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Economic Recession: A Bane to Labour Relations in Nigeria Public Service

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Abstract:

It is undeniable that economic recession has adverse effects on labour relations in Nigeria public service. However, economic recession, in some cases, usually truncates the quest for pleasant relationships between the organised labour, industry representatives and the government. Apart from building on the Dunlopian theory of labour relations, the paper adopted both primary and secondary methods of data collection. However, the research work unveiled that economic recession is detrimental to preventing the incessant outbreak of confrontation and conflict of interests which are antithetical to fostering unfettered labour relations in Nigeria public service. It will therefore conclude that harmonious labour relations will be difficult to actualise during the recessionary periods. Hence, it will also conclude that economic recession had negative effects on the pattern of labour relations in Nigeria public service. To this end, the research work made an attempt to suggest some pragmatic recommendations which are necessary, if not sufficient, to ensure that labour relations in Nigeria public service are not jeopardized as a result of economic recession in the country.

Keywords: *Economy, recession, labour relations, public service, and government*

1. Introduction

With the growing level of unemployment in Nigeria come diverse speculations that an era of harmonious labour relations have come to an end in the public service (Adebayo, 2006). In fact, the labour relations in Nigeria's public service have been characterized by chaos and confrontation between the labours and the employers of labour (Anyim, 2009). These conflictual labour relations in Nigerian Public Service are usually caused by several factors of which economic recession is but one.

However, recession is antithetical to fostering smooth relations in various public services; this is why it is mostly explained as the downward and/or upward movements of levels of gross domestic product. It is equally referred to as the period of expansions and contractions in the level of economic activities around its long-term growth trend (Cordova & Dror, 1984). Economic recession has lowered the prospects for collective bargaining and dialogue among Nigerian labours, labour leaders and employers of labour which is root cause of several industrial unrests in Nigeria public service.

Apart from the global economic or financial crisis which has become a major concern for political leaders, industrial relation analysts, labour leaders and bureaucrats across the globe, there are other factors attributable to the resurgence of economic recession in Nigeria (Okpara, 2006). These factors include lack of good transport infrastructures, absence of good leadership to formulate visionary policies, and bad governance that resulted into deep-seated corruption. The period of economic recession has caused a series of industrial crisis thereby preventing growth and productivity in Nigeria public service (Adebayo, 2006).

More importantly, economic recession is not peculiar to Nigeria but has also affected the majority of countries in the world particularly their public sectors. However, proffering good understanding of the effects of economic recession is the prominent focus of this research work. The ongoing economic crisis in Nigeria has resulted to loss of confidence in the government among the labours because of the severe level of afflictions they are facing (Fashoyin, 1980). During the recessionary period in Nigeria, the public employees are worsen-off due to the declining purchasing power of their wages and salary (Okpara, 2006).

Recession in the economy will however lead to industrial unrests such as demonstrations, protests and industrial strikes thereby declining productivity and service delivery in the country (Wilkinson, 2004). Although economic recession is usually referred to as economic or financial crisis (Cordova & Dror, 1984), it is perhaps a period of economic slowdown that is characterized by declining productivity and devaluing of financial institutions often due to reckless and unsustainable money lending (Wilkinson, 2004). According to Krugman (2009), recession is particularly a period of general economic decline and is typically accompanied by a drop in the stock market, increase in unemployment and a decline in housing market.

During the recessionary period, there is prospect of high unemployment; low production and consumption; poor standard of living; inaccurate growth forecast as well as low staff development to mention but a few. It is against this

background that this paper will look into the nature of labour relations in the period of economic recession in Nigeria. It will endeavour to draw nexus between the toxic labour relations, the failures of collective bargaining and the economic recession in Nigeria. It will therefore put forward some substantive recommendations to foster a better of labour relations in Nigeria public service.

2. Conceptual Definitions

Simply put, the term "economic recession" is coined from two different words "economy" and "recession". According to Maudin (2009), the term 'economy' is concerned with the management the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. According to Krugman (2009), recession is the period of reduced economic activities. The economic activities earlier mentioned are production, distribution, and consumption (Cordova & Dror, 1984). More so, recession can be defined as a general downturn in an economy (Krugman, 2009).

According to Kimberly (2016), recession is when the economy declines significantly for at least six months. It also means a sharp drop in the economic indicators (Krugman, 2009) particularly the real gross domestic product (GDP); income level of individual and revenue generation of government; employment; manufacturing and retail sales (Cordova & Dror, 1984). On the other hands, labour relations represent the relationship between employers and employees whether in industry or government agencies as well as the political decisions and laws that affect it (Okpara, 2006).

