

Industrial Relations and Workplace Transformation in Oil and Gas Industry in Nigeria

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Abstract

The nature and character of relations among industrial workers play a significant role in workplace environment, particularly in volatile workplace like the Nigeria oil and gas industry. This study examined industrial relations and workplace transformation in the oil and gas industry in Nigeria, focusing on labour dynamics, unionisation, and workplace transformation in Bayelsa State. The study employed a descriptive survey design. A sample size of 370 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected through structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test. The result yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.86, indicating a high level of internal consistency and reliability. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression analysis, alongside thematic analysis of qualitative responses. Findings revealed that workplace transformation significantly influences industrial relations practices, demonstrating that structural reforms, technological integration, and modern workplace strategies enhance labour-management relations and organisational effectiveness. Trade union activities were found to significantly affect organisational policy decisions. The study also identified systemic challenges, including weak law enforcement, political interference, and employer resistance to unionisation, while recognising opportunities for digital advocacy, tripartite dialogue, and union capacity-building. The study concluded that proactive workplace transformation combined with strategic union engagement can strengthen industrial relations, improve organisational efficiency, and foster sustainable workplace harmony. The study recommends that there should be enhanced collaboration between management and unions through the mechanisms of contract of employment, digital engagement strategies, stronger enforcement of labour laws, targeted capacity-building for union leaders, and adaptive workplace policies to balance technological advancement with employee welfare and development. This will drastically improve labour relations and promote a cordial workplace environment.

Introduction

Industrial relations in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria have undergone significant transformations over the past decades, largely influenced by shifts in labour dynamics, unionisation, and the structural changes within the workplace. According to Akinwale (2016), industrial relations encompass the complex interplay between employers, employees, and their representatives, including trade unions, with the goal of fostering cooperation and resolving conflicts that may arise in the course of employment. In the context of Nigeria's oil and gas

sector - an industry that serves as the economic backbone of the nation, labour issues remain both highly sensitive and strategically important due to the sector's contribution to national revenue and employment (Okafor & Aniche, 2019). Unionisation has played a pivotal role in shaping the labour landscape within this sector. Fashoyin (2018) observed that trade unions have historically functioned as vital mechanisms through which workers assert their rights, negotiate conditions of service, and engage with management on matters affecting welfare and job security. In the same vein, Adamu and Egbetokun (2020) asserted that the strength and vibrancy of trade unions in the oil and gas industry often determine the balance of power between labour and management. Nevertheless, union activities have not been without challenges. Ajayi (2021) noted that political interference, legal restrictions, and globalisation have weakened union influence, sometimes rendering collective bargaining processes ineffective. Labour dynamics in Bayelsa State, being a hub of oil production in Nigeria, reflect the broader challenges of industrial relations in the sector. These regions are not only the epicentres of oil exploration but also hotspots for labour unrest, environmental degradation, and socio-economic dislocation. However, Nnadi (2022) highlighted those recent developments (such as automation, contract staffing, and international partnerships) have altered the traditional employer-employee relationships, introducing new complexities into workplace structures. Similarly, Okolie and Omodia (2023) emphasized that workplace transformation has led to a shift from permanent employment to casual and outsourced labour, raising questions about job security and workers' rights. The concept of workplace transformation, as defined by Aluko (2017), refers to the adoption of new organizational structures, technologies, and managerial practices aimed at improving productivity and competitiveness. This transformation, while beneficial to employers, has also generated significant tension within the labour force, especially when changes are implemented without adequate stakeholder consultation. According to Udu and Okon (2019), such unilateral transformations often result in increased grievances, reduced morale, and heightened union agitation. The impact and influence of trade unions in shaping industrial relations within the oil and gas sector cannot be overstated. Historically, trade unions such as the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) have served as strong advocates for improved working conditions, fair remuneration, and social justice for oil workers (Fashoyin, 2018). These unions, according to Adamu and Egbetokun (2020), have been instrumental in compelling multinational and indigenous oil firms to comply with labour laws and uphold collective bargaining agreements. In the same vein, Okolie and Omodia (2023) asserted that trade unions help to balance the power asymmetry between employers and employees by providing a structured platform for dialogue and resistance. Unionization has had a profound impact on employee welfare, organizational policies, and dispute resolution mechanisms within the oil and gas industry. Ajayi (2021) observed that unionized workplaces are more likely to adopt inclusive policies that address workers' grievances, health and safety concerns, and equitable promotion practices. Similarly, Aluko (2017) noted that through organized labour, employees gain access to structured grievance procedures, which enhance industrial peace and reduce the likelihood of abrupt work stoppages. Nevertheless, the strength of unionization is often undermined by casualization, outsourcing, and government policies that restrict the right to strike or to collectively bargain in certain contexts. Workplace transformation, particularly in the form of automation, organizational restructuring, and policy shifts, has significantly affected employer-employee relations in the oil and gas sector. According to Nnadi (2022), the adoption of automation technologies and digital infrastructure, while aimed at improving operational

