

# The Role of Labour Unions in Employees' Career Development in University of Lagos, Nigeria

## Abstract

Labour unions in institutions have become quite audible and more articulate in addressing the challenges of the members especially in areas of career development. These challenges could be internal or external. The study therefore, examined the role of labour unions in employees' career development in University of Lagos with other specific objectives of examining how participation in labour union activities and labour union training program influences employees' career development. A cross-sectional design was deployed utilizing survey method. The study employed proportionate stratified sampling technique to select 357 respondents from four different unions in the university. Structured questionnaire covering areas of social demographic characteristics, and how labour union roles, participation in union activities and labour union training influence employees career development in the university was utilized for data collection. Data collected were analyzed for descriptive and inferential statistics using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The result showed that participation in union activities ( $p = .006 < .05$ ) significantly influenced employees career development. This is a wake-up call for union members who could leverage on union participation to achieve career goals especially in developing world where merit is not given the appropriate space. The study recommends among others that labour unions in academic institutions should make career development issues a priority, as this will increase the commitment of members towards the union.

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**Keyword:** Career Development, Labour Union, Labour Union Role, Participation, Union Training Programme

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## Introduction

Labour unions for decades have continued to seek improvement in its members' welfare, and raising members' living standard in the society. In developing countries like Nigeria, labour union activities goes beyond their primary role of protecting workers' interest as evidenced in the fight for decolonization. Decolonization offers self-determination which in itself improves self-worth needed for career development. Also, the various struggle by labour unions championed by Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in the military era between the 1980s and 1990s fast tracked Nigerian return to democratic rule (Okafor & Malizu, 2013). Democratic rule comes with a lot of freedom – freedom of speech, freedom of association etc. which helped the

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unions to be more vocal in their quest for career emancipation of their members.

There is a perception that the existence of labour union is premised on catering for only the interest of its members especially on issues bordering on working conditions. However, studies have shown that labour union objectives transcend mere catering for its member's interest on issues of working conditions to include issues of corporate transparency, equity and justice in the society as well as to bring about a balance in the powers of the employer, workers and government through functioning as a political organization (Poole, 1980; Cho et al, 2019).

Employees' career development has been a major concern to researchers and stakeholders in every industry. The absence of career development could produce job stagnation and possibly depression for the concerned employees. If these negative challenges in the work place failed to receive urgent attention, it could deflate the morale of employees, impair their commitment and loyalty to the organization and they could leave the organization. Nguyen (2012) findings had emphasized that perceived poor career development and advancement could lead to high turnover of employees in organizations. This was corroborated by Osibanjo et al. (2014) who maintained that employees who perceived not being adequately rewarded in terms of promotion may disengage from the services of an organization.

Career development is no doubt an area of great interest and concern to employees in academic institutions. This is because it is the gateway for greater opportunities for increased remunerations and benefits to enhance the standard of living of their members. Thus, career development practices should be one of the key areas labour unions in tertiary institutions could use to facilitate union membership and participation. Enhanced membership and participation of members fosters greater cohesion and union leaders can leverage on that advantage to negotiate better welfare for the members. Favourable negotiation could usher in better work

place climate. Osinbajo et al (2014) assert that experience of favourable career growth climate by employees will significantly impact their retention, survival and growth of the organization.

In developing world like Nigeria there is need for regular labour unions agitation for better opportunities for members' career development. This would ensure recruitment and retention of career conscious employees into their membership. Employee's retention in unions help build robust union membership and participation. This translates to greater union's relevance at negotiation table with management and could help achieve a win-win situation during negotiation with management. However, when union membership is weak, management gains undue upper hand, negotiation becomes more challenging and eventual outcomes might be compromised. Unions in this category could hardly stimulate their members towards robust participation in union activities for fear of victimization.

