reason is that the extent to which employees are satisfied with their job has been found to affect or predict important work outcomes such as turnover rate, job performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, and job effectiveness. For instance, high level of job satisfaction has been related to job performance and commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1997). This shows that it may play a role in employees' attitude toward their unions as well.

In Parkes and Ravazi (2003) studies, they identified higher level of job satisfaction, age, gender, education, and organisational size as factors that are related to attitude of employees to union membership. Previously, a plethora of studies have been conducted to examine the antecedents of union members' attitude (Gani, 1992; Sibert and Craimer, 2001; Judge, Heller and Mount, 2002). Most of these studies investigated the role that job satisfaction play in attitude towards labour unions but they were not conducted in Nigeria. Therefore, their findings and conclusions might not reflect the actual situation among university employees especially in any developing country context, considering cultural differences and the fact that most labour union membership in industrialised societies is voluntary (Parks and Ravazi, 2003). Therefore, it can be proposed that the level of employees' job satisfaction may influence their attitude toward their unions.

Furthermore, the importance of examining male and females cannot be undermined, considering its significance in explaining workplace diversity. Oakley (1987) observed that there is confusion between sex and gender and makes an attempt to distinguish the two terms. She sees sex as biological, while gender is both psychological and cultural. She goes further to support the above contention with a number of facts. First, anthropologists have reported wide variation in the way different cultures define gender. Oakley further points out that every society uses biological sex as criterion for the prescription of gender; although no two cultures would agree completely on what distinguishes one gender from the other.

The large entrant of females in the workplace in Nigeria is relatively short when compared to their male counterparts. Being a female according to socially entrenched view tends to make the employee more subservient, less competitive, nice, considerate, more helping than men (Glick and Fiske, 1991). Males are culturally viewed to be more competitive, aggressive, competent, and domineering. A cursory look at union management in Nigerian universities reflects a gender-bias leadership structure. These perceived gender differences affect both men and women's behaviours and evaluation of the activities they are involved (Feldman, 1999). For instance, while men are usually more prepared for leadership position in organisations, women on the other are prevented in subtle ways, from climbing up the leadership or executive position in their organisation due to what has been termed the glass ceiling (Udegbe, 1999). According to Riley (1997), membership and participation in union activities have been related to gender. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to propose that being male and female may also reflect in their attitude toward unionism as members of university workforce.

Deaux and Major (1987) suggested that the degree to which a job emphasized gender differentiated skills and abilities could act as a moderator variable in employees' reactions. Some support for this notion was reported by Wood (1987) who devised a group of tasks that were either categorised to require complex personal oriented activity, or that called for predominantly task-oriented activities. These tasks were then assigned to all-male and all-female groups. Results indicated that female groups were superior in their performance of tasks requiring personal-oriented skills while male groups excelled at task-oriented projects. Social role theory predicts that women will experience role conflict when taking on leadership roles because conventions regarding appropriate female behaviours conflict with the general expectation that leaders behave in a masculine or task-oriented style (Eagly, 1987). In much similar way, when women are not handling jobs that conform to the gender role, this is likely to engender dissatisfaction and discourage them from participating in union activities. In fact, low membership may be reported in organisations where voluntary membership is emphasized since labour unions' activities tend to reflect more of male gender ascribed roles. It is not out of place to assert that union-related activities by ASUU, SSANU, and NASU tend to involve the qualities that are socially attributed to males, such as dominance and verbally intimidating. It is however worthy of note that university jobs are not gender differentiated. Male and females are significantly employed as academic, non-academic, and senior staff in the university.

Union membership is a discernible characteristic with which to differentiate the existence of social groups. Social Identity Theory (SIT) asserts that in-groups" (e.g. union members) and "out-groups" (non-active union members) are formed by the degree to which individuals identify with the relevant group (Kelly and Kelly, 1994). A positive social identity is promoted by the constant comparison between the groups. However, when comparisons indicate deficiencies on the part of the in-group (compared to the relevant out-groups), SIT suggests that individuals can either withdraw from their existing social group (psychologically or behaviourally) and become a member of the other distinct group or attempt to make their existing group more positively distinct. Allen and Stephenson (2003), studying the perceived differences between the personal values and out-group values of managers (i.e. non-union members) and union members, observed that both groups held traditional stereotypes about each other. Importantly, strong group identification was related to perceiving the out-group more stereotypically. In the light of this, it can be assumed that members of academic union (ASUU) will report differently in their attitude toward unionism from the members of non-teaching staff (NASU).

