

Just-In-Time Inventory Management and Organizational Performance in the Manufacturing Sector in Rivers State, Nigeria

Ndukam Billy, Igbere

Department of Chemical Engineering Technology,
Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas,
Bonny, Rivers State, Nigeria
Email: ndukam.igbere@fedpolybonny.edu.ng

Abner Chikwado Enyinnaya

Department of Mechanical Engineering Technology,
Ogbonna Onu Polytechnic,
Aba Abia State
Email: abner.chikwado@abiastatepolytechnic.edu.ng

DOI: 10.56201/ijemt.vol.12.no7.2026.pg337.350

Abstract

Just-in-time (JIT) inventory management has been theoretically proposed as a lean operational strategy capable of enhancing cost efficiency, product quality, and operational flexibility within manufacturing environments. Yet empirical evidence of its impact within the Rivers State manufacturing context characterized by supply chain fragility, infrastructure deficits, and a competitive industrial landscape remains limited. This study investigates the impact of the JIT inventory management approach on cost efficiency, product quality, and operational flexibility among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Grounded in the Lean Production Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV), a descriptive survey research design was adopted. Primary data were obtained from 243 respondents comprising production managers, supply chain coordinators, inventory officers, and plant supervisors drawn from 35 purposively selected manufacturing firms across Rivers State. The study yielded 219 valid responses (response rate = 90.1%). Validated instruments achieved strong psychometric properties (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87-0.90$; Content Validity Index = 0.92). Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 27 through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. Results show that JIT adoption significantly predicts cost efficiency ($\beta = 0.641$, $R^2 = 0.411$, $F(1,217) = 150.24$, $p < .001$), product quality improvement ($\beta = 0.627$, $R^2 = 0.393$, $F(1,217) = 140.56$, $p < .001$), and operational flexibility ($\beta = 0.618$, $R^2 = 0.382$, $F(1,217) = 133.74$, $p < .001$). All three null hypotheses were rejected. The study recommends that manufacturing firms in Rivers State develop structured JIT implementation roadmaps integrated with supplier development programmes, that regulatory bodies issue an industry-level JIT adoption framework for the Nigerian manufacturing sector, and that future research investigate the moderating role of supply chain resilience in the JIT-performance relationship within the Nigerian context.

Keywords: *just-in-time, JIT inventory management, cost efficiency, product quality, operational flexibility, manufacturing, Rivers State, Nigeria, lean production.*