Most previous studies on labour union roles have concentrated more on the social, political, and economic roles of labour unions with a responsibility of checking the powers of employers, fighting against the exploitation of workers, and maintaining and improving workers employment conditions (Webb & Webb, 1894; Hyman, 1975; Poole, 1980; Hoxie, 1921; Perlman, 1928; Ghosh et al, 2009; Pitan, 2013; Uzor, 2017).

Studies have also explored the role of labour unions in career development from membership perspective in United Kingdom, and union contribution to the career advancement, training and employees' job satisfaction in Kenya (Healy, 1999; Legat, 2014). However, limited study exists in respect of the role of both the academic and non-teaching staff labour unions in career development in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Hence, this study seeks to examine labour union's role in employees' career development within a Nigerian university system. Other specific objectives are to determine how participation in labour union activities and labour union training programmes influence employees' career development.

## Literature Review

### A. Overview of Labour Unions

performs the role of negotiating labour contract on behalf of its members with the employer, ensuring members job security, enhancing cordial relationship between workers and employers, and resolving grievances among members in a rational manner.

### C. Participation in Union Activities and Career Development

According to Olusanya and Okeke (2021), participation in the activities of the union is one of the crucial ways adopted by workers to defend and promote their collective interest. Participation in union activities by employees may be as a result of their perception of the various roles of the union in the workplace and in the society, as well as the perceived benefits to be derived, or thought of meeting personal needs which may include perceived opportunity for career development and advancement. Obiekwe and Obibhunun (2019) observed that the need for adequate benefits and wages, associating with others, collective bargaining and job security are the reasons behind workers participation in labour unions.

According to Gallagher and Strauss (1991), workers participate in labour unions' activities when they perceive success in satisfying their goals with respect to the participatory activity, and when the advantages of participating outweighs, the costs involved. Strauss (1977) also maintained that workers participate in union activities on perception of the satisfaction of important goals. This important goals within the context of the academic environment may include opportunity for recognition which will propel the individuals towards career advancement.

Adequate contributions have been made in the literature in the areas of participation in union activities, (Gallagher & Strauss, 1991; Tripti & Ginni, 2015; Obiekwe & Obibhunun, 2019). However, most of this study identified the need to achieve a goal or perceive success in satisfying a goal as the main reason behind participation of workers in the activities of their union.

### D. Labour Union Training Programme and Career Development

Training is very crucial in the workplace as

absence of training will result in the inability of employees to have solid grip on their duties and task (Sherwani & Mohammed, 2015). Mahadevan and Yap (2019) also maintained that training enhances the competence of employees that participated in the training as opposed to those who failed to participate. The value and benefits of employees' training is recognized by virtually everyone who works in an organization, as a well-planned and properly executed training can result in a more efficient workforce and improved performance (Uzman & Waqar, 2015). Dalto (2014) also pointed out that a properly executed training decreases costs, reduced waste, and inefficiencies. However, without a career perspective, training may tend to focus only on equipping people for their current work. (Hirsh, 2007).

Highly committed employees that seek greater career tend to learn those skills required to improve their functions and performance within the organization as well as that which will enhance their career progression and development. The process or means to achieve this goal is through training. Shaheen et al. (2013) posit that training makes it possible to obtain information on certain subject matter and it is also advantageous to networking for employees' efficiency and performance. Afroz (2018) also pointed out that training is necessary and vital in promoting many aspects of employee learning and development.

Labour unions can design and implement a good training programme or influence management to provide desired training for its members. Training helps in developing skills that improves career development. Khan (2008) asserts that union role includes the provision of education and training services for workers and this enhances skills and career development.

Most studies on training seems to focus more on the benefits of training to employees in terms of improved skills, competence, work quality, service delivery, productivity and performance (Shaheen et al, 2013; Uzman & Waqar, 2015; Mahadevan & Yap, 2019; Paul & Audu, 2019; Mamy et al, 2020), to the organizations in terms of reduction in cost, wastage and inefficiency (Dalto, 2014). However, less attention has been given to training effect on employees' career development particularly from the labour union perspective in

the literature.

## Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by Seliq Perlman theory of scarcity of consciousness of manual workers and Webb and Webb theory of industrial democracy in explaining the role of labour unions in employees' career development as well as the reason behind workers participation in labour unions activities.

### A. Theory of Scarcity of Consciousness of Manual Workers

This theory was propounded by Perlman (1928). The theory posits that workers awareness of scarcity of job opportunities resulted in their coming together to form labour unions in order to protect their jobs, distributes employment equitably among themselves, and to subject individual member's interest to the whole labour organization. Perlman however, objected to the sentiment that class consciousness led to the formation of labour union movement.

The relevance of this theory to this study is that the main reason for union membership and participation is job security. This therefore shows the labour unions role in promoting the job security of their members. Job security enables employees retention for possible future career development.

### B. Industrial Democracy Theory

This theory was propounded by Webb and Webb (1897). Here, labour union is seen as the reaction to class struggle as well as the consequences of the removal of state protection policy for workers. Webb and Webb (1897) posit that labour unions have three means of regulating their operations including; mutual insurance; collective bargaining; and legal enactment. The mutual insurance involves workers pooling funds with the benefit paid to those deprived of their means of survival as a result of the causes beyond their control. This fund was categorized into benevolent fund which is paid to workers involved in accident and sickness, and the out of work pay, which is paid to workers affected by lay off and also to replace tools damaged by fire or theft through workers negligence.

The method of collective bargaining involves a decision-making process and carrying out bargaining between the parties to employment relations on certain issues of concern to both parties, as well as a means of settlement of disagreement or trade dispute between both parties in the workplace. The method of legal enactment involves labour unions demands on enactment of legislation on basic minimum conditions of employment for the purpose of achieving harmonious relationship in the workplace.

This theory pointed out the reason behind workers joining and participating in union activities. Also, the various methods fashioned out by the labour unions in their operation especially the bargaining and the legal enactment method as pointed out in the theory suggest that labour unions in tertiary institutions can engage the management and employers through collective bargaining to negotiate a better policy that can enhance staff career development.

## Methodology

The study was conducted in the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The choice of University of Lagos was premised on the basis that the institution comprises labour unions that are very articulate, vibrant and well disposed towards the protection of the interest of its members, hence, findings obtained may be replicated in other tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

A cross-sectional research design that deployed survey method was used. There were four active labour unions in the University of Lagos including Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities (SSANU), Non-Academics Staff Union (NASU) and National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT). Cochran's Formula was used to yield a sample size of 357 and sampling frame was obtained from the management in which out the total work force of 4,885, 1,710 were members of ASUU, 1,925 (SSANU), 1,100 (NASU), and 150 (NAAT).

Stratified proportionate sampling method was used to distribute the questionnaires to the union members in their offices. Bowley (1926)

proportion allocation formula was adopted to get a representative sample unit in each stratum and this shows a unit sample of 125 for ASUU, 141 for SSANU, 11 for NAAT and 80 for NASU, respectively. Closed-ended structured questionnaire was used to obtain information from the respondents. The information reflected socio demographic characteristics of respondents, and labour union's role in staff career development in University of Lagos.

In establishing the instrument validity, content, construct and face validity were employed. The instrument reliability was achieved through pilot test conducted among 20 labour union members in the faculty of management sciences of the University of Lagos. The data obtained from the pilot test was subjected to statistical analysis using Cronbach Alpha reliability test through version 20 of SPSS and the result showed a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.842. No further adjustment was made on the questionnaire after the validity and reliability test before the actual survey.

Data collected were analyzed by employing Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for both descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson correlation and multiple regression were then carried out to determine the association between the dependent and independent variables.

Ethical consideration was achieved through consent of the respondents before administering the questionnaire to them, excluding questions on identity, phone contact and address from the research instrument, and assuring them the data was purely for research purposes and confidentiality would be strictly adhered to.

