

LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF NIGERIA

Ukanwa Anayo Cyprian
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Faculty of Social Sciences
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka,
Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: ca.ukanwa@unizik.edu.ng
Phone number: 09068805363

Abstract

This study examined labour market participation and conditions of employment in South-East Nigeria, focusing on economically active persons, employees, employers, and labour officials across major economic hubs including Onitsha, Aba, Nnewi, and Enugu. The objectives were to assess the level and patterns of labour market participation, evaluate prevailing conditions of employment, and determine the relationship between labour market participation and employment conditions in the region. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from a sample of 220 respondents using a closed-ended structured questionnaire measured on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). Mean scores and standard deviations were used to analyse responses, while hypotheses were tested using Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA). The findings indicated a relatively high level of labour market participation, with respondents reporting active engagement in economic activities (mean = 2.90, SD = 0.96) and a predominance of informal employment (mean = 2.98, SD = 0.97). However, conditions of employment were largely unfavourable, as reflected in low job security (mean = 2.32, SD = 1.07), inadequate income (mean = 2.41, SD = 1.05), and weak enforcement of labour laws (mean = 2.31, SD = 1.08). The MANCOVA results revealed statistically significant differences in employment conditions across levels of labour market participation (Wilks' Lambda = 0.664, F = 8.941, $p < 0.05$). The study therefore concluded that although labour market participation in South-East Nigeria is high, it is largely necessity-driven and constrained by poor employment quality. The study recommends strengthening regulatory enforcement, improving wages and employment benefits, promoting skills development, and implementing policies that ensure not only access to employment but also improved working conditions in the region.

Key words: Employment Conditions, Human Capital Development, Informal work, Labour Market Participation, Secure Employment

Introduction

Labour market participation remains a central issue in development debates because it directly reflects how people engage with economic opportunities and how fairly work outcomes are distributed across regions and social groups in Nigeria (Francis Agyei-Sasu, 2023). In the South East of Nigeria, labour market participation is shaped by a mix of historical trading culture, limited industrial growth, and a rising youth population that increasingly struggles to find stable employment opportunities (Chukwudi Eze et al., 2024). National data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that Nigeria's unemployment and underemployment rates combined stood at over 33 percent in recent labour force reports, with the South East recording higher youth vulnerability compared to national averages due to weak private sector absorption (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). While participation rates appear high in informal activities such as petty trading and self employment, many of these jobs are characterised by low earnings, job insecurity, and absence of social protection, which raises concerns about the quality rather than the quantity of employment (Ayodeji Obayelu et al., 2020). Studies on rural and semi urban labour markets indicate that young people often participate out of necessity rather than choice, reflecting survival driven engagement rather than productive employment (Abdulrahman Rufai et al., 2021). In the South East, female participation shows a steady presence in agriculture and informal enterprises, yet persistent gender gaps remain in access to secure jobs and income levels, suggesting uneven employment conditions despite visible engagement (Ayodeji Obayelu et al., 2020). Global labour statistics from the International Labour Organisation reveal that Sub Saharan Africa records one of the highest rates of vulnerable employment worldwide, a pattern that mirrors labour realities in South East Nigeria where informality dominates (International Labour Organisation, 2023). While some scholars argue that high labour participation signals resilience, others note that poor employment conditions can weaken long term productivity and deepen socio economic inequality, especially when growth does not translate into decent work opportunities (Francis Agyei-Sasu, 2023). This implies that analysing labour market participation without equal attention to employment conditions gives an incomplete picture of labour outcomes in the South East of Nigeria (Chukwudi Eze et al., 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Despite widespread participation in economic activities across the South East of Nigeria, the region continues to experience rising unemployment, underemployment, and poor job quality, particularly among youths and women (Chukwudi Eze et al., 2024). Official labour force statistics indicate that many individuals counted as employed work fewer hours than desired or earn incomes below subsistence levels, raising questions about the real benefits of labour market engagement (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). While Abdulrahman Rufai et al. (2021) argue that labour participation among rural youths has increased due to informal sector expansion, this growth has not translated into improved employment security or welfare outcomes. In the South East, enterprise based work dominates, yet access to credit, training, and stable markets remains limited, exposing workers to unstable incomes and economic shocks (Godwin Onuekwusi et al., 2020). Gender disparities further complicate the problem, as women participate actively but are often concentrated in low paying and vulnerable jobs with minimal legal protection (Ayodeji Obayelu et al., 2020). This disconnect between participation levels and employment conditions suggests that labour engagement alone does not guarantee decent work outcomes in the region (Francis Agyei-Sasu, 2023). Therefore, understanding how labour market participation interacts with conditions of employment is necessary to explain persistent socio economic challenges in the South East of Nigeria (Chukwudi Eze et al., 2024).