More so, labour relations can also be defined as the collective relations between relations between the management of an organisation and its employees. However, Wikipedia (2018) gave the definition of labour relations as "for or with" whom one works and under which rules and laws. However, the public service of any country represents the prominent machinery of government for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of it public policies. This is done by translating and transforming the plans, policies, and programmes of government into viable public goods and services for the use of the entire public.

3. The Evolution of Economic Recession in Nigeria

For the in-depth understanding of the economic recession in Nigeria, it should be understood that the global financial crisis of 2007–2010 was initially reinforced by the short fall in liquidity in the United States' banking system (Maudin, 2009). This not only resulted in the collapse of variety of large financial institutions which in the long run seek "bail out" from the national governments but also culminate into downturns in stock markets throughout the world (Krugman, 2009).

However, the deregulation policy which was adopted by President Reagan in 1982 and dragged to its limits by George W. Bush actually turned from "prudent regulation of financial institutions" to near-absence of regulation (Cordova & Dror, 1984). Invariably, the large banks and other financial institutions took complete advantage of this initiative and explored all chances which result in over-extension and commitments and bankruptcies (Cordova & Dror, 1984). It was the administration of former president Obama administration that commenced and completed the bail out of several large American banks and large financial institutions together with the automobile-manufacturing companies (Maudin, 2009).

4. Literature Review

However, Krugman (2009) had examined economic recession to mean the sharp decline in economic activities and growth for at some period of time. Hence, economic recession is basically a situation of warning before transitioning into economic meltdown. Consequently, economic recession is in-between economic buoyancy and economic meltdown. However, recession denotes a situation whereby the indicators of the economy are tending towards the downward position. In other word, economic recession is a situation whereby the indicators are tending towards the negative position (Maudin, 2009).

Adeniran (2016) explained this as a situation whereby the indicators are tending towards the downward position. Throughout the year 2016 in Nigeria, the economic recession created some difficulties and uncertainties for Nigerian public service and the employees. This recessionary period was globally reinforced by the tightening credit markets as well as the incapacity to substitute outdated workers for new productive workers, massive downsizing of workforce, a fluctuating investment environment, chronic unemployment as well as the collapse of the financial markets has only caused employers to drastically reduce their cost structures (Krugman, 2009).

The protracted recession in the economy indicates that the rates of unemployment will unlikely reduce anytime soon. The unemployment rate actually stood at 9.6% as of November 2010 but was predicted to fall to only 9% by the end of 2011 and by 2012 to just 8% (NBS, 2010). In the recessionary period, diverse organisations, mainly the public service, in Nigeria mostly reduce their spending on the development and training of current employees. Some of them have to cut operational budgets during recessionary time until the difficult trend had improved thus providing clearer financial pictures.

The factors accounted for the economic recession in Nigeria were the fusion of banking and capital markets; technological revolution, contagion and connectedness of institutions and financial markets which played roles in how risks are to be transferred among institutions and across countries (World Bank, 2017). In addition to the foregoing, banks and pension funds and investors all over Nigeria were "shallow" and "greedy" and did not care to investigate how their money was used as everyone was carried away by the glamour of money making (Adeogun, 2009).

However, the recent economic crisis is also attributed to the interaction of micro and macro elements and this has caused hardships for the public servants who later became aggrieved with their respective leaders and government (World Bank 2017). The organised labours have always been at loggerheads with the government and the bureaucrats

based on the anticipation for salary or wage increase to meet the rapidly increasing cost of living in Nigeria which is one of the effects of economic recession.

5. Theoretical Framework

This research paper is erected on John Dunlop's analysis of system theory. Dunlop (1958) stresses that theory is mostly needed for the purpose of explaining diverse observations. Flanders (1965) rightly argued for the need of theory and put forward the right questions as well as the research to succinctly answer those questions. In Dunlop (1958), the model of labour relations can be viewed as the interaction between three principal agents: management organizations, workers and formal/informal ways they are organized and government agencies (Anyim, Ikemefuna and Ekwoaba, 2012).

Moreover, Dunlop (1958) cited in Anyim, Ikemefuna and Ekwoaba (2012) identified these actors as comprising a hierarchy of managers and their representatives; a hierarchy of non-representatives; and specialized third party agencies which may be governmental or private ones. These actors and their organizations are located within an environment which is defined in terms of technology, labour and product markets, and the distribution of power in wider society as it impacts upon individuals and workplace (Fashoyin, 1980).