Based on the theoretical, empirical, and qualitative evidence, the following hypotheses are therefore proposed:

- (i) There will be significant influence of gender and job satisfaction on attitude toward unions among University of Ibadan staff
- (ii) The non-teaching members would significantly report more favourable attitude towards labour unions than the academic staff members.

## Methods

**Design:** The survey design was adopted in the study that was carried out among members of the Academic, Senior staff, and non-academic unions at the University of Ibadan. The independent variables involved are gender and job satisfaction while attitude toward unionism is the dependent variable.

**Participants:** The purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting two hundred and forty (N=240) participants from a population of University of Ibadan employees. They had a mean age of 32.7 (sd=9.77). The males were 166 (69.2%) while the females were 74 (30.8%). The sample that involved employees was drawn from the three major labour unions in the school, namely, ASUU, SSANU and NASU. In all, there were 159 non-teaching staff (66.2%) and 81 (33.8%) teaching staff members.



**Instrument:** A structured questionnaire was used to collect data and other relevant information from participants. The questionnaire was divided into sections:

The first part was used to generate demographic information from respondents on age, job type and union membership, age, and job status. The next part of the questionnaire contained the attitude toward labour union scale. It was used to assess attitude of respondents towards the labour unions they belong in the University. The scale was originally developed by Dakurah, Goddard, and Osuteye (2005). It consists of 29 items that were positively worded and scored on 5-point Likert type with responses ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). It yields a cronbach alpha value of 0.76.

The last part of the questionnaire contained the job satisfaction index. It was developed by Quinn and Shepard (1994) to assess job satisfaction. The scale was revised to 5-point Likert type scale with degree of response ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The scale had a cronbach coefficient value of 0.68.

## Results

The first proposition that gender and job satisfaction would significantly influence attitude toward unions among University staff was tested using 2x2 ANOVA. The result is presented in Tables 1 and 2:

**Table 1: A Summary Table of 2x2 ANOVA showing the Comparison of males with Females and Job Satisfaction at High and Low Levels on Attitude toward Unionism**

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	p
Gender differences (A)	18.75	1	18.75	3.83	<.05
Job Satisfaction (B)	32.71	1	32.71	6.68	<.05
AXB	21.43	1	21.43	4.38	<.05
Error	1155.53	236			
Total	1280.73	239			

**Table 2: Summary Table showing Test of difference for Gender and Job Satisfaction on Attitude toward Unionism**

Gender Difference And Attitude Toward Unionism; Job Satisfaction	x	SD	N
Gender Male	14.30	2.64	166
Female	16.17	2.00	74
Total	15.65	2.34	240
Job Satisf. Low	14.64	2.56	58
High	16.15	2.11	182
Total	15.78	2.31	240

The result in Tables 1 and 2 shows that there was significant main influence of gender on attitude towards unions  $F(1, 236) = 3.83; p < .05$ . Female respondents significantly reported more favourable attitude towards labour union ( $x = 16.1$ ) than their male counterparts ( $x = 14.3$ ). Also, job satisfaction was found to have significant influence on attitude towards labour union  $F(1, 236) = 32.71; p < .05$ . The result indicates that respondents who reported high level of job satisfaction ( $x = 16.2$ ) (Table 2) significantly reported more favourable attitude towards union than those who reported low level of job satisfaction ( $x = 14.6$ ). In addition, there was significant interaction influence of gender differences and job satisfaction on attitude towards union  $F(1, 236) = 4.38; p < .05$ . Thus, the first hypothesis was confirmed as predicted.

The second hypothesis stated that non-academic members would significantly report more favourable attitude towards labour unions than the academic staff members. It was tested using t-test for independent measures. The result is presented below:

**Table 3: Summary of t-test Result Comparing Non-academic Staff with Academic Staff Members on Attitude towards Labour Unions**

Variables	Labour Unions	N	x	SD	df	t	P
Attitude to Unions	Non-academic	159	16.07	2.29	238	2.72	<.05
	Academic	81	15.22	2.28			

The result in Table 3 shows that there was significant influence of labour union membership type on attitude towards labour unions ( $t = 2.72$ ,  $df = 238$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Result showed that Non-academic members significantly reported more favourable attitude towards labour union ( $x = 16.07$ ) than the Academic staff members ( $x = 15.2$ ). The result confirmed the hypothesis as proposed.