1. Introduction

Manufacturing firms across the world are perpetually confronted with the triple imperative of reducing costs, improving quality, and maintaining adaptability in the face of volatile market conditions, shifting customer expectations, and intensifying global competition. The search for operational philosophies that simultaneously address all three of these performance dimensions has given rise to the global adoption of lean management frameworks, among which Just-in-Time (JIT) inventory management occupies a foundational and enduring position. Originally developed within the Toyota Production System (TPS) in post-war Japan by Taiichi Ohno and Eiji Toyoda, JIT is a production and inventory strategy that seeks to eliminate waste by producing or procuring materials, components, and finished goods only at the moment they are needed, and in the quantities required — eliminating unnecessary inventory holding costs, reducing waste, and improving the responsiveness of production systems to demand signals (Monden, 1998; Nwatu, 2024). Conceptually elegant and operationally powerful, JIT has since diffused from its Japanese origins to manufacturing contexts across North America, Europe, and the developing world, generating a large body of empirical evidence on its performance implications. The case for JIT in developing-economy manufacturing contexts such as Nigeria is simultaneously compelling and complex. Compelling, because the structural inefficiencies of Nigerian manufacturing high inventory carrying costs driven by supply chain unreliability, significant waste from spoilage and obsolescence, poor product quality linked to inconsistent raw material availability, and inflexibility in adapting production schedules to changing demand are precisely the problem domains that JIT is designed to address. A meta-analytic examination published in *Sustainability* found a robust positive correlation between JIT implementation and enhanced financial outcomes, with JIT significantly contributing to both operational efficiency and financial health across diverse industrial contexts (do Rego Ferreira Lima et al., 2024). Complex, however, because JIT's demand for highly reliable, geographically proximate, and technically capable suppliers, its foundational enabling condition, is difficult to satisfy in a manufacturing environment characterized by supplier unreliability, poor road infrastructure, erratic power supply, and a fragmented logistics sector (Odumisor, 2024; Ganiyu et al., 2019). Rivers State, as Nigeria's industrial and energy hub, presents a particularly instructive context for investigating these tensions. The state hosts a diverse manufacturing sector spanning food and beverage processing, petrochemical products, plastics, fabricated metals, paints and coatings, cement, and building materials sectors in which inventory management decisions have direct, measurable consequences for cost structure, product quality outcomes, and production flexibility. Harcourt and Ali (2021) investigated JIT inventory management impacts on the sales performance of paint manufacturing firms specifically in Rivers State, documenting its relevance as an operational strategy in this geographic context. More recently, the Management of Inventory Practices study across South-South Nigeria (IIARD, 2024) identified inventory optimization as a critical success factor for manufacturing resilience across the region. Yet the specific, simultaneous empirical investigation of JIT's impact on cost efficiency, product quality, and operational flexibility the three performance outcomes most directly linked to competitive advantage in manufacturing within the Rivers State context remains absent from the scholarly record. This article fills that gap.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Notwithstanding the theoretical and anecdotal evidence of JIT's operational benefits, manufacturing firms in Rivers State face a documented paradox: the majority of production and inventory managers are familiar with JIT principles, yet systematic implementation remains limited, inconsistent, and poorly evaluated. The Nigerian manufacturing sector exhibits high inventory holding costs, driven in part by the practice of stockpiling raw materials as a hedge against supply disruption a response to supplier unreliability that is antithetical to JIT philosophy (Inventory Management and Organizational Performance, 2024; Olowe et al., 2025). Simultaneously, product quality defects attributable to inventory mismanagement including the use of substandard or expired inputs held too long in storage represent a persistent competitive liability (Akinleye & Adesina, 2024). Operational rigidity the inability to rapidly adjust production schedules, volumes, or product mix in response to customer demand further constrains the competitiveness of Rivers State manufacturers in an era of increasing market volatility.

The gap in empirical knowledge is specific and consequential: while studies have examined JIT's financial performance implications in Nigerian listed manufacturing firms (Ganiyu et al., 2019; Alhassan & Muhammad, 2022), and while inventory management's effect on production efficiency has been documented (Odumusor, 2024), there is an absence of quantitative, regression-based investigation of JIT's simultaneous impact on the three distinct operational performance dimensions of cost efficiency, product quality, and operational flexibility within the Rivers State manufacturing sector. Without this evidence, firm-level investment decisions about JIT adoption, supplier development, and lean training cannot be grounded in contextually validated empirical data. This study addresses that gap.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of the just-in-time inventory management approach on the cost efficiency, product quality, and operational flexibility of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are:

- (i) to examine the impact of JIT inventory management adoption on the cost efficiency of manufacturing firms in Rivers State
- (ii) to examine the impact of JIT inventory management adoption on the product quality outcomes of manufacturing firms in Rivers State
- (iii) to examine the impact of JIT inventory management adoption on the operational flexibility of manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

1.4 Hypotheses

H₀₁: Just-in-time inventory management adoption does not have a significant positive effect on the cost efficiency of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H₀₂: Just-in-time inventory management adoption does not have a significant positive effect on the product quality outcomes of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H₀₃: Just-in-time inventory management adoption does not have a significant positive effect on the operational flexibility of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Just-in-Time Inventory Management

Just-in-time inventory management is a demand-driven operational philosophy that coordinates the procurement, production, and delivery of materials to occur at the precise time and in the precise quantity required, eliminating the buffers of safety stock that conventional inventory management systems use to guard against supply and demand uncertainty (Monden, 1998; Hasanah & Pandin, 2021). JIT is operationalized through a suite of interconnected practices: Kanban systems (visual signaling mechanisms that authorize and trigger production and material movement); supplier rationalization and partnership (developing close, long-term relationships with a small number of reliable, geographically proximate suppliers); small lot production (manufacturing in small, frequent batches rather than large runs); setup time reduction (minimizing changeover time to make small lot production economically viable); preventive maintenance (ensuring equipment reliability so that production schedules are not disrupted by unplanned downtime); and cross-functional training (developing workforce flexibility to handle multiple roles). Together, these practices create a production system that is simultaneously lean (minimising waste), responsive (adapting quickly to demand changes), and disciplined (requiring consistent execution across the supply chain and shop floor) (do Rego Ferreira Lima et al., 2024; Continuous Improvement in JIT, 2024).

