Do university faculty members strike? : A study on strike propensity

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“The quality of a nation depends upon the quality of its citizens. The quality of its citizens depends not exclusively, but in critical measure upon the quality of their education, the quality of their education depends more than upon any single factor, upon the quality of their teacher.”

Abstract

Strike induces stand still circumstances in the work place where employees refuse to work and stand together for a cause backed up by the goals of union. Strike aids the employees to settle down their grievances and get their demands done through negotiation. Strike propensity is one of the major predictors of strike action. Although strike propensity does not necessarily end as actual strike action, it is a major reason for it. Strike propensity is the readiness to engage in strike action over a variety of issues and goals with the support of union. Strike affects the number of working days which reduces the opportunity to exchange knowledge between teachers and students and thereby the quality of education. It is detrimental to students’ learning. The factors that prompt faculty members to go on strike are increases in the work load, inadequate salary and perks, when the employees’ grievances are not redressed on time. The present study aims to understand the strike propensity of university faculty members in Tamil Nadu. The sample consisted of 51 faculty members from a State University Tamil Nadu. The 9 items strike propensity scale developed by McKelvie (1987) was used. The results revealed that there is no significant difference in employee strike propensity with regard to gender, marital status, area of residence and academic discipline.

Keywords: Strike, Strike Propensity and Strike Propensity Scale.

Introduction

According to Hornby (2001), strike is a period of time when an organized group of employees of a company stop working because of a disagreement over payment or certain conditions. Those employees who often engage in strike actions are called strikers. Conflict or disagreement is a common problem in any organization due to the diversity of workforce as well as the difference in goals pursued by the employees to and their organization. Strike propensity is a motivational concept reflecting the extent to which union members are willing to strike in support of goals articulated by the unions (Barling et al., 1992). Strike propensity means readiness to involve in strike action, it is
different from actual employee strike but it is considered as a strong predictor of employee’s and trade union’s strike.

Education is a vital factor in economic development (Jekayina, Yusuf, Yahaya, & Yusuf, 2011; Pillay, 2010). Nation can achieve economic growth and poverty reduction with higher quality education (Bloom, Canning, & Chan, 2005; Pillay, 2010). Becoming highly skilled workers through higher education helps to drive technological innovation through research which ultimately increases social productivity (Dabalen, Oni, & Adekola, 2000). According to Kuh (2003), colleges contribute to effective learning through the level of academic challenges, active and collaborative learning, students/teachers interaction, better education experience and supportive campus atmosphere. Interruptions in these processes due to strike impact the quality of education. Some of the reasons for teachers engaging in strikes are due to decrease in funding the system and lack of execution of collective bargaining agreements (Esenwa, 2003). In universities, faculty members engage in strike when their rights are denied or authorities are perceived to be engaging in unfair practices that affect them. Also, they go out in the street for getting their benefits. Recently, many strikes carried out in Indian Universities for the implementation of the 7th pay Commission’s recommendations.

On the other hand, when the university teachers engage in strike, the academic performance of the students are at risk. There are strong research evidences that teachers strike is tied to student’s poor quality of education. This results in the students lagging behind in their course and therefore the course is delayed of completion. There is a possibility that this can affect the motivation and competency of the students. The behaviors expressed by teachers influence the students. When teachers go on strike, students model these as ideal behaviors and they engage in strike even for minor issues later in their lives. These strikes can negatively affect human development (Edinyang, & Ubi, 2013) and thereby the human resources of the nation.

Odubela (2012) concluded that effective learning and enriching academic performance of each student will be possible only when the teachers teach the syllabus of the subject on time before the examinations. This become impossible when the strikes happen. Edinyang & Ubi (2013) found that disturbance in academic program as caused by the strike action leads to stress, disappointment, frustration, emotional and psychological trauma, lack of motivation for the students, this will affect the effective learning environment of the students and inhibits the human development.

**Need and Scope**

Strike propensity is the willingness to strike. Although it is not an action but it is a strong predictor of strike action (Barling et al. 1992). Strike propensity of the employees will help the management to get information regarding strike in advance. This will help both the employees and management to get in to the negotiation process to resolve their problem mostly with the help of the union. Union can resolve their member’s grievances and they can pressurize the management to settle the issues. This can inhibit the potential damages that could be caused by the strike. If the management knows that a union is under exogenous, identity related or political pressure to strike,
then it can make an inference that merely offering wage concession equal to union’s economic costs of striking will not be sufficient to avoid a stoppage of work or strike (Cohn, 1993).