Objective of the Study

1. To examine the level and pattern of labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria.
2. To assess the conditions of employment among workers in the South East of Nigeria.
3. To determine the relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the level and pattern of labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria?
2. What are the prevailing conditions of employment among workers in the South East of Nigeria?
3. Is there a relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria?

of Nigeria are not significantly favourable.

H₁₂: Conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria are significantly favourable.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria.

H₁₃: There is a significant relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Labour Market

The labour market refers to the space where labour services are offered by individuals and demanded by employers, shaping how people access jobs, wages, and working conditions within an economy (Oluwaseun Ayodeji & Basirat, 2020). In Nigeria, the labour market is largely informal, meaning many workers operate outside formal contracts and regulatory protection, which affects job stability and income security (International Labour Organisation, 2023). While classical economic views treat the labour market as a neutral mechanism of supply and demand, this assumption fails to capture structural inequalities related to gender, disability, and education that influence participation outcomes (Oluwaseun Ayodeji et al., 2020). Efayena and Ichoku argue that access to labour opportunities in developing economies is uneven, with disadvantaged groups facing systematic barriers even when willing to work (Efayena & Ichoku, 2024). In the South East of Nigeria, labour markets are shaped by trading culture, small scale manufacturing, and limited public sector absorption, which narrows formal employment options (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Global evidence shows that where labour markets lack strong institutions, employment often becomes survival driven rather than productivity enhancing, a trend visible across Nigerian states (World Bank, 2023). Based on this understanding, the labour market in the South East reflects not just participation levels but also the quality and sustainability of work available to the population (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

The Level and Pattern of Labour Market Participation in the South East of Nigeria

Labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria is relatively high when measured by engagement in economic activity, yet much of this participation occurs in informal and vulnerable forms of work (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Youths and women dominate sectors such as petty trading, agriculture, and micro enterprises, reflecting necessity driven entry rather than structured employment growth (Oladokun & Olubunmi, 2024). While Mohammed and colleagues highlight that education improves women participation rates nationally, in the South East this advantage is often weakened by limited access to formal jobs (Mohammed et al., 2020).

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics indicate that underemployment remains widespread, with many individuals working fewer hours than desired despite being counted as employed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Disability further shapes participation patterns, as Efayena and Ichoku note that persons with disabilities are significantly less likely to be employed even when qualified (Efayena & Ichoku, 2024). Rural participation remains high due to agricultural reliance, yet earnings are unstable and seasonal, reinforcing income insecurity (International Labour Organisation, 2023). This implies that labour participation figures alone may overstate economic inclusion in the South East, as participation does not always translate into decent or secure employment outcomes (World Bank, 2023).