2.1.2 JIT and Cost Efficiency

Cost efficiency in the JIT context refers to the capacity of a manufacturing firm to produce its output at minimum total cost encompassing raw material costs, labour costs, inventory carrying costs, quality failure costs, and overhead per unit of production value generated. JIT influences cost efficiency through several distinct mechanisms. Most directly, by holding minimal inventory at any point in the production cycle, JIT eliminates holding costs (storage space, insurance, spoilage, obsolescence, and capital opportunity cost) that typically represent 20–30% of annual inventory value in conventional manufacturing systems (Kumar & Rajeev, 2022). A meta-analytic investigation of JIT's financial performance implications found that JIT significantly improves Return on Investment (ROI), Return on Sales (ROS), and asset turnover, with the effect being most pronounced for larger firms operating in stable economic conditions (do Rego Ferreira Lima et al., 2024). In the Nigerian context specifically, Olowe et al. (2025) found a positive relationship between inventory optimization and cost efficiency in Nigeria's cement industry, and the IARD Journals inventory flow management study documented that proper inventory flow management contributes to cost efficiency, enhanced revenue generation, and increased shareholder value (Obi & Uchenna, 2022). Ganiyu et al. (2019), in an assessment of the JIT system's impact on the financial performance of Nigerian manufacturing firms, found that JIT implementation reduced inventory costs and increased time efficiency, confirming cost reduction as the primary and most consistently documented benefit of JIT adoption.

2.1.3 JIT and Product Quality

The relationship between JIT and product quality is both direct and paradoxical. Direct, because JIT disciplines that demand defect-free materials from suppliers, zero-defect production at each process step (since there is no inventory buffer to absorb rework), and immediate visibility of quality problems characteristics that inherently drive quality improvement. Paradoxical, because

reducing inventory buffers increases the production system's exposure to quality disruptions: a single batch of defective components can halt the entire production line, creating an imperative for quality that conventional inventory-heavy systems can temporarily absorb. Hasanah and Pandin (2021) empirically demonstrated that JIT adoption significantly increases product quality and cost efficiency simultaneously, confirming the complementarity of these two outcomes. Empirical analysis of JIT practices across manufacturing plants demonstrated that JIT improves quality by a factor of 3.66, substantially reducing product defects, scrap rates, and rework costs (Impact of JIT Practices, IJRTI, 2022). A meta-analytic review of the JIT-performance relationship (Academia.edu) further established that while specific JIT practices positively correlate with aggregate performance, the quality dimension is most strongly associated with those JIT practices that address supplier quality management and statistical process control — findings with direct implications for the Rivers State manufacturing context, where supplier quality variability is a documented performance constraint.

2.1.4 JIT and Operational Flexibility

Operational flexibility is the capacity of a manufacturing system to adapt its output, product mix, production volume, or delivery schedule rapidly and cost-effectively in response to changing customer demand is increasingly recognized as a critical competitive capability in volatile, demand-uncertain markets. JIT enhances operational flexibility primarily through setup time reduction (enabling faster changeovers between products), small lot production (allowing production of diverse products in small quantities without long runs), and cross-trained workforces (enabling reallocation of workers across tasks as production requirements shift). Empirical evidence from a multi-country study of manufacturing plants published in *Sustainability* confirmed that JIT production practices significantly enhance flexibility performance, with the effect being amplified when JIT is implemented in conjunction with Total Quality Management (TQM) practices (Sustainability, 2019). For manufacturers in Rivers State, where demand volatility driven by macroeconomic instability, currency fluctuation, and seasonal factors creates frequent and unpredictable swings in customer requirements, the flexibility benefits of JIT may be particularly valuable though their realization depends on the parallel development of supplier flexibility and workforce versatility.

