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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to examine the relationship between employee absorption and industrial harmony of tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The study adopted a survey research design. The population for the study was two thousand, two hundred and fifty six academic staff of the institutions (2,256). The sample size was 327 academic staff determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. Structured questionnaire was used to obtain primary data from the respondents. The regression analysis with the aid of SPSS version 22.0 was used to test the hypotheses. The study findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between employee absorption and industrial harmony of tertiary institutions in Rivers State. These results culminated into the understanding that employee absorption is a critical non-financial incentive that has significant relationship on industrial harmony. Thus, management of higher institutions needs to move from a fragmented approach of reducing strike incidence and give room for unions in the organization to air their views and try as much as possible to align the needs of the employees to that of the institution.

Keywords: Industrial Harmony, Absorption, Low Grievance, Low Strike Action

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria educational institutions in recent time have experienced workers disharmony, instability and other forms of industrial conflict and strike. This has results to low workers performance in the academic system. Apparently most of these problems were encountered because of poor involvement in decision making process (Enyi, 2001), incessant industrial disputes, brain-drain, under-funding or poor financing of quality education, cultism, corrupt practices and abuse of trust (Ladan, 2012; Mukoro, 2013) which are major issues that lead to industrial disharmony.

The concept industrial harmony is seen as a friendly and cooperative agreement on working relationships between employers and employees for their mutual benefit (Otobo, 2005; Osad and Osas, 2013). According to Puttapalli and Vuram (2012), industrial harmony is concerned with the relationship between management and employees with respect to the terms and conditions of employment and the work place. In effect, it is a situation where employees and management cooperate willingly in pursuit of the organization's aims and objectives.

Apparently, employee absorption can be described as the full concentration of happy feelings, that felt by the person who is doing their jobs, when he/she felt that time goes by so quickly and is difficult to leave the jobs (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). Schaufeli et al (2002) stated that absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. Absorbed employees are characterized by being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulty detaching oneself from it (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002).

According to Nworgu (2005), most Nigerian universities have experienced a series of crises caused by poor involvement of employee in decision making, non-implementation of agreement, and information

between workers, students and the university administrators. Industrial harmony is one of the major areas of concern to the government, employers of labour, investors and trade unions of any industrial community; and the maintenance of industrial harmony for the proper growth and development of the economy and the nation (Brickner, 1996). This is so because; industrial conflicts disrupt both the process of student performance and staff productivity in the academic environment.

However, several studies have been carried out to examine the impact of industrial harmony on corporate performance, employee commitment in developed economies and in large organizations (Awang, 2009; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Kreiser, Marino and Weaver, 2002; Elem, 2015). Whereas these stream of study focused on manufacturing firms and oil and gas industry on various sectors of the economy. This research therefore seeks to fill this gap by evaluating the individual and composite influence of employee engagement on industrial harmony amongst higher institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The pursuit of the ideal of perfect harmony can too easily lead to the harmony of silence. From the above literature gap this study is carried out to examine the relationship between employee absorption and workplace harmony in tertiary Institution in Rivers State, Nigerian.

The following research questions guided the study:

- Does employee absorption affect staff collaboration in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- Does employee absorption affect low strike incidence in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background of the Study

The study is anchored on social exchange theory. Social exchange theory was introduced by Homans

(1958), with the publication of his work *Social Behaviour as Exchange*, defined social exchange as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons. Social exchange theory is one of the most widely used models of interpersonal interaction in social psychology. The formation of successful relationship between managers and employees, which is one of the core elements of workplace harmony, is based upon the social exchange theory. Social exchange theory involves the exchange of tangible and intangible resource between interdependent parties with an expected benefit to both of them (Homans, 1958). Social exchange relationships are based on the feeling of common purpose between different parties of specific relationship and its fulfillment (Gouldner, 1960).

These parties will not carry out their obligation in this relationship unless they see that the other party has something of value to offer (Chiaburn and Marinova, 2006). Therefore, fulfilling obligations constitutes the vital aspect in any social exchange relationship (Rousseu, 1990). For example, beneficial actions aimed at employees by the organization and its representatives facilitate the establishment of high quality exchange relationships that create obligations for workers to reciprocate in positive ways (Settoon *et al.*, 1996).

This theory is basically related to the present study that once management tries to establish a close relationship with employees; by allowing them to have a voice/say in matters that affects them, the employees in turn would reciprocate by being committed to the organization and hence would not see the need to leave the organization.

Absorption

Employee absorption can be described as the full concentration of happy feelings, that felt by the person who is doing their jobs, when he/she felt that time goes by so quickly and is difficult to leave the

jobs (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) stated that absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. Absorbed employees are characterized by being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulty detaching oneself from it (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Being fully absorbed in ones work comes close to what has been called flow, a state of optimal experience that is characterized by focused attention, clear mind, mind and body unison, effortless concentration, complete control, loss of self-consciousness, distortion of time, and intrinsic enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). However, typically, flow is a more complex concept that includes many aspects and refers to rather particular, short-term peak experiences instead of a more pervasive and persistent state of mind, as is the case with engagement.