efficiency, has led to massive job displacements and reduced demand for skilled labour. This has not only heightened job insecurity but also strained relations between employers and workers. Similarly, restructuring efforts (often implemented under the guise of cost-cutting or globalization) have led to the dilution of labour rights, increased use of contract staff, and weakening of traditional employment bonds (Chukwuemeka & Adebayo, 2024). However, Akinwale (2016) pointed out that such transformations also present opportunities for redefining job roles, upskilling workers, and implementing more flexible work arrangements if well managed. Industrial relations in Nigeria's oil and gas sector remain a subject of deep concern, particularly in the oil-rich state of Bayelsa State. The current study addresses the persistent and complex problem of strained employer-employee relations, union marginalization, and unstable labour conditions in the face of rapid workplace transformations. According to Akinwale (2016), these issues have continued to plague the sector, manifesting through frequent strikes, breakdown in negotiations, and industrial disharmony. The study explored how the evolving nature of work (including automation, contract staffing, and restructuring) has impacted traditional labour dynamics and the efficacy of trade unions in maintaining fair industrial practices. The problem particularly affects workers, union leaders, multinational corporations, and regulators within Bayelsa State regions that account for a significant portion of Nigeria's crude oil production and employment in the sector (Okafor & Aniche, 2019). The labour challenges in Nigeria's oil and gas sector are not recent discoveries. These include regulatory inefficiencies, the politicization of union activities, poor enforcement of labour laws, and resistance by employers to engage in meaningful negotiations. Nevertheless, prospects remain for improving these relations through policy reforms, capacity building, and stronger institutional frameworks. According to Okafor and Aniche (2019), the future of industrial relations in this vital sector lies in the institutionalization of transparent negotiation processes, legal protections for workers, and sustainable corporate practices that align productivity goals with employee welfare. Furthermore, historical records and empirical studies have consistently highlighted issues of poor labour-management dialogue, union suppression, and a lack of structured mechanisms for dispute resolution (Fashoyin, 2018; Udu & Okon, 2019). However, the problem has become more complex in recent years due to emerging global trends such as workplace automation, neoliberal reforms, and transnational corporate practices that threaten job security and dilute union influence. In the same vein, Nnadi (2022) asserted that the impact of these changes on employer-employee relations has not been fully understood, especially in localized contexts of Bayelsa State. Nevertheless, despite various studies, much of the existing literature tends to generalize the Nigerian oil and gas sector without offering in-depth regional analyses or focusing specifically on the interplay between unionization and workplace transformation in these critical states. The extent of research done on the issue includes national-level analyses on industrial conflicts, union activism, and labour law reform (Ajayi, 2021; Adamu & Egbetokun, 2020). However, there is a significant research gap regarding how labour dynamics are unfolding in real time in Bayelsa State amid new technological and organizational shifts. Most of the existing works have not sufficiently examined how union strategies have adapted—or failed to adapt—to changes in workplace policies, nor have they critically assessed the effectiveness of dispute resolution mechanisms in the context of increasing job casualization and technological automation. This study fills that gap by offering a localized, nuanced, and sector-specific investigation into how these labour trends are playing out and what implications they carry for industrial peace and sustainable employment relations in the region.

The consequences of not addressing this problem are far-reaching. Continued industrial disharmony could cripple oil production, disrupt national revenues, and worsen unemployment and poverty in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, ignoring these labour challenges may deepen distrust between employers and employees, promote illegal labour practices, and escalate social tensions in already volatile communities (Chukwuemeka & Adebayo, 2024). In the long run, the lack of a responsive and inclusive industrial relations framework could lead to institutional erosion, weaken investor confidence, and hinder Nigeria's transition to a modern, globally competitive oil industry. The objective of the study is to; analyse the role and influence of trade unions in shaping industrial relations within the sector. The study raised the question; how does unionisation impact on industrial peace, employee welfare, and negotiations within the sector?

The understated hypothesis was stated in the null form and tested at the 0.05 level of significance to guide the study; H_0 : Workplace transformation has no significant impact on industrial relations practices in the gas industry.