The Conditions of Employment among Workers in the South East of Nigeria

Conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria are shaped by informality, weak labour regulation enforcement, and limited access to social protection for workers (International Labour Organisation, 2023). Many workers operate without written contracts, paid leave, or health insurance, which exposes them to income shocks and workplace vulnerability (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Agbaje and colleagues report that workplace gender based violence remains a concern among employed women in the region, reflecting unsafe and unequal work environments (Oluwaseun Agbaje et al., 2021). While Anosa argues that human capital development improves productivity, many firms fail to invest consistently in training due to cost pressures and short term planning (Ifeanyi Anosa, 2021). Employee participation in decision making is uneven, with Ezeanolue and Ezeanyim noting that limited voice reduces morale and organisational performance in manufacturing firms (Emeka Ezeanolue & Ezeanyim, 2020). Banking and university sectors show slightly better conditions, yet engagement still varies by job grade and employment status (Phina et al., 2021). Therefore, employment conditions in the South East remain fragile, reflecting broader structural weaknesses within Nigeria labour institutions (World Bank, 2023).

The Relationship between Labour Market Participation and Conditions of Employment in the South East of Nigeria

The relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria reveals a clear mismatch between engagement and job quality (International Labour Organisation, 2023). High participation rates often coexist with poor working conditions, suggesting that individuals accept unfavourable jobs due to limited alternatives (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). While Chinedu Eze and colleagues observe that inclusive employment practices improve engagement among senior staff, such benefits rarely extend to lower level or informal workers (Chinedu Eze et al., 2024). Ayodeji and Basirat argue that women may participate actively in the labour force yet experience exploitation and rights violations within workplaces (Oluwaseun Ayodeji & Basirat, 2020). Similarly, disability related exclusion limits not only participation but also access to decent working environments for affected individuals (Efayena & Ichoku, 2024). Where organisational climate is supportive, employee engagement improves, but this remains uneven across sectors in the South East (Phina et al., 2021). Thus, participation without improvement in employment conditions risks reinforcing inequality rather than promoting inclusive economic development in the region (World Bank, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Human Capital Theory, which explains labour market participation and employment outcomes as products of investment in education, skills, and health (Gary Becker, 1964). The theory was propounded by Gary Becker in 1964, arguing that individuals who invest more in human capital are more likely to participate actively in the labour market and secure better employment conditions (Gary Becker, 1964). Its major assumption is that education and skill acquisition raise productivity, which in turn improves earnings, job stability, and working conditions for individuals (Theodore Schultz, 1961). While Becker emphasises rational individual investment decisions, in the Nigerian context structural barriers often limit returns on such investments, especially in regions with weak labour institutions like the South East (International Labour Organisation, 2023). The theory is relevant to this study because variations in education and skills help explain differences in participation levels and employment quality across workers in the South East of Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). It applies to the study by linking low skill employment to poor job conditions and informal work that dominates the regional labour market (World Bank, 2023). Critics argue that Human Capital Theory underplays labour market discrimination and institutional failures, which often prevent skilled individuals from accessing decent jobs (Efayena & Ichoku, 2024). Based on this understanding, the theory is adopted because it provides a clear lens to analyse how skill investment interacts with participation and employment conditions in the South East of Nigeria (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design because it allowed data to be collected directly from respondents on labour market participation and employment conditions as they existed in the South East of Nigeria

(Kothari, 2004). This design was suitable because it enabled the researcher to describe opinions, patterns, and relationships without manipulating variables (Goundar, 2012). Descriptive surveys were appropriate for labour studies since they captured real life employment experiences across diverse groups (Bhattacharyya, 2006). The design supported the use of structured questionnaires and quantitative analysis, which strengthened objectivity and comparability of responses (Patel & Patel, 2019). Based on this understanding, the research design aligned well with the study objectives and hypotheses (Daniel & Sam, 2011).

The area of the study covered the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, focusing on major economic hubs such as Onitsha, Aba, Nnewi, and Enugu where labour activities were concentrated (Davidavičienė, 2018). These cities were selected because they hosted dense clusters of traders, manufacturers, service providers, and public institutions (Kothari, 2004). The region represented a mix of formal and informal labour markets, making it suitable for examining participation and employment conditions (Gupta & Gupta, 2022). Studying these locations improved the relevance of findings by reflecting real labour dynamics across urban and semi urban settings (Goddard & Melville, 2004).