## Discussion

Findings confirmed the first hypothesis which tested gender differences and level of job satisfaction on attitude towards labour unions. Results identified females as having more favourable attitude toward labour union than the male employees. Similarly, respondents who reported higher levels of job satisfaction significantly showed more favourable attitude towards labour unions than those who reported low job satisfaction. The direction of gender difference in attitude toward labour unions seemed to have contradicted previous findings. Most of the studies reviewed identified female members of organizations as having less favourable attitude toward labour unions. For instance, when the glass-ceiling which prevent the female from occupying leadership positions in Nigerian organizations as reported by Udegbe (1999) is considered, it would have been expected that male employees in the university will report more favourable attitude toward labour union. Nevertheless, the present finding is not surprising when the less gender-bias nature of university job is considered.

Perhaps, the earlier report by Deaux and Major (1987) lent much credence to the present finding which reported a different position from the previously held views about male and females' attitude. Their study had suggested that the degree to which a job emphasized gender differentiated skills and abilities could act as a moderator variable in employees' reactions. Some support for this notion was reported by Wood (1987) who devised a group of tasks that were either categorized to require complex personal oriented activity, or that called for predominantly task-oriented activities. However, employees' job in the university does not follow such gender differentiation. It was not surprising therefore that the finding differed from positions hitherto reported. Women according to socially entrenched views are perceived as more subservient, less competitive, nice, considerate, more helping than men (Glick and Fiske, 1991). The more favourable attitude they showed toward labour union in the present study may be due to the perception of unions as an instrument for ensuring welfare for employees. The finding supported the Glick and Fiske report of gender description of the female.

On the finding that linked higher level of job satisfaction with more favourable attitude toward labour union, previous studies offered similar conclusion. For instance, Parkes and Ravazi (2003) identified higher level of job satisfaction, age, gender, education, and organisational size as factors that are related to attitude of employees to union membership. For instance, high level of job satisfaction has been found to associate with job performance and commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Job satisfaction as a driver of commitment may have explained employees' attitude toward labour union among university workers investigated in the present study.

Finally, the second hypothesis that compared university academic with non-academic members of staff on attitude towards union was confirmed in the direction predicted. The result showed that the non-academic members of staff reported significantly more favourable attitude towards unions than their counterparts who academic staff members. It is important to note that there was dearth of studies comparing different unions in a particular organisation on attitude toward their labour unions, especially in emerging and developing economies where labour rights are still subjects of legislative debate. However, union activities are apparently common in Nigeria, especially public universities where there is no restriction to unionisation, and unions are free to compete for resources and members' welfare. For instance, NASU and ASUU had on several occasions competed over pay disparity and better conditions of service, with the latter demanding conditions that are similar to the academic union members. Nevertheless, the social identity theory justifies the present finding. According to Kelly and Kelly (1994), social identity is formed by the degree to which individuals identify with their relevant group. The cohesion among members of non-academic staff in universities reflects in their more involvement in their union activities than the academic staff. It is not surprising that findings indicated more favourable attitude toward labour union than their academic staff counterparts.

As found in the study, it can be concluded that employees more favourable attitude toward labour union results from high level of job satisfaction. Another major conclusion in the study is that females and non-academic staff members tend to have more favourable attitude toward their unions. These conclusions have implication for management of labour unions in universities. It implies that labour unions can promote their effectiveness when more female members occupy leadership positions because they have the commitment to ensure improved member involvement and participation in union activities. Their favourable disposition can help to promote general favourable attitude which can

translate to job commitment. The common assertion by union leaders that their activities promote employees' well-being seems to hold among university unions. This attitude can be harnessed through effective conflict handling by management to promote positive work attitudes.

It is therefore suggested that labour unions in universities need to encourage their female members to seek and occupy leadership positions as a strategy to promote involvement and commitment. More than anything else, the academic staff union is encouraged to learn from its non-academic counterpart on how to promote members favourable attitude towards union.

The findings and conclusions drawn in the present study have provided insight and foundation to a better understanding of members' attitude toward labour unions in the university. It is however desired that future researchers expand the scope by involving more universities and increasing the sample size in order to enhance generalisation. Nonetheless, the study has offered insight to differences in level of job satisfaction, gender and job category of university staff in comparing their attitude toward labour unions, especially in a Nigerian sample.

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