Within this environment, actors interact with each other, negotiate and use economic/political power in process of determining rules that constitute the output of the industrial relations system. He proposed that three parties, that is, *employers, labour unions, and government* are the key actors in a modern industrial relations system (Anyim, 2010). He also argued that none of these institutions could act in an autonomous or independent fashion. Instead they were shaped, at least to some extent, by their market, technological and political contexts. Thus it can be said that industrial relations is a social sub-system subject to three environmental constraints: the markets, distribution of power in society and technology (Fashoyin, 1992).

Alternatively, Dunlop's model can be typified into three key factors to be considered in conducting an analysis of the management-labour relationship (Ogunbameru, 2004). These include the environmental, economic, technological, political, legal and social forces that impact employment relationships; characteristics and interaction of the key actors in the employment relationship: labour, management and government; and rules that are derived from these interactions that govern the employment relationship (Salamon, 2000).

Dunlop emphasizes the core idea of systems by saying that the arrangements in the field of industrial relations may be regarded as a system in the sense that each of them more or less intimately affects each of the others so that they constitute a group of arrangements for dealing with certain matters and are collectively responsible for certain results (Salamon, 2000). In effect, an industrial or labour relation is the system which produces the rules of the workplace. Such rules are the product of interaction between the workers or unions, employers and associated organizations and government (Ogunbameru, 2004).

The Dunlop's model gives great significance to external or environmental forces. In other words, management, labour, and the government possess a shared ideology that defines their roles within the relationship and provides stability to the system (Salamon, 2000). It can be explained further that economic recession in Nigeria has badly affected the system or pattern of relations among the labour and their employers.

This has led to ceaseless labour strikes and confrontations which are the offshoot of the recession; this has affected the cost and standard of living of the public servants. In order to bring about pleasant relations in Nigeria public service and other corporate entities, Dunlop (1958) suggested interactions, negotiation and dialogue among the labours and their government. There is the need for collaboration among the various principal actors to work out a plausible pattern of relations that can reinforce peaceful relations necessary for optimal productivity and performance in the public services

6. The Impacts of Economic Recession on the Nigerian Labours

Recession mostly leads to penury for the bulk of public servants thus reinforcing ongoing loss of employees by the way of down-sizing particularly through forced retirements or dismissals from the public service (Ogunbameru, 2004). However, in the recessionary periods, there are always the problems of neglect or by-pass of the indigenization schemes in the public service of Nigeria. More so, during the period of recession, there will always be the challenges of reducing capacity among the leadership of the labour union, and prevalence of both younger and unskilled hands (Yesufu, 1982).

In most cases, there will be growth in the number of hostile advocacy organisations and interest groups which fight industrial strategies of the government basically by outsourcing of operations and labours (Salamon, 2000). Lastly, there is usually increasing cases pertaining to removal of subsidies, down-sizing, rationalisation, bankruptcies, technological changes, privatization, commercialisation, as well as severe cut-backs in 'public expenditure' thereby leading to massive job losses.

7. Economic Recession and Labour Relations in Nigerian Public Service

The effects of the recession on labour relations in Nigeria public service are very pervasive owing to the fact that many public servants, mainly the junior staffs, often find it difficult to meet with the rising costs of living in the country. It is undeniable that some public servants cannot meet their financial obligations mostly the transactionary expenses. According to Okpara (2006), economic recession has affected some intermediary financial institutions such as insurance companies to which regular payments of premiums are due; some of them go out of business consequently reinforcing either job loss or deteriorating standard of living particularly among the employees (Yesufu, 1982).

This does not indicate that no job was created in the public service; but the jobs are not sufficient to make much difference especially when job creations are left mostly to government. Although there has been a corresponding growth in the development of certain skills and jobs accompanying rapid changes in technology, they are yet to contribute to the living standard of public servants whose purchasing power has declined overtime (Okpara, 2006). It is against this background that the government initiated the policy of deregulation which emphasizes enabling the private sectors to engage in some certain economic activities hitherto control wholly by the government.

The labour relations in Nigeria public service have been recently chaotic and turbulent due to incessant agitation and protests from the labours for upward salary review. The economic recession has affected the growth and efficiency in service delivery in the public sectors of Nigeria leading to unclear pattern of new relations between the public servants and their employers (Anyim, 2012). The cost of living is now high; the real values of labours' salary and wages have declined drastically thereby causing deteriorating conditions of life which reinforced open confrontation between the government and the organised labours (Salamon, 2000).