Industrial Relations

Industrial relations, as a dynamic field within labour and management studies, encapsulates the intricate web of relationships that exist between employers, employees, and the institutions that mediate these interactions. According to Ubeku (2016), industrial relations refers to the network of rules and practices that govern the workplace, particularly concerning collective bargaining, dispute resolution, and the rights and responsibilities of both labour and management. This perspective reflects the conventional understanding of industrial relations as a mechanism for promoting cooperation and mitigating conflicts in the world of work. Similarly, Oginni and Fajofodun (2019) emphasised that industrial relations is not only about employer-employee relations but also includes the role of government, trade unions, and legal frameworks in shaping labour market outcomes. In the same vein, Fajana (2015) averred that industrial relations is a multidisciplinary field that draws from economics, law, sociology, and human resource management to analyse and understand the patterns and consequences of industrial interactions. This wider scope highlights the holistic nature of industrial relations and its significance to national productivity and workplace harmony. Nevertheless, the concept has undergone a considerable evolution over time. While traditionally focused on unionised employment settings and collective bargaining mechanisms, contemporary industrial relations have expanded to include non-unionised work environments, informal sectors, and global labour dynamics. Akinwale (2019) noted that globalisation, technological innovation, and changing labour laws have reshaped the scope of industrial relations, making it imperative to understand emerging trends such as remote work, flexible contracts, and the gig economy. Consequently, scholars and practitioners have had to reconsider the principles and policies governing the employment relationship in light of these transformations. Ajayi (2020) defined industrial relations as the structured and unstructured interactions among the actors in the labour market that aim to foster stability and productivity. He opined that its scope includes labour-management cooperation, conflict resolution, job regulation, employee voice mechanisms, and workplace democracy. Notwithstanding, some scholars argue that industrial relations should go beyond formal employment relationships to also engage with issues of social justice, economic inequality, and environmental sustainability. Asopuru and Opara (2021) asserted that a truly modern industrial relations system must be sensitive to broader societal expectations while still addressing the immediate concerns of workers and employers.

However, the boundaries of industrial relations remain contested, especially in contexts where labour institutions are weak or where informal employment dominates. In such situations, the traditional frameworks of industrial relations may be inadequate or altogether absent. According to Nwosu and Umeojiako (2022), the effectiveness of industrial relations systems is largely determined by the strength of institutions such as trade unions, employer associations, labour courts, and regulatory agencies. They supported that without institutional robustness, industrial relations can degenerate into conflict-prone engagements devoid of structure or accountability.

In a more practical sense, industrial relations manifest in activities such as collective bargaining, grievance handling, arbitration, and negotiation. These functions serve not only to resolve workplace disputes but also to preempt them through proactive engagement. Observed that by creating platforms for dialogue and cooperation, industrial relations enhance workplace morale and reduce the incidence of strikes, lockouts, and other forms of industrial unrest (Okolie & Agba, 2017). Consequently, sound industrial relations are often correlated with higher levels of organisational performance and employee satisfaction. Moreover, the scope of industrial relations extends into public policy, especially in countries where the state plays a dominant role in labour regulation. Adediran and Olayemi (2023) concurred that government policies on minimum wage, pension reforms, occupational health and safety, and labour rights are fundamental aspects of industrial relations. They noted that public sector industrial relations can significantly influence national economic performance and social cohesion, especially in developing economies like Nigeria, where the state is a major employer of labour. Nevertheless, challenges such as union fragmentation, employer resistance, and political interference continue to constrain the effective practice of industrial relations in many African settings. According to Eze and Ogbona (2018), these obstacles undermine the potential of industrial relations to serve as a vehicle for equitable development and social progress. They emphasised that reforming industrial relations systems to make them more inclusive, participatory, and responsive is essential to achieving sustainable economic and industrial development. Industrial relations are a vital component of any functional labour market system. It encompasses a broad scope that includes formal and informal employment relationships, regulatory and institutional frameworks, conflict resolution mechanisms, and evolving workplace dynamics. As scholars like Fajana (2015) and Ajayi (2020) have highlighted, industrial relations are not static but must adapt to changing economic, technological, and social contexts. It remains a cornerstone for promoting workplace harmony, organisational effectiveness, and national development. The historical antecedents of industrial relations are deeply rooted in the socio-economic transformations brought about by industrialisation, particularly the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries. This period marked a radical shift from agrarian economies to industrialised societies, fundamentally altering the dynamics of labour, management, and production. The emergence of factories, mass production, and wage labour led to the concentration of workers in urban areas and introduced new forms of employer-employee relationships, which laid the foundation for the modern field of industrial relations. Before industrialisation, most work was done in homes, small workshops, or on farms, often within a feudal or craft-based system.