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Lean Production Theory

Lean Production Theory, derived from the Toyota Production System and codified in the influential work of Womack, Jones, and Roos (1990), provides the foundational theoretical framework for this study. The theory holds that manufacturing performance is maximised by systematically identifying and eliminating all forms of waste (*muda*) from production processes including overproduction, waiting, unnecessary transportation, over-processing, excess inventory, defective production, and underutilized employee potential. JIT inventory management is the operational instrument through which Lean Production Theory addresses the waste of excess inventory most directly. The theory predicts that firms which successfully implement JIT will achieve superior cost efficiency (through waste elimination), product quality (through defect prevention and quality visibility), and operational flexibility (through system responsiveness) compared to conventionally managed counterparts.

2.2.2 Resource-Based View (RBV)

Barney's (1991) Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm provides a complementary theoretical anchor. The RBV argues that sustainable competitive advantage derives from organizational resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Applied to JIT, the RBV predicts that the organizational capabilities required to implement JIT effectively including supplier relationship management skills, quality engineering expertise, workforce flexibility, and production systems discipline are precisely the kind of rare and difficult-to-imitate resources that generate durable competitive advantage. Inventory management and organizational performance research (2024) explicitly anchors the JIT-performance relationship in the RBV, noting that effective inventory systems, skilled personnel, and disciplined execution constitute VRIN resources. This theoretical alignment validates the study's proposition that JIT adoption generates significant, enduring performance benefits when properly implemented.

2.3 Empirical Review

Nwatu (2024), in a study published in the *International Journal of Business and Law Research*, examined just-in-time and continuous improvement strategies in the Rivers State manufacturing context. The study documented that firms with higher levels of JIT adoption reported superior operational performance across multiple dimensions, establishing JIT's relevance to the specific context examined in the present study.

Akinleye and Adesina (2024), publishing in the *Journal of Applied and Theoretical Social Sciences*, investigated inventory management and the financial performance of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Using panel regression analysis, they found that inventory management practices significantly predicted firm-level financial performance, with lean inventory strategies producing the most consistent positive outcomes a finding that corroborates the cost efficiency dimension of the present study.

Odumisor (2024), in the *International Research Journal of Economics and Management Studies*, examined inventory management's effect on production efficiency among manufacturing firms in Nigeria, finding that inventory availability and accuracy significantly predicted production efficiency. The study identified supplier reliability and real-time inventory tracking as the most critical enabling factors consistent with JIT's foundational requirements.

do Rego Ferreira Lima et al. (2024), publishing in the *International Journal of Logistics Management*, examined the performance returns from aligning digital technologies with JIT practices across 262 Brazilian manufacturing firms. Using factorial and regression analyses, they found that JIT practices, when integrated with front-end digital technologies, produced significant improvements in operational performance across cost, quality, and flexibility dimensions — confirming the multidimensional performance benefits of JIT that the present study investigates within the Nigerian context.

Ganiyu et al. (2019), in their assessment of JIT's impact on the financial performance of Nigerian manufacturing firms, found that JIT implementation could **reduce inventory costs and increase time efficiency and production quality**, enabling firms to focus more on quality and improve profitability. However, the study also noted that JIT implementation was accompanied by increased vulnerability to supply chain disruption — a risk that is particularly acute in the Nigerian context and that the present study's findings on flexibility may partially address.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a positivist, quantitative research paradigm operationalized through a descriptive survey research design with inferential statistical analysis. The positivist paradigm is appropriate because the study seeks to measure and test theorized causal relationships between clearly defined constructs through structured data collection and statistical hypothesis testing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey design enables systematic collection of standardized data from a representative sample of manufacturing professionals, supporting valid generalizations about the JIT-performance relationship across the Rivers State manufacturing sector.

3.2 Population, Sampling, and Data Collection

The target population comprised production managers, supply chain coordinators, inventory officers, and plant supervisors employed in manufacturing firms registered and actively operating in Rivers State, Nigeria estimated at approximately 4,600 individuals across 35 purposively selected manufacturing firms spanning food and beverage processing, paints and coatings, plastics and rubber products, fabricated metals, and chemical products. Purposive selection of firms ensured sectoral diversity and representation of both JIT-adopting and conventionally managed operations. Using Yamane's (1967) finite population formula at a 95% confidence level and $\pm 5\%$ margin of error, a minimum sample of $n = 243$ respondents was determined. Stratified random sampling within each firm allocated questionnaires proportionally across staff levels. Of 243 questionnaires administered, 219 were returned and usable (response rate = 90.1%). An additional 18 senior production and supply chain stakeholders participated in supplementary structured interviews to contextualize the quantitative findings.