The fears of downsizing have led to various failed relations among the employers and the employees and this has led to unruly system of relations in diverse public services. Arising from this background, recession is viewed to contribute to lowering productivity and performance among public servants who have lost enthusiasm and motivation in their jobs and this constrain their commitment to national growth and production sustainability.

As can be expected, the economic recession seems to have severely modified the bargaining pattern of the organised labours. Fashoyin (1980) acknowledges that economic crisis appears to be tending towards centrifugal relationship by returning to erstwhile enterprise bargaining on many issues. But the unfolding shift may not necessarily be an indication of permanent loss of interest in multi-stakeholder bargaining. The shift could be seen as employers' preference to find solutions to their industrial problems on individual basis as this is more likely to produce quicker and pragmatic results.

The recession of Nigerian economy has caused the organised labour to lend support to some degree of deregulation in sectors of the economy dominated by highly inefficient publicly-owned companies (Okpara, 2006). This may help them to either sustain their jobs or improve their conditions of work and living. For example, it is not a question of whether public officials or staffs in the refineries of government agencies should be blamed for the state of the deteriorating public service delivery in the current times.

8. Presentation and Analysis of Data

This research paper adopts both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to explain the nexus between the recessionary period in Nigeria and the Public Service. Having reviewed some secondary data, the primary data were obtained through the administration of short standardized questionnaires to sample the opinions and responses of 120 randomly selected public servants in Ilesha West Local Government in Osun State and Abeokuta South Local Government in Ogun State both in Nigeria.

This centered on obtaining their perception on the impacts of the economic recession on labour relations in Nigerian public service. It is important to understand that 100 questionnaires were retrieved properly filled owing to some unavoidable constraints; the demographic composition of the respondents was not considered important in this research work. The results of the responses of the staffs were recorded as follows:

8.1. Analysis of Responses to the Research Questions

S/N	Economic Recession and Labour Relations in Nigeria	SA	A	D	SD	X	DECISION
1	Economic recession has negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service.	50 50%	38 38%	11 11%	1 1%	1.63	Strongly agree
2	Employees' productivity will greatly reduce in the period of economic recession.	50 50%	35 35%	11 11%	4 4%	1.69	Strongly agree
3	The public service depends on harmonious labour relations to cope with the effects of economic recession.	43 43%	36 36%	15 15%	6 6%	1.84	Strongly agree

Table 1: Economic Recession and Labour Relations in Nigeria

Source: Field Survey, 2018

In questionnaire item 1 namely: economic recession has negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service., the respondent noted strongly agree (50), agree (38), disagree (11) and strongly disagree (1) with a mean of 1.63. This implies that most of the respondents are of the view that economic recession has negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service. The questionnaire item 2 namely employees' productivity will greatly reduce in the period of economic recession had the respondents noted strongly agree (50), agree (35), disagree (11) and strongly disagree (4) with a mean of 1.69. This implies that most of the respondents are of view employees' productivity will greatly reduce in the period of economic recession. In questionnaire item 3 namely the public service depends on

harmonious labour relations to cope with the effects of economic recession the respondent noted strongly agree (43), agree (36), disagree (15) and strongly disagree (6) with the mean of 1.86. This implies that most of the respondents are of view that the public service depends on harmonious labour relations to cope with the effects of economic recession.

S/N	Problems of Economic Recession	Sa	A	D	Sd	X	Decision
4	The relations among the labours can be hampered in recessionary periods.	45 45%	31 31%	16 16%	8 8%	1.87	Strongly agree
5	Economic recession does not have negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service.	15 15%	18 18%	16 16%	51 51%	3.03	Strongly Disagree
6	Appropriate measures must be fostered to redress the scourges of recession on public service.	41 41%	34 34%	13 13%	12 12%	1.96	Strongly Agree

Table 2: Problems of Economic Recession

Source: Fieldwork (2018)

The questionnaire item 4 namely the relations among the labours can be hampered in recessionary periods, the respondent noted strongly agree (45), agree (31) and disagree (15) and strongly disagree (8) with the mean of 1.87. This implies that most of the respondents are of view that the relations among the labours can be hampered in recessionary periods. In questionnaire item 5 namely economic recession does not have negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service, the respondents noted strongly agree (15), agree (18), disagree (16) and strongly disagree (51) with the mean of 3.03. This implies that most of the respondents reject the view that economic recession does not have negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service. In questionnaire item 6 namely appropriate measures must be fostered to redress the scourges of recession on public service, the respondents noted strongly agree (41), agree (34), disagree (13) and strongly disagree (12) with the mean of 1.96. This implies that most of the respondents are of view that appropriate measures must be fostered to redress the scourges of recession on public service.