## Results and Interpretation

The sample size was calculated to be 357, which was also the number of questionnaires distributed. However, 302 questionnaires were properly filled and returned for analysis. This gave a response rate of 85%.

Table 1 : Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Socio-Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	159	52.6
	Female	143	47.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100</b>
Age (Years)	Below 30 years	32	10.6
	30 - 39 years	92	30.5
	40 - 49 years	102	33.8
	50 years and above	76	25.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100</b>
Marital Status	Single	54	17.9
	Married	243	80.5
	Divorced/Separated	2	0.7
	Widowed	3	1.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100</b>
Highest Educational Qualification	O' Level Certificate	31	10.3
	OND/Technical/NCE	34	11.3
	Bachelor's Degree/HND	109	36.1
	Master's Degree	81	26.8
	Ph.D.	47	15.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100</b>
Work Experience	1 - 5 years	80	26.5
	6 - 10 years	74	24.5
	11 - 15 years	56	18.5
	16 - 20 years	32	10.6
	Above 20 years	60	19.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>Designation:</b>	Senior Staff	237	78.5
	Junior Staff	65	21.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Union Membership:</b>	ASUU	88	29.1
	SSANU	115	38.1
	NAAT	11	3.6
	NASU	88	29.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey, 2020

Table 1 shows the result of the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. A greater percentage of the respondents (52.6) who participated in the study were males which indicated the dominance of males in the membership of the labour unions. The age distribution showed that a one third of the respondents (33.8%) were 40-49 years, and a tenth (10.6%) was below 30 years. The majority of the respondents (80.5%) were married and close to one-fifth (17.9%) were single. The educational level of most of the respondents were first degree (36.1%) while a tenth had secondary school certificate (10.3%). In this study, half of the respondents had at most ten years of working experience (51%) and close to one-fifth (19.9%) had more than 20 years working experience. The

senior staff category was 78.5% and SSANU had the highest respondents of 38.1% while NAAT had lowest respondents with 3.6%.

The result in Table 2 indicates that a very weak and positive relationship exists between labour union role and employee career development ( $r = .110$ ), as well as between participation in union activities and employee career development ( $r = .186$ ). Table 2 further shows that union training programme was not significantly correlated to employees' career development, as ( $r = .075$ ). However, multiple regression was carried out to determine how labour union's role, participation in union activities and union training programmes influenced employees' career development as presented in Table 3.

**Table 2: Correlation Result**

Variables	ECD	LUR	PUA	UTP	Mean	SD
ECD	1	0.110	.186**	0.075	26.65	4.42
LUR	0.110	1	.388**	.477**	27.81	5.62
PUA	0.186	.388**	1	.492**	20.91	5.06
UTP	0.075	.477**	.492**	1	16.11	5.48

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \*\* ( $p < .01$ ), \* ( $p < .05$ )

Source: Output of Data Analysis

**Key:** ECD: Employee Career Development; LUR: Labour Union Role; PUA: Participation in Union Activities; UTP: Union Training Programme.

**Table 3: Regression Result**

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig.	VIF	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
Constant	22.558		16.025	0.000		.193 <sup>a</sup>	0.037	3.855	< .05
LUR	0.046	0.059	0.891	0.374	1.349				
PUA	0.161	0.184	2.764	0.006	1.374				
UTP	-0.035	-0.043	-0.621	0.535	1.511				

Dependent Variable: Employee Career Development

Source: Output of Data Analysis

**Key:** LUR: Labour Union Role; PUA: Participation in Union Activities; UTP: Union Training Programme.

As shown in the regression model in Table 3, ( $F = 3.855$ ,  $p < .05$ ) indicating that the model is significant. Also, the  $R$  is .193 and the value of the  $R^2$  is .037 which indicates that LUR, PUA, and UTP caused a variation of 3.7% in employee career development. Furthermore, the result of the diagnostic test showed the existence of no multicollinearity issue and that the model is reliable with non-existence of auto correlation, as the variance inflation factor (VIF) range is between 1.374 and 1.511.