The population of the study consisted of the economically active population, employees, employers, and labour officials in the South East of Nigeria (Bhattacharyya, 2006). This group was appropriate because they were directly involved in labour market participation and employment regulation (Kothari, 2004). Employees provided insight into working conditions, while employers offered perspectives on hiring practices and job structures (Patel & Patel, 2019). Labour officials contributed regulatory and policy viewpoints that enriched the analysis (Goundar, 2012). This population ensured balanced representation of labour demand, supply, and oversight within the region (Gupta & Gupta, 2022).

A sample size of 220 respondents was selected for the study to ensure adequate representation while remaining manageable for detailed analysis (Kothari, 2004). Stratified random sampling was used to divide respondents into employees, employers, economically active individuals, and labour officials to capture diverse perspectives (Bhattacharyya, 2006). This technique reduced bias and improved precision by ensuring each subgroup was fairly represented (Daniel & Sam, 2011). Stratification was suitable for labour studies where population characteristics varied widely across roles and locations such as Aba and Onitsha (Patel & Patel, 2019).

Data were collected using a closed ended structured questionnaire designed on a four point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree (Kothari, 2004). This instrument was chosen because it simplified responses and improved consistency across participants (Goundar, 2012). The Likert scale enabled quantification of perceptions on labour participation and employment conditions (Bhattacharyya, 2006). Structured questionnaires were appropriate for large samples and allowed for efficient statistical analysis (Patel & Patel, 2019).

The validity of the questionnaire was ensured through content and face validation by research and labour experts (Kothari, 2004). Experts reviewed the items to confirm alignment with the study objectives and clarity of wording (Davidavičienė, 2018). This process ensured that the instrument measured labour participation and employment conditions accurately (Bhattacharyya, 2006). Validity checks reduced ambiguity and strengthened the credibility of findings (Goddard & Melville, 2004).

Reliability was established through a pilot study conducted outside the main sample area (Patel & Patel, 2019). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess internal consistency of the questionnaire items (Kothari, 2004). This method was suitable because it measured the stability of responses across similar items (Gupta & Gupta, 2022). Reliable instruments ensured that results were consistent and reproducible (Bhattacharyya, 2006).

Data were collected through direct administration of questionnaires to respondents in workplaces and labour offices across Enugu, Aba, Nnewi, and Onitsha (Daniel & Sam, 2011). This approach improved response rates and allowed clarification where necessary (Goundar, 2012). Physical distribution ensured inclusion of respondents with limited digital access (Kothari, 2004). The method supported accuracy and completeness of data collected (Patel & Patel, 2019).

Mean scores and standard deviation were used to analyse questionnaire responses because they summarised central tendencies and dispersion effectively (Bhattacharyya, 2006). These tools were appropriate for Likert scale data and allowed easy interpretation of respondents' views (Kothari, 2004). Mean analysis supported comparison across labour groups and locations (Patel & Patel, 2019). Therefore, descriptive statistics provided a clear picture of labour participation patterns and employment conditions (Gupta & Gupta, 2022).

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance was used to test the hypotheses because it examined relationships between labour participation and employment conditions while controlling for background variables (Daniel & Sam, 2011). MANCOVA was suitable for analysing multiple dependent variables simultaneously (Kothari, 2004). This method improved accuracy by reducing error variance and isolating key effects (Bhattacharyya, 2006). Based on this understanding, MANCOVA strengthened the robustness of the study findings (Gupta & Gupta, 2022).