Concept of Industrial Harmony

Industrial harmony refers to a friendly and cooperative agreement on working relationships between employers and employees for their mutual benefit (Otobo, 2005; Osad and Osas, 2013). According to Puttapalli and Vuram (2012), industrial harmony is concerned with the relationship between management and employees with respect to the terms and conditions of employment and the work place. In effect, it is a situation where employees and management cooperate willingly in pursuit of the organization's aims and objectives.

Industrial harmony thus covers the area of responsibilities, employment policy, collective bargaining, communication and consultation (Odia and Omofonmwan, 2007). Industrial harmony enhances labour productivity and in turn improves performance in our education sector, achieving economic growth, and enhancing living standards and quality of life. It creates a peaceful working environment conducive to tolerance, dialogue and

other alternative (to strike) means of resolving industrial or labour disputes in Nigeria (such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, conciliation and litigation or court adjudication).

Industrial agreement in its optimal structure, presupposes an industry in a state of relative balance where relationship amongst people as well as gatherings are heartfelt and profitable. Sayles and Strauss (1981) noticed that with the unavoidable contrasts among gatherings inside an organization, struggle and varying destinations saturate cutting edge organizations. This kind of contention keeps the presence of industrial agreement which mirrors a condition of authoritative shakiness (Sayles and Strauss, 1981). Furthermore, as Hanson (1972) noted, industrial agreement speaks to nonappearance of conflict by industrial unions which will undoubtedly bring about viable and proficient organization.

They further stated that industrial harmony in its ideal form, presupposes an industry in a condition of relative equilibrium where relationship between individuals and or groups are cordial and productive. Sayles and Strauss (1981) assert that with the inevitable differences among groups within an organization, conflict and differing objectives permeate modern organizations. This type of conflict prevents the existence of industrial harmony which reflects a state of organizational instability (Sayles and Strauss, 2009). On the other hand, Hanson (2006) opines that industrial harmony represents absence of strike by industrial unions in organization which is bound to result in effective and efficient organization.

Staff Collaboration

Staff collaboration is defined as the formal and informal interactive processes among teachers and related service personnel for planning, development, and monitoring of interdisciplinary interventions. Staff collaboration involves development of goals and objectives, initiation of instructional strategies, collaborative monitoring of these strategies, and

reviewing of team efforts as related to educational outcomes. These team practices may occur within students' educational environments as well as during formal team meetings. Collaboration among team members augments efficient interdisciplinary interventions and provides a means for accountability among members (Demchak, Alden, Bergin, Ting, & Lacey, 1995).

Giangreco (1996) described a formalized program of a consensus decision-making process for educators, parents, administrators, and related-service providers in the development of educational programs for students in special education. This program the Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach (VISTA) was designed to operationalize collaborative teamwork as it pertains to educational support service decision making (Giangreco, 1996). An important characteristic of VISTA is that learning outcomes are based on the student's educational needs and are considered to be discipline free. VISTA teams collectively consider interrelationship among disciplinary recommendations and explore gaps and overlaps of these recommendations.

Low Strike Incidence

The study of Fashoyin (1992) as cited by (Tarila, Leburu and Wale-Oshinawo 2018) posits that the unpleasant side of industrial relations and one which the public frequently associate union with, is the strike. Strikes show an interruption of affectionate associations between labour and management and are typically the one side of industrial relation that draws the most harmful comment. Hyman (1975), discoursed that the strike, as unpleasant it is, executes many beneficial function for the two side of the parties: first when a union calls out its members on strike, it is in the belief that the strike will wield pressure on the manager to take a desire and action, such a yielding to a request for enhancement in terms of employment security or improving an inadequate working state.

To the industrial striker, strike speaks to the activity of his major right to pull back his administrations. Circumstances which seem to negate his own desire and yearning or which debilitates the satisfaction of the requirements of the individual are being enrolled during the time spent striking. All the more vitally, it is these individual rights that are outfit by the exchange union to set out on strike activity. The union quality in an industry, in this manner generally lay on the force of the strike.

The strike is an extremely strong apparatus and can be intense if the workers on strike speak to key work or if the creation lost brought about by the business amid the strike is exceptionally huge. The strike likewise makes the administration to unite genuinely in future transaction; in that capacity, effective strikes improve the dealing position of the union for next arrangement. The strike if effective enhances the financial prosperity of the individuals from exchange union as they can pay increments as a consequence of strike activity.