Regarding how employee career development was influenced by each of the independent variables, the model revealed that labour union role has no significant influence on employees' career development ( $\beta = .059$ ,  $p = .374 > .05$ ) hence, the failure to reject the Null hypothesis one, that is there is no relationship between labour union roles and employees career development.

The result however revealed the rejection of the Null hypothesis two, as participation in union activities has a significant influence on employees' career development ( $\beta = .184$ ,  $p = .006 < .05$ ). This implies that there is a relationship between participation in union activities and employees career development.

In Null Hypothesis three, we fail to reject it, as union training programme does not significantly affect employees career development ( $\beta = -0.43$ ,  $p = .535 > .05$ ).

## Discussions of Findings

This study investigates labour unions' role in employees' career development in tertiary institution in Lagos, Nigeria. Findings revealed that the labour unions roles have no significant influence on employees' career development as confirmed from the result of the first hypothesis in the regression model. This finding negates a similar study conducted by Healy (1992) which revealed that labour unions have a collective role in teachers' career development in United Kingdom. Also, the finding negates the findings of Legat (2014) which revealed that Kenya

University Academic Staff Union activities significantly influenced the employees' training and career advancement among other outcomes. Negations of previous findings may be attributed to the study area and unit, whereas present study was conducted among academic and non-teaching staff union in Nigeria, previous studies were conducted among only the teaching staff unions in UK and Kenya respectively. The small sample size in this study could also explain the differences in the findings.

Findings on participation in union activities and career development showed from the result of the second hypothesis tested that participation in union activities significantly influences employees' career development in the institution. This implies that members' participation in various activities of their unions provides an opportunity for enhancing their career development in the institution. This is corroborated by Gallagher and Strauss (1991) who posit that workers would participate in union activities if the advantages of participating outweighs the costs involved. Active participation could regularly bring employee to proximity with top managements of the university, revealing individuals articulation of ideas during negotiations. This exposure can make management think higher and better ways of utilizing employees' skills which could lead to career development.

Finally, the findings on labour union training programme and employees' career development as showed from the result of the third hypothesis tested revealed that employees career development is not significantly affected by labour unions training programme. This finding negates the findings of Kiima (2015) which revealed that training enhances career prospects and opportunities for advancement among employees in the banking sector. This negation may however be attributed to the study unit, as whereas the present study focused on labour unions in academic institution in Nigeria, the former concentrated on bank workers in Kenya. Also, whereas labour unions in public tertiary institutions may be primarily concerned with the working conditions of their members, banks on the other hand may be more concerned with



developing employees' competence through training to enhance employees' career development and overall performance of the bank.

## Conclusion

This study examined the role of labour unions in employees' career development and how participation in union activities as well as union training programmes influence employees' career development in University of Lagos, Nigeria. The findings have shown that while labour unions role and training programme does not translate in enhancing employees' career development, participation in union activities influences employees' career development in the institution. This may be attributed to the unions focusing more attention on issues revolving around the improvement of members' terms of employment and working conditions with less attention on members training to enhance their work skills and career development within the institution.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained, the study recommends that labour unions in tertiary institutions should bring the issue of their members' career advancement and development to the front burner as this will increase the commitment of members towards the union course, and further encourage and attract new members. This can be achieved by the union through a continuous engagement with the university management on a better policy for career development of members.

Members of labour unions should endeavor to participate actively in union events, as this would enable them gain recognition that will position them to engage the management for better policy to promote their career development, and also increase their access to informal interaction networks that can aid their career growth.

Labour unions should incorporate a training programme where such is not in existence or modify its training programme to bring about a significant improvement in the skills and knowledge required by their members to propel

them to have better career development opportunities.

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