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents (n = 220)

Variable	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	117
	Female	103
Age	18 to 25	41
	26 to 35	69
	36 to 45	63
	46 and above	47
Employment Status	Employee	87
	Employer	51
	Self employed	63
	Labour official	19
Sector	Public	61
	Private	79
	Informal	80
State	Abia	43
	Anambra	59
	Ebonyi	31
	Enugu	47
	Imo	40

Source: Field survey, 2025

The demographic profile showed a fairly balanced gender distribution, indicating broad inclusion of economically active individuals across the South East. Most respondents fell within the 26 to 45 age bracket, suggesting that the data largely reflected views of the most active labour force segment. Employees and self employed individuals formed the majority, which strengthened insight into real workplace experiences. Informal sector dominance reflected the labour reality in hubs such as Onitsha, Aba, and Nnewi. Representation across all five states ensured geographical balance. Based on this understanding, the demographic spread was adequate to support meaningful analysis of labour participation and employment conditions in the region.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question One

What is the level and pattern of labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria?

Table 2: Labour Market Participation

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Active engagement in work	71 (32.3%)	83 (37.7%)	39 (17.7%)	27 (12.3%)	2.90	0.96
Availability of jobs	49 (22.3%)	67 (30.5%)	63 (28.6%)	41 (18.6%)	2.56	1.01
Participation by necessity	77 (35.0%)	69 (31.4%)	43 (19.5%)	31 (14.1%)	2.87	0.98
Youth participation	83 (37.7%)	71 (32.3%)	41 (18.6%)	25 (11.4%)	2.97	0.94
Dominance of informal work	91 (41.4%)	63 (28.6%)	37 (16.8%)	29 (13.2%)	2.98	0.97

Source: Field survey, 2025

Responses indicated a high level of labour participation, largely driven by necessity rather than job availability. Informal work emerged strongly, especially in Aba and Onitsha where trading and small enterprises dominate. Youth involvement remained high despite limited formal opportunities. Although participation was widespread, disagreement responses revealed concerns about job access quality. Therefore, labour participation in the South East appeared active but survival driven rather than opportunity based.

Research Question Two

What are the prevailing conditions of employment among workers in the South East of Nigeria?

Table 3: Conditions of Employment

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Reasonable income	39 (17.7%)	61 (27.7%)	71 (32.3%)	49 (22.3%)	2.41	1.05
Job security	33 (15.0%)	57 (25.9%)	77 (35.0%)	53 (24.1%)	2.32	1.07
Fair working conditions	41 (18.6%)	59 (26.8%)	69 (31.4%)	51 (23.2%)	2.41	1.06
Access to benefits	81 (36.8%)	67 (30.5%)	43 (19.5%)	29 (13.2%)	2.91	0.98
Labour law enforcement	37 (16.8%)	49 (22.3%)	79 (35.9%)	55 (25.0%)	2.31	1.08

Source: Field survey, 2025

Employment conditions were generally perceived as weak. Low mean scores reflected dissatisfaction with income, job security, and enforcement of labour laws. Respondents from informal clusters in Nnewi and Aba showed stronger disagreement, indicating vulnerability. While some access to benefits existed, it remained uneven. This implies that employment quality lagged behind participation levels across the region.

Research Question Three

Is there a relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria?

Table 4: Labour Participation and Employment Conditions

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Participation without quality	87 (39.5%)	69 (31.4%)	41 (18.6%)	23 (10.5%)	3.00	0.92
Acceptance of poor jobs	91 (41.4%)	63 (28.6%)	39 (17.7%)	27 (12.3%)	2.99	0.95
Better conditions raise participation	83 (37.7%)	71 (32.3%)	43 (19.5%)	23 (10.5%)	2.97	0.93
Skills improve job quality	79 (35.9%)	69 (31.4%)	47 (21.4%)	25 (11.3%)	2.92	0.95
Poor conditions discourage workers	89 (40.5%)	67 (30.5%)	41 (18.6%)	23 (10.4%)	3.01	0.91

Source: Field survey, 2025

Findings showed a strong relationship between labour participation and employment conditions. High agreement levels confirmed that poor job quality pushed people into unstable work while discouraging long term engagement. Respondents agreed that improved conditions would attract sustained participation. Thus, labour participation without decent employment reinforced inequality rather than economic progress in the South East.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant level of labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria.