Absorption and Industrial Harmony

Okon, Asu, Patrick and Antigh (2012) carried out a study to determine the impact of workers absorption characteristics on industrial harmony in University of Calabar Teaching Hospital and Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital Calabar were the only tertiary health institutions in Nigeria's Cross River State and the 2575 total staff strength of the two organizations was the study population. A total of 266 subjects were randomly sampled. Pearson Product Moment Correlation test was conducted to test the null hypothesis and it was established that there was significant influence of workers absorption characteristics on industrial harmony in the study case. The study recommended that absorbed employees are characterized by being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulty detaching oneself from it.

Akuh (2015) investigated industrial harmony for academic excellence: an imperative for a productive educational system in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to discuss the imperative of industrial harmony for academic excellence and a productive educational system in Nigeria. To ensure harmonious industrial relations, the leader of every institution will need to encourage, open and frank discussion of the institutions problems with the subordinates; seek the opinion of those doing the institutional job i.e. the staff; explain their discussion to those who have to carry them out; recognize the contributions of all involved in the institutional job; set collaborative goals to encourage team work instead of autocracy and listen to rather than talk at their subordinates. In conclusion, effective and understood grievance procedure that is simple, straightforward, flexible, proactive, responsive, devoid of protocol and time conscious is central to harmonious industrial relations. Above all, promoting visionary and disciplined leadership within our educational system is a key to a conducive environment for learning devoid of corrupt practices and indiscipline.

Mojaye and Dedekuma (2015) conducted a study on the influence of employee absorption on Industrial Harmony in the Civil Service of Delta State Nigeria. The study tries to establish a link between feeling, difficulty in leaving ones work and good industrial relations and industrial peace. The study focused on the Delta State Civil Service and attempted to find out the role that workers absorption had played in ensuring industrial peace since the advent of the state. Questionnaires were administered to 325 civil servants out of which, only 299 were useful. One of the research questions was whether there is any relationship between industrial harmony and employee absorption. The study showed that while employee absorption may not necessarily lead to good industrial relations but it may engender industrial peace.

Therefore, the following hypotheses emerged from the foregoing discussion:

Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between employee absorption and staff collaboration in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

Ho₂ There is no significant relationship between employee absorption and low strike incidence in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

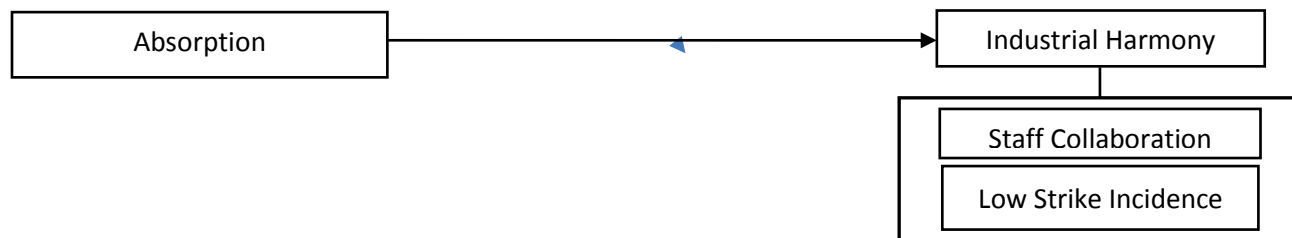


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the relationship between employee absorption and industrial harmony of tertiary institutions in Rivers State

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design as it sought to describe data and characteristics about the population or phenomenon being studied. This design was preferred because very large samples are feasible, making the results statistically significant even when analyzing multiple variables. Survey is useful in describing the characteristics of a large population. The target population of this study consisted of all the academic staff of the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, hinging on the data sourced from these institutions payroll the population for the study was two thousand, two hundred and fifty six academic staff of the institutions (2,256). The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was employed in determining the sample size. From the table, therefore the sample size for this study was 327 academic staff of the 6 tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study used primary data collected through the use of questionnaire administered by the researcher to designated members of staff of these institutions. The response in the questionnaires was measured using the Likert scale. The Likert scale is a technique that captures the responses of the variables in the study (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Each of the questions in Section the questionnaire consisted of five choices:

Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). The Cronbach alpha test coefficient was used to measure the reliability of the research instrument and the results obtained was 0.87 which was reliable. The multiple regression analysis was used to determine the probability value and t-statistic in determining the level of significance and testing the stated hypotheses. Moreover, all the statistical analysis was done through the aid of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 22.0.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

It was observed that 327 copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents. 22 copies of questionnaire were not returned. 305 copies of questionnaire were returned. However, out of this number only 302 copies questionnaire were correctly filled and thus; was suitable for data analysis.

Regression Analysis

The multiple regression analysis was applied to establish the effect the predictor variables had on the criterion variables and to test the hypothesized relationships. The hypotheses were tested at 95% level of confidence and a 5% level of significant in order to draw conclusion.