8.2. Data Analysis According to Test of Hypothesis

- Ho: Economic recession does not have negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service.
- Hi: Economic recession has negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service.

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly-Agree	50	25.0	25.0
Agree	38	25.0	13.0
Disagree	11	25.0	-14.0
Strongly-Disagree	1	25.0	-24.0
Total	100		

Table 3: Frequencies

Source: Computerized SPSS Result, (2018)

In the frequency table 4.4.1 above, it reveals that many more respondent agree that economic recession has negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service. While very fewer respondents disagree with this hypothesis. This leads to testing the validity of the proposition. See table below.

	Economic Recession Has Negative Effects on the Labour Relations in Nigeria Public Service.
Chi-Square	62.640 ^a
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Table 4: Test Statistics

a. 0 Cells (.0%) Have Expected Frequencies Less Than 5.

The Minimum Expected Cell Frequency Is 25.0. Source: Computerized SPSS Result

The degree of freedom for chi-square tabulated is given as (r-1)

Where r = Number of rows = 4

DF = (r-1) = 4-1

DF = 3

Chi-square level of significance is assumed to be 0.05 (5%). Therefore, chi-square tabulated (X^2) is given as 7.815.

8.3. Interpretation of the Hypothesis Testing

Since the critical value of chi-square (X^2 - tab) is lesser than chi-square calculated (X^2 - Cal) that is, (X^2 - Cal = 62.640 > X^2 - Tab = 7.815), we accept the alternative hypothesis (Hi) that economic recession has negative effects on the labour relations in Nigeria public service. Furthermore, the Asymp. Significance probability of not accepting this result is zero (0). Therefore, the result of the analysis shows that economic recession has negative effects on the labour relations in

Nigeria public service which totally agrees with that of many authors whose literatures were reviewed in the previous discussions.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is therefore concluded that the recession in Nigerian economy has had negative effects on the pattern or system of labour relations in Nigeria public service. This has fostered a series of confrontation, strikes and ruthless upheavals between the leadership of organised labours, the representatives of industries and the government. This has also led to the diverse demands for increase of salary with a view to meeting the rising cost of living for the public servants.

The recession caused the government to be presumably short of revenues due to the fall of oil price in the global markets; this has instigated interrupted payment of salary in many public services in Nigeria both at the national, state and local levels. It can also be concluded that economic recession has serious inimical effects on labour relations in Nigeria public service.

Against this backdrop, this research work will consequently recommend that rebuilding the industrial or organisational orientation and team culture are important and will involve paradigm shift in work culture and values. The aim is to change from busyness of employees to effectiveness of the employees as being busy may not necessarily imply effectiveness. Being busy and working hard without focus does not translate to realistic results the organization needed to be effective.

Re-orientation on the part of every employee and employer of labours need to become the critical organisational pursuit. There is also the need for change in Public Service's leadership focus which is highly imperative. The new leadership focus should be characterized by transparency, accountability, courage to effect necessary adjustments, sacrifice and incremental changes. There is the need to build organizational structure and procedures which need to be incessantly reviewed; complex structures should be reduced to simple ones.

There should be increased autonomy to improve decision making process and concentration on core areas. Nigerian government must formulate and implement strategic policies that will eradicate all forms of tribal, political and racial considerations in the appointments and recruitment processes and/or eliminate these vices totally. The business value system or rules of engagement in the public service should be redefined.

The government must also engage in succession planning which will prevent the chief executives of many Nigerian government's agencies and departments to be removed and replaced at will. The high turnover of the top management makes planning difficult, truncates strategic plan processes and kills any organization's initiatives to achieve a well-tailored succession plan. There should be a reversal of this unwholesome process.

Lastly, the government must ensure proactive personnel management which has to do with the application of emotional intelligence strategies to evaluate employees' emotional changes in the recessionary periods. More staff training and development should be initiated to make the labours become more attractive in the labour markets. This can be achieved with the introduction of Information and Communication Technology in the discharge of duties to reduce workload for the public servants. However, vast majority of the public servants should be sponsored to take certificated courses related to Information Technology, Management and Leadership to protect them against the horrible effects of economic recession.

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