H₁₁: There is a significant level of labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria.

Table 5: MANCOVA Result for Labour Market Participation

Source	Value	F	df	Sig
Wilks' Lambda	0.712	6.483	5, 212	0.000
Pillai's Trace	0.288	6.483	5, 212	0.000
Hotelling's Trace	0.404	6.483	5, 212	0.000

Source: Field survey, 2025

The MANCOVA result showed a significant effect of labour market participation variables on the dependent measures, as the significance value was less than 0.05. This result indicated that labour market participation in the South East was statistically meaningful rather than random. Responses across active engagement, youth involvement, and informal work patterns contributed strongly to this outcome. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria existed at a significant level, even though its quality varied across sectors and locations.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria are not significantly favourable.

H₁₂: Conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria are significantly favourable.

Table 6: MANCOVA Result for Conditions of Employment

Source	Value	F	df	Sig
Wilks' Lambda	0.841	3.212	5, 212	0.008
Pillai's Trace	0.159	3.212	5, 212	0.008
Hotelling's Trace	0.189	3.212	5, 212	0.008

Source: Field survey, 2025

The MANCOVA output revealed a significant result since the probability value was below the 0.05 threshold. However, the direction of responses showed that employment conditions were largely unfavourable. This statistical significance reflected strong agreement among respondents regarding poor income levels, weak job security, and limited labour law enforcement. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted statistically but interpreted negatively in practice. Based on this understanding, employment conditions in the South East were significantly present but largely unfavourable to workers.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria.

H₁₃: There is a significant relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria.

Table 7: MANCOVA Result for Labour Market Participation and Employment Conditions

Source	Value	F	df	Sig
Wilks' Lambda	0.664	8.941	5, 212	0.000
Pillai's Trace	0.336	8.941	5, 212	0.000
Hotelling's Trace	0.506	8.941	5, 212	0.000

Source: Field survey, 2025

The MANCOVA results showed a strong and statistically significant relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment. The low Wilks' Lambda value and high F statistic confirmed that changes in participation patterns were closely linked to employment quality. Respondents consistently indicated that poor conditions pushed individuals into informal participation, while improved conditions could encourage stable engagement. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that labour participation and employment conditions were deeply connected in shaping labour outcomes in the South East of Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What is the level and pattern of labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria?

The study found that labour market participation in the South East of Nigeria was relatively high but largely informal, youth driven, and shaped by necessity rather than choice, as many respondents engaged in self employment and casual work due to limited formal opportunities. This finding aligns with Anosa (2021), who observed that weak industrial absorption capacity in the South East pushes economically active individuals into informal and survival based employment. Similarly, Chinedu Eze et al. (2024) reported that employment participation in the region is sustained more by individual resilience than institutional support. While these scholars stress engagement levels, this study extends the argument by showing that participation patterns reflect structural labour market weaknesses. Based on this understanding, labour participation exists strongly but follows unstable and unregulated paths (Anosa, 2021; Chinedu Eze et al., 2024).

Research Question 2: What are the prevailing conditions of employment among workers in the South East of Nigeria?

The findings revealed that conditions of employment in the South East were largely unfavourable, characterised by low wages, weak job security, limited benefits, and inconsistent enforcement of labour standards. This mirrors the findings of Phina et al. (2021), who noted that poor organisational climate in South East institutions negatively affects employee welfare and commitment. Agbaje et al. (2021) also highlighted unsafe and unsupportive workplace environments, especially for vulnerable workers, which reinforces the present study's evidence of poor employment conditions. While these studies focus on specific sectors, the current findings broaden the scope by showing that unfavourable conditions cut across both formal and informal employment. Therefore, employment conditions remain a central challenge shaping worker experiences in the region (Phina et al., 2021; Agbaje et al., 2021).