Table 1: Effect of Absorption on Staff Collaboration

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.897 ^a	.757	.749	1.26296

a. Predictors: (Constant), Absorption,

Source: (SPSS 22) Output, 2019

Model table 1, above showed the result of the regression analysis (R-value 0.897) between the criterion variable (staff collaboration) and the predictor variables employee absorption that were taken together. The (R-value =0.897) indicated that the predictor variables had a strong effect on the

criterion variable. The coefficient of determination (R²-value 0.757) implied that both predictor variables explained 75.7% variance of staff collaboration while remaining 24.3% could be due to the effect of extraneous variables.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Absorption and Staff Collaboration

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	14.896	1.020		14.611	.000
	Absorption	-.013	.039	-.019	-.332	.740

a. Dependent Variable: Staff Collaboration

Source: (SPSS 22) Output, 2019

Hypothesis 1

Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between employee absorption and staff collaboration in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

Table 2 above indicated the result of correlation coefficient. The relationship between absorption and staff collaboration is not significant with a (t-statistic value of -0.332) at significant level of (P=0.740) at 0.05% level of confidence and (t-crit=1.96). The t-cal=

-0.332 with (P= 0.740) indicated that there is no significant relationship between absorption and staff collaboration. Thus, the alternate hypothesis was hereby rejected. Similarly absorption as a predictor variable contributes ($\beta = -0.013$) to the variation of the criterion variable (staff collaboration). This meant that absorption makes no contribution to explain the variation in criterion variable (staff collaboration) in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Effect of Absorption on Low Strike Incidence

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.680 ^a	.533	.523	2.06963

a. Predictors: (Constant), Absorption

Source: (SPSS 22) Output, 2019

Model table 3, above showed the result of the regression analysis (R-value 0.680) between the

criterion variable (low strike incidence) and the predictor variables employee absorption that were

taken together. The (R-value =0.680) indicated that the predictor variables had a moderate effect on the criterion variable. The coefficient of determination (R²-value 0.533) implied that both predictor variables

explained 53.3% variance of low strike incidence while remaining 24.3% could be due to the effect of extraneous variables.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Absorption and Low Strike Incidence

		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	17.012	1.671		10.183	.000
	Absorption	.197	.064	.092	2.501	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Low Strike Incidence

Source: (SPSS 22) Output, 2019

Hypothesis 2

Ho₂ There is no significant relationship between employee absorption and low strike incidence in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

Table 4 above indicated the result of correlation coefficient. The relationship between absorption and low strike incidence is statistically positive and significant with a (t-statistic value of 2.501) at significant level of (P=0.004) at 0.05% level of confidence and (t-crit =1.96). The t-cal=2.501 with (P>.004) indicated that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between absorption and low strike incidence. Thus, the alternate hypothesis was hereby accepted. Similarly absorption as a predictor variable contributes ($\beta=0.197$) to the variation of the criterion variable (low strike incidence). This meant that absorption makes a strong and unique contribution to explain the variation in criterion variable (low strike incidence) in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The relationship between absorption and the two measures of industrial harmony: (staff collaboration and low strike incidence) was also empirically tested using multiple regression analysis and the study found that there was a positive and significant relationship between absorption and low strike

incidence with (t-cal= 2.501 and P=0.004) while the empirical result showed that there was no significant relationship between absorption and staff collaboration with a negative contribution (t-cal= -0.332 and P=0.740). The study result was in line with conclusion of Okon, Asu, Patrick and Antigh (2012) carried out a study to determine the impact of workers absorption characteristics on industrial harmony in University of Calabar Teaching Hospital and Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital Calabar, Nigeria, A total of 266 subjects were randomly sampled. Pearson Product Moment Correlation test was conducted to test the null hypothesis and it was established that there was significant influence of workers absorption characteristics on industrial harmony in the study case. The study recommended that absorbed employees are characterized by being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulty detaching oneself from it. Furthermore, Mojaye and Dedekuma (2015) also conducted a study on the influence of employee absorption on Industrial Harmony in the Civil Service of Delta State Nigeria. The study tried to establish a link between feeling, difficulty in leaving ones work and good industrial relations and industrial peace. The study showed that while employee absorption may not necessarily lead to good industrial relations but it may engender industrial peace.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The idea which necessitated this study was to provide an overview understanding and the empirical relationship between employee absorption and industrial harmony in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. Findings from the analyses and test of research hypotheses revealed that there is a variation of the result in both variables (employee absorption and the measures of industrial harmony) showed strong relationship and insignificant relationship.

The study recommended that absorbed employees are characterized by being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulty detaching oneself from it. Therefore, management of higher institutions needs to move from a fragmented approach of reducing strike incidence and give room for unions in the organization to air their views and try as much as possible to align the needs of the employees to that of the institution.

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