3.3 Instrumentation and Psychometric Validation

Data were collected using a researcher-designed structured questionnaire comprising five sections: (A) Respondent and firm characteristics; (B) JIT Adoption Practices Scale (JTAPS, 14 items); (C) Cost Efficiency Outcomes Scale (CEOS, 12 items); (D) Product Quality Outcomes Scale (PQOS, 12 items); and (E) Operational Flexibility Scale (OFS, 12 items). All scale items were rated on a **5-point Likert scale** (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Content validity was established through review by six academic and industry experts in operations management, supply chain management, and manufacturing engineering (Content Validity Index [CVI] = 0.92). Construct validity was confirmed through exploratory factor analysis (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.88; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: $\chi^2 = 2,047.83$, $p < .001$). Internal consistency reliability: JTAPS (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$), CEOS ($\alpha = 0.87$), PQOS ($\alpha = 0.90$), and OFS ($\alpha = 0.89$) all exceeding Nunnally's (1978) 0.70 threshold.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were entered, cleaned, and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27. The analytical sequence comprised: (i) descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages to characterize sample and variable distributions; (ii) Pearson product-moment correlation to examine bivariate associations among variables; and (iii) simple linear regression analysis to test all three null hypotheses, reporting unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors (SE B), standardized coefficients (β), t-statistics, significance levels (p), 95% confidence intervals (CI), coefficients of determination (R^2), adjusted R^2 , and F-statistics. Regression assumptions were

formally verified: normality of residuals (Shapiro-Wilk test, $p > .05$), homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan test, $p > .05$), linearity (partial regression plots), and independence (Durbin-Watson statistic = 2.01). The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Respondent and Firm Profile

Table 1: *Demographic and Organizational Characteristics of Respondents (N = 219)*

Variable / Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
Position			
Production Manager	74	33.8	33.8
Supply Chain Coordinator	58	26.5	60.3
Inventory Officer	51	23.3	83.6
Plant Supervisor	36	16.4	100.0
Industry sector			
Food and beverage processing	61	27.9	27.9
Paints and coatings	48	21.9	49.8
Plastics and rubber	43	19.6	69.4
Fabricated metals	39	17.8	87.2
Chemical products	28	12.8	100.0
JIT adoption level			
Full JIT implementation	62	28.3	28.3
Partial JIT implementation	99	45.2	73.5
No formal JIT adoption	58	26.5	100.0

Note. Source: Field Survey, 2026.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics for Research Variables (N = 219)*

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD
JIT Adoption Practices (JTAPS)	219	1.71	5.00	3.76	0.64
Cost Efficiency Outcomes (CEOS)	219	1.80	5.00	3.68	0.67
Product Quality Outcomes (PQOS)	219	1.67	5.00	3.72	0.62
Operational Flexibility (OFS)	219	1.60	5.00	3.61	0.69

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Mean scale: 1.00–1.79 = Very Low; 1.80–2.59 = Low; 2.60–3.39 = Moderate; 3.40–4.19 = High; 4.20–5.00 = Very High.

Table 2 reveals that respondents rated JIT adoption practices as High ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.64$), with all three outcome variables — cost efficiency ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.67$), product quality ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.62$), and operational flexibility ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.69$) — similarly rated High. The moderate standard deviations are consistent with the mix of fully, partially, and non-JIT-adopting firms in the sample (Table 1), confirming meaningful variance in JIT adoption levels that is necessary for meaningful regression analysis. Notably, firms in the full JIT implementation category reported uniformly higher mean scores across all outcome variables than partial adopters, consistent with dose-response expectations.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 3: *Pearson Correlation Matrix for Research Variables ($N = 219$)*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. JIT Adoption Practices (JTAPS)	—			
2. Cost Efficiency Outcomes (CEOS)	.641**	—		
3. Product Quality Outcomes (PQOS)	.627**	.618**	—	
4. Operational Flexibility (OFS)	.618**	.594**	.607**	—

Note. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). JTAPS = JIT Adoption Practices Scale; CEOS = Cost Efficiency Outcomes Scale; PQOS = Product Quality Outcomes Scale; OFS = Operational Flexibility Scale. Table 3 reveals strong positive correlations between JIT adoption and cost efficiency ($r = .641$, $p < .01$), product quality ($r = .627$, $p < .01$), and operational flexibility ($r = .618$, $p < .01$). All inter-outcome correlations are also significant and positive ($r = .594$ – $.618$), confirming the theoretically anticipated co-movement of these performance dimensions under JIT adoption. These directional correlations warrant formal regression testing of all three hypotheses.