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment in the South East of Nigeria?

The study established a strong relationship between labour market participation and conditions of employment, indicating that poor employment conditions often push individuals into informal or unstable participation. This supports Anosa (2021), who argued that inadequate human capital investment leads to poor job quality, which in turn affects how workers engage with the labour market. Chinedu Eze et al. (2024) similarly observed that when employment conditions are inclusive and supportive, employee engagement improves significantly. While these authors focus on organisational settings, the present study shows that at a regional level, poor conditions reduce sustainable participation. Thus, labour participation patterns cannot be separated from the quality of employment

available. This implies that improving conditions would directly reshape labour market behaviour in the South East (Anosa, 2021; Chinedu Eze et al., 2024).

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that labour market participation in South-East Nigeria is active but uneven and predominantly informal. A large proportion of individuals engage in economic activities not because employment conditions are attractive, but because survival necessitates participation in any available form of work. Consequently, labour market participation alone does not constitute an indicator of healthy labour market outcomes.

The study further revealed that conditions of employment remain weak, characterized by low job security, inadequate wages, and poor enforcement of labour standards across sectors. As a result, employment quality emerged as a more critical concern than the mere availability of work.

More importantly, a significant relationship was found between labour market participation and conditions of employment, suggesting that unfavourable employment conditions are associated with unstable and informal forms of labour market participation. This implies that improvements in employment conditions could influence participation patterns, encouraging a shift towards more formal and sustainable employment. Therefore, labour market policies in South-East Nigeria should extend beyond job creation to include deliberate efforts to improve the quality and security of work. In this regard, meaningful development requires attention not only to access to employment but also to the dignity and conditions attached to it.

Recommendations

Government at both the federal and state levels should strengthen labour regulations and ensure their effective enforcement, particularly in informality-dominated economic centres such as Aba and Onitsha. This would help protect workers from unfair labour practices and enhance job security and stability.

Employers should be encouraged, through a combination of incentives and regulatory monitoring, to provide improved working conditions, fair wages, and basic employment benefits. Better workplace conditions are likely to promote sustained labour market participation and increased productivity.

Labour unions and labour officials should intensify awareness and sensitisation campaigns to educate workers about their rights and obligations under existing labour laws. Such efforts would empower employees to advocate for improved working conditions and support compliance with labour standards.

Finally, policies aimed at skills development and human capital enhancement should be prioritised. Improved skills acquisition would enhance workers' employability and enable access to higher-quality employment, thereby strengthening the overall labour market in South-East Nigeria.

References

- Agbaje, O. S., Arua, C. K., Umeifekwem, J. E., Umoke, P. C. I., Igbokwe, C. C., Iwuagwu, T. E., ... & Obande-Ogbuinya, E. N. (2021). Workplace gender-based violence and associated factors among university women in Enugu, South-East Nigeria: an institutional-based cross-sectional study. *BMC women's health*, 21(1), 124.
- Agyei-Sasu, F. (2023). *Structural transformation and labour market development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evidence from Ghana and Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn).
- Anosa, I. (2021). Human capital development and organizational productivity in selected manufacturing firms South-East. *International Journal of Business & Law Research*, 9(1), 39-51.
- Anosa, I. (2021). Human capital development and organizational productivity in selected manufacturing firms South-East. *International Journal of Business & Law Research*, 9(1), 39-51.
- Ayodeji, O., & Basirat, A. A. (2020). Empowered but violated: Study of intimate partner violence and women labour force participation in Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Business and Social Sciences*.
- Bhattacharyya, D. K. (2006). *Research methodology*. Excel Books India.
- Chinedu-Eze, V. C., Emerole, G. A., & Osuala, A. E. (2024). Inclusive employment and employees' engagement of senior staff in selected federal universities in South-East, Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research*, 10(8), 439-449.
- Daniel, P. S., & Sam, A. G. (2011). *Research methodology*. Gyan Publishing House.
- Davidavičienė, V. (2018). Research methodology: An introduction. In *Modernizing the academic teaching and research environment: Methodologies and cases in business research* (pp. 1-23). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Efayena, O. O., & Ichoku, E. H. (2024). The disability gap in employment in developing economies: Evidence from the Nigerian labour market. *Economic Annals*, 69(242), 129-153.
- Eze, C., Chikeleze, O., & Okwueze, O. (2024). Youth unemployment and socio-economic development in south East Nigeria: The Nexus. *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, 16(1), 258-281.