Labour Dynamics in the Gas Sector

Labour dynamics encapsulate the ever-evolving relationships, negotiations, structures, and outcomes associated with the workforce within an economic system. These dynamics include factors such as employment patterns, wage structures, labour mobility, unionisation, and employer-employee relations, all of which are shaped by economic policies, technological

developments, political ideologies, and sectoral peculiarities. According to Okonkwo (2017), labour dynamics represent the interaction of forces that determine how labour is recruited, compensated, managed, and maintained within the organisational and national context. This interaction becomes even more nuanced when examined within specific industries, such as the gas sector, where capital intensity, safety regulations, international regulations, and geopolitical interests significantly influence labour relations. In the gas sector, labour dynamics are influenced by global energy demands, the complex technological nature of operations, and the strategic importance of energy resources. Osuoka (2016) emphasised that the extractive nature of the gas sector inherently requires a specialised, technically competent, yet highly flexible labour force, thereby intensifying labour-management negotiations and regulatory oversight. Similarly, Adedeji (2019) observed that the gas sector's reliance on both skilled expatriates and local professionals often creates a dual labour market, characterised by disparities in wages, working conditions, and access to managerial roles. This often generates discontent among local workers, who feel marginalised despite government localisation policies. Labour dynamics in the gas sector are further shaped by the interaction between multinational oil companies and host communities. According to Etemike and Igbinovia (2021), the labour structure in the Nigerian gas sector is stratified, often reflecting wider socio-economic inequalities. They asserted that the operations of multinational corporations tend to centralise employment decisions outside the host communities, leading to local grievances and unrest. In the same vein, Nwankwo (2020) noted that casualisation and outsourcing are prevalent practices within the gas sector, allowing companies to avoid unionised labour and reduce cost obligations, albeit at the expense of job security and worker welfare. However, trade unions have continued to play a pivotal role in mediating labour dynamics within the sector. Ajayi and Oladipo (2022) opined that the ability of unions such as the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) to negotiate better wages and protect job security is vital in balancing corporate interests with labour rights. Nevertheless, they also observed that union power has diminished over the years due to government deregulation policies and the influx of contract-based employment. Notwithstanding these challenges, labour activism remains a critical counterweight to exploitative practices, particularly in the gas-rich Niger Delta region, where socio-political tensions often manifest in industrial actions and community protests. Technological advancement also plays a significant role in reshaping labour dynamics. As automation and digital technologies become more integrated into gas operations, there is a gradual shift from manual labour to knowledge-based tasks. Uche and Ekpenyong (2018) emphasised that while this transition may improve efficiency, it also results in job displacement, especially for low-skilled workers. Consequently, this creates a demand for new skill sets and a restructuring of training and development frameworks. According to Olanrewaju (2023), this transition necessitates a collaborative approach involving government, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions to ensure that the workforce remains adaptable and future-ready. Government regulation is another force that influences labour dynamics in the gas sector. Policies such as the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Content Development Act (2010) aim to increase local participation in both employment and procurement processes. Oyelaran-Oyeyinka and Adeniran (2017) supported that these policies have led to measurable increases in local employment and capacity building. However, they also noted that enforcement remains inconsistent, thereby limiting the intended impact of such regulatory frameworks. From a global perspective, the dynamics of labour in the gas industry are not unique to Nigeria. Globally, gas-producing nations such as Qatar, Russia, and the United States also experience similar tensions

between labour optimisation and worker welfare. According to Friedman (2021), the gas sector worldwide is undergoing a labour transformation driven by environmental regulations, economic volatility, and geopolitical realignments. These transformations affect recruitment models, safety compliance, unionisation, and compensation structures. In the Nigerian context, these global shifts compound local issues such as infrastructural decay, corruption, and ethnic tensions, further complicating labour dynamics. Labour dynamics encompass the various changing patterns, behaviours, relationships, and structures that define how labour operates within an economic, political, and industrial context. The features and characteristics of labour dynamics are multifaceted and shaped by a combination of internal organisational practices and external socioeconomic, technological, and regulatory forces. These features are particularly evident in sectors like manufacturing, oil and gas, services, and agriculture, where labour plays a central role in productivity and industrial relations. One of the fundamental features of labour dynamics is labour mobility. This refers to the ability of workers to move between jobs, industries, or geographic regions in response to changing opportunities or economic pressures. Labour mobility can be horizontal (across firms or industries) or vertical (through promotion within organisations). It plays a critical role in labour market efficiency by helping to balance labour supply and demand. According to Aina (2017), in