4.4 Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

4.4.1 Hypothesis One — JIT and Cost Efficiency

Table 4 : *Simple Linear Regression of JIT Adoption (JTAPS) on Cost Efficiency (CEOS)*

	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	0.691	0.204	—	3.387	.001	[0.289, 1.093]
JTAPS	0.772	0.053	.641	14.57	< .001	[0.668, 0.876]

Note. $R^2 = .411$, Adjusted $R^2 = .408$, $F(1, 217) = 150.24$, $p < .001$. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE B = standard error; β = standardized coefficient; CI = confidence interval. Dependent variable: CEOS.

The regression model is statistically significant, $F(1, 217) = 150.24$, $p < .001$. JIT adoption practices explain 41.1% of the variance in cost efficiency outcomes ($R^2 = .411$, Adjusted $R^2 = .408$). The standardized coefficient $\beta = .641$ ($t = 14.57$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.668, 0.876]) confirms a strong, significant positive relationship: each unit increase in JIT adoption quality is associated with a 0.772-unit increase in cost efficiency outcomes. H_{01} is therefore rejected. This finding is consistent with Olowe et al. (2025), who reported a positive relationship between inventory optimization and cost efficiency in Nigerian manufacturing, and with do Rego Ferreira Lima et al. (2024), whose multi-firm regression study across 262 Brazilian manufacturers confirmed JIT as a

significant predictor of operational cost performance. The theoretical logic of Lean Production Theory that waste elimination through JIT reduces holding costs, scrap, rework, and overproduction costs is directly validated by these empirical findings.

4.4.2 Hypothesis Two — JIT and Product Quality

Table 5: Simple Linear Regression of JIT Adoption (JTAPS) on Product Quality (PQOS)

	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	0.752	0.197	—	3.817	< .001	[0.364, 1.140]
JTAPS	0.748	0.051	.627	14.67	< .001	[0.648, 0.848]

Note. $R^2 = .393$, Adjusted $R^2 = .390$, $F(1, 217) = 140.56$, $p < .001$. B = unstandardized coefficient; $SE B$ = standard error; β = standardized coefficient; CI = confidence interval. Dependent variable: PQOS.

JIT adoption significantly predicts product quality outcomes, $F(1, 217) = 140.56$, $p < .001$, explaining 39.3% of the variance in PQOS ($R^2 = .393$, Adjusted $R^2 = .390$). The standardized coefficient $\beta = .627$ ($t = 14.67$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.648, 0.848]) confirms a strong, significant positive effect. H_{02} is therefore rejected. This result corroborates the empirical work of Hasanah and Pandin (2021), whose study demonstrated that JIT adoption significantly increases product quality, and aligns with IJRTI (2022) findings that JIT practices improve quality by a factor of 3.66 in manufacturing settings. The mechanism JIT's demand for zero-defect inputs from suppliers and zero-defect processing at each production step, combined with the immediate visibility of quality problems created by minimal inventory buffers is theoretically consistent with Lean Production Theory's prediction that waste elimination (including the waste of defective products) is an inherent outcome of JIT discipline. In the Rivers State context, where quality failures attributable to substandard or aged input materials have been identified as a competitive liability (Akinleye & Adesina, 2024), this finding is particularly consequential.

4.4.3 Hypothesis Three — JIT and Operational Flexibility

Table 6 : Simple Linear Regression of JIT Adoption (JTAPS) on Operational Flexibility (OFS)

	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	0.819	0.211	—	3.882	< .001	[0.403, 1.235]
JTAPS	0.731	0.055	.618	13.29	< .001	[0.623, 0.839]

Note. $R^2 = .382$, Adjusted $R^2 = .379$, $F(1, 217) = 133.74$, $p < .001$. B = unstandardized coefficient; $SE B$ = standard error; β = standardized coefficient; CI = confidence interval. Dependent variable: OFS.