- Ezeanolue, E. T., & Ezeanyim, E. E. (2020). Employee participation in decision making and organizational productivity in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Development and Policy Studies*, 8(1), 110-124.
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, Nigeria. (2022). Annual report on labour conditions in Nigeria. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment. <https://www.labour.gov.ng>
- Goddard, W., & Melville, S. (2004). Research methodology: An introduction. Juta and Company Ltd.
- Goundar, S. (2012). Research methodology and research method. Victoria University of Wellington, 1(1), 1-47.
- Gupta, A., & Gupta, N. (2022). Research methodology. SBPD publications.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2023). ILOSTAT database: Employment by sector and region. Geneva: International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/ilostat>
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). Research methodology: Methods and techniques. New Age International.
- Mohammed, O. A., Njiforti, P. P., & Rafindadi, S. A. (2020). Analysis of the impact of reproductive health outcome on women labour force participation and earnings in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 8(1), 93-116.
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria. (2022). Unemployment and underemployment report. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria. (2023). Labour force statistics report 2023. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>
- Noor, K. B. M. (2008). Case study: A strategic research methodology. *American journal of applied sciences*, 5(11), 1602-1604.
- Obayelu, A. E., Ogbe, A. O., & Edewor, S. E. (2020). Gender gaps and female labour participation in agriculture in Nigeria. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 11(2), 285-300.
- Oladokun, Y., & Olubunmi, A. (2024). Female Education and Employment in Nigeria. *Mujer Andina*, 2(2), 179-193.
- Onuekwusi, G. C., Odoemelam, L. E., & Alocha, O. C. (2020). Determinants of Enterprise Choice of Women Participants in South East Entrepreneurship Development Programme, Abia State, Nigeria. *Journal of Community & Communication Research*, 5(1), 152-159.
- Ørngreen, R., & Levinsen, K. (2017). Workshops as a research methodology. *The Electronic Journal of e-learning*, 15(1), 70-81.
- Patel, M., & Patel, N. (2019). Exploring research methodology. *International Journal of Research and Review*, 6(3), 48-55.
- Degu, G., & Yigzaw, T. (2006). Research methodology.
- Phina, O. N., Ogechukwuand, N. N., & Shallom, A. A. (2021). Organizational climate and employee engagement: A commercial bank perspective in Southeast Nigeria. *Annals of Management and Organization Research*, 2(3), 161-173.
- Rajasekar, D., & Verma, R. (2013). Research methodology. Archers & Elevators Publishing House.
- Panneerselvam, R. (2004). Research methodology. PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd..
- Rufai, A. M., Ogunniyi, A. I., Salman, K. K., Salawu, M. B., & Omotayo, A. O. (2021). Rural transformation and labor market outcomes among rural youths in Nigeria. *Sustainability*, 13(24), 13794.
- Saharan, V. A., Kulhari, H., Jadhav, H., Pooja, D., Banerjee, S., & Singh, A. (2024). Introduction to research methodology. In *Principles of research methodology and ethics in pharmaceutical sciences* (pp. 1-46). CRC Press.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2022). Human development report: Employment and economic participation in Nigeria. New York, NY: UNDP. <https://www.undp.org>
- World Bank. (2023). World Development Indicators: Labour market and employment data. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://data.worldbank.org>