Due to strike, a huge economic and industrial losses occur and therefore it has to be prevented. The employers and union parties who engage in sophisticated mutual gain negotiation acknowledge their dependence and their independence and accept that they have overlapping and different interests. They make agreement with regard to mutual commitment to freedom of association, good faith in bargaining, exhaustion of dispute producers, democracy, picket rules and non-violence. This is one of the effective method to prevent strike (Brand, 2010). Amadi and Precious (2015), most of the times strikes are used to pressure governments to make necessary amendments in the welfare of both academic and non-academic staff union of universities and necessary changes in the university infrastructural development and policies.

Methodology

Aim

The aim of the study is to understand the strike propensity of faculty members working in a state university.

Objectives

1. To assess the strike propensity among the faculty members of state university.
2. To study the strike propensity in the context of demographic details among the faculty members of state university.

Hypotheses

H_1: There will be a significant difference in strike propensity of faculty members based on gender

H_2: There will be a significant difference in strike propensity of faculty members based on Marital status

H_3: There will be a significant difference in strike propensity of faculty members based on the area of living

H_4: There will be a significant difference in strike propensity of faculty members based on academic discipline

Tools

To measure the strike propensity, a 9 items scale developed by McKelvie (1987) was used along with the informed consent from the participants. They were asked to fill the socio-demographic details before responding to the questionnaire.
Sample

A total of 51 faculty members from State University in Tamil Nadu participated in the study. Purposive sampling was adopted to select the participants. The participants were instructed to respond to the questionnaire genuinely and not to omit any of the statements.

Statistical Tests

Since the sample is non-normative, qualitative statistical procedures are ideal. Along with the mean rank, Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test were performed to find the difference among the mean groups.

Result and Discussion

Table-1 showing the demographic details of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Area of Living</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males=16</td>
<td>Single=6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Rural=15</td>
<td>Science=26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females=35</td>
<td>Married=45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-urban=19</td>
<td>Commerce &amp; Management =6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban=17</td>
<td>Social Science=19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in table 1, the sample consisted of 51 participants in which 16 are males and 35 are females. There are 6 singles and 45 married participants in the sample. Based on the area of residence, out of 51 participants, 15 are from rural areas, 19 are from semi-urban and 17 are from urban areas respectively. Most of the rural people come from an agriculture and farming background. They are not much aware of the strike and its impact. Mostly urbanites work in organizations or industries for others. Due to media exposure and technological advancement, they have knowledge regarding strike and the effect it can result. Academic discipline wise, there are 26, 6 and 19 participants from science, commerce/management and social science respectively. Science discipline deals with physics, chemistry, zoology, botany, mathematics etc. which pertains to physical, chemical and biological aspects of living and non-living things. Major area of study for commerce and management participants is accounting, business, finance and economics. It focus mainly on managerial aspects of the organization.

Table 2 shows the gender difference in strike propensity among university teaching faculty members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26.26</td>
<td>271NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NS= Not Significant
Hypothesis No. 1 tested: There will be a significant difference in strike propensity of faculty members based on gender. Hypothesis is not confirmed. Gender difference is not observed in the strike propensity of faculty members.

From the table 2, it is clear that there are 16 males and 35 females in the sample. The mean rank of strike propensity for males is 25.44 and for females is 26.26 respectively. It shows that there is no significant gender difference in strike propensity with regard to gender ($U = 271$, $p = 0.85$). Earlier men used to engage in blue collar, white collar or pink collar jobs. Females are occupied with household chores only. Women were expected to look after their families, especially children whereas men were expected to earn the income for the family. These sacrifices that women make restrict the spectrum of education, careers and social life outside the family (Martin, 1989). Now in the 21st century, the egalitarian roles of men and women are given the prime importance and hence both share the work at home as well as at work for bread and butter. Majority of the males and females have to juggle between work and family (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2013) and so they encounter similar kind of workplace related issues. This might have developed a similar strike prone behaviour across the gender.

Table 3 shows the difference in strike propensity of university faculty members across marital status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25.77</td>
<td>$124.5^{NS}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$NS = $ Not Significant

Hypothesis No. 2 tested: Marital status will significantly differentiate the strike propensity of the employees. Hypothesis is not confirmed. No significant difference is found in employee strike propensity among the faculty members based on their marital status.