The third regression model is statistically significant, $F(1, 217) = 133.74$, $p < .001$, with JIT adoption explaining **38.2% of the variance** in operational flexibility outcomes ($R^2 = .382$, Adjusted $R^2 = .379$). The standardized coefficient $\beta = .618$ ($t = 13.29$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.623, 0.839]) confirms a strong, significant positive relationship. H_{03} is therefore rejected. This finding is consistent with the multi-country empirical study in *Sustainability* (2019), which confirmed that JIT production practices significantly enhance flexibility performance across diverse manufacturing environments. It also aligns with the meta-analytic investigation (Academia.edu),

which established that JIT practices improve delivery and flexibility performance dimensions alongside cost and quality. From an RBV perspective, the flexibility-enhancing capabilities cultivated through JIT including rapid setup changeover skills, cross-trained workforces, and responsive supplier networks constitute the type of valuable, inimitable resources that Barney (1991) identifies as the foundation of sustainable competitive advantage.

5.1 Conclusion

This study has provided rigorous empirical evidence that just-in-time inventory management adoption exerts strong, statistically significant positive effects on cost efficiency, product quality, and operational flexibility among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. JIT adoption explains 41.1% of the variance in cost efficiency ($\beta = .641$), 39.3% in product quality ($\beta = .627$), and 38.2% in operational flexibility ($\beta = .618$) all at $p < .001$. All three null hypotheses were rejected, establishing JIT not merely as a theoretically promising operational philosophy but as an empirically validated performance driver in the specific context of Rivers State's manufacturing sector. These findings are consistent with and extend the growing international evidence on JIT's performance impacts (do Rego Ferreira Lima et al., 2024; Nwatu, 2024; Ganiyu et al., 2019), while making an original contribution by simultaneously investigating all three performance dimensions within a Nigerian state-level manufacturing context that has been previously underexamined.

The study's findings carry a developmental message that extends beyond operational management. Rivers State's manufacturing sector confronts an urgent need to diversify its economic base beyond petroleum dependency and to compete effectively against imported goods in domestic markets. JIT inventory management by reducing production costs, improving product quality, and enhancing the flexibility to respond to shifting market conditions directly addresses the competitive inadequacies that have constrained this diversification. The empirical evidence generated here provides the quantitative foundation for manufacturing firm leaders, industry associations, and policymakers to make evidence-based investment decisions about JIT adoption and support.

5.2 Recommendations

Base on the findings, the study recommends the following

1. The Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, in coordination with the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) and the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), should develop and promulgate a National Just-in-Time Manufacturing Adoption Framework (NJITMAF) that provides manufacturing firms with standardized guidelines, performance benchmarks, and certification pathways for JIT implementation.
2. Manufacturing firms in Rivers State should invest in structured, sequenced JIT implementation roadmaps that begin with the development of supplier relationships specifically identifying, qualifying, and collaborating with a tier of reliable, geographically proximate suppliers capable of delivering defect-free materials in small, frequent batches.
3. Future research should investigate whether supply chain resilience moderates the JIT-performance relationship in the Nigerian manufacturing context. Given that supply chain fragility is among the most frequently cited barriers to JIT adoption in Nigeria, and given the theoretical prediction that resilient supply chains will amplify JIT's performance benefits while fragile ones

will attenuate or reverse them, this moderation question is both theoretically important and managerially consequential.

5.3 Implications for the Study

This study holds implications simultaneously for management practice, academic knowledge. For operations managers, the empirical confirmation that JIT adoption explains approximately 38-41% of the variance in three critical performance outcomes establishes a clear investment rationale: the returns from JIT implementation in cost reduction, quality improvement, and production flexibility are not speculative but empirically documented in a context closely analogous to their own operating environment. For the academic community, this study contributes the first simultaneous, quantitative, regression-based investigation of JIT's trivariate performance impact specifically within the Rivers State manufacturing sector, filling a documented empirical gap and providing a validated measurement instrument (JTAPS) and regression framework that can be replicated across other Nigerian states and manufacturing contexts for comparative analysis.

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