From the table 3, it is clear that there are 6 single and 45 married faculties are in the sample. The mean rank of strike propensity for single teachers is 27.75 and married teachers is 25.77 respectively. It is observed that there is no significant difference in strike propensity with regard to marital status ($U = 124.5$, $p = 0.75$). Married people have to concentrate on running the family and raising their kids. Also, they have to focus on their job as well. Whereas single employees can spend enough time and space for other activities they would like to engage in as they are concentrated only towards their job and do not have much family responsibilities (Padmanabhan & Magesh, 2016). According to Klinenberg (2012), people who live alone exhibit more socially active behaviors than married people. Since the single faculty members are educated, aware of the injustice happening in the society and being socially active, they tend to show more willingness to engage in strike rather than the married employees. But, the difference is not significant as both the group had scores with little differences.
Table 4 shows the difference in area of residence with regard to Strike Propensity among university faculty members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.47</td>
<td>0.64NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-urban</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \chi^2 = 0.64 \); \( p = 0.72 \)

Hypothesis No.3 tested: Strike propensity of the employees will differ based on their area of residence. The hypothesis is not confirmed. Based on the area of residence, the strike propensity of the faculty members do not vary.

From the table 4, it is clear that there are 15 rural, 19 semi-urban and 17 urban university faculty members in the sample. The mean rank of strike propensity for teachers who are from rural area is 23.47, teachers who are coming from semi-urban area is 26.74 and teachers who are coming from urban area is 27.41 respectively. It is found that there is no significant difference in strike propensity among faculty members with regard to their area of residence (\( \chi^2 = 0.64, p = 0.72 \)). The urban faculty members showed higher strike propensity when compared to rural teachers even though no significant difference is obtained. This may be due to the reason that urban people are more exposed to the knowledge how employees could be exploited due to the media advancement. People from different walks of life, especially the urbanites are exposed to all the updated social events and news. So they have become aware of what is happening around them instantly. This awareness would have helped them to form an opinion and take a position towards strike. This is reflected in the pattern of mean scores starting from urban, semi-urban and rural participants.

Table 5 shows the difference in Strike Propensity based on academic discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25.54</td>
<td>1.61NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce &amp; Management</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \chi^2 = 1.61 \); \( p = 0.72 \)

Hypothesis No.4 tested: There will be a significant difference in the strike propensity with regard to academic discipline of the faculty members. The hypothesis is not confirmed. Hence, no significant difference is found in the strike propensity based on the discipline among faculty members.

From table 5, it is clear that there are 26 science, 6 commerce and management and 19 social science university faculty members in the sample. The mean rank of strike propensity for teachers who belong to science discipline is 25.54, teachers who belong to commerce and management
discipline is 19.92 and teachers who belong to social science discipline is 28.55 respectively. It is found that there is no significant difference in strike propensity with regard to discipline \( (\chi^2 = 1.61, p = 0.44) \). The one who studies and teaches social science are concerned about the social problems as they have a larger understanding about it. They are aware of the injustice happening to them and others and ways to react to it through proper channel. This may motivate them to express high strike propensity to engage in strike. The main purpose of social sciences is neither for introspective self-observation nor is limited to the critical analysis of the society. It focuses on problem areas and alternative courses of action within society itself including politics. Researches of social sciences can also identify of new forms of discrimination and exclusion, and to alerting policy-makers to the need to address these issues (Soros, 2012). This may be the reason why social science faculty members scored higher when compared to other disciplines.

Conclusion

The faculty members “thinking that engaging in strike is necessary” is the acceptance that the strike is acceptable for genuine reasons. In reality, when the teachers engage in the strike, the studies of students will be affected. This results in the loss of valuable time of students. So, it is the responsibility of the management to address perceived grievances and take necessary steps to prevent strike which causes potential damage to the management and employees as well as the students. A harmonious educational environment is necessary for the country to thrive.

Limitations

- Sample size used in the study is limited.
- The participants are selected from one university only.
- Findings cannot be generalized.

Suggestions

- More than one institution can be included in future study.
- The future study can take into account a large sample size for better results and generalizations.

Implications

A positive employer-employee relationship should be maintained and a safe and secure workplace atmosphere should be provided for the employees. Management should promote positive and healthy union activities in the organization. Management can provide programmes to enrich the faculty members so that they won’t view management as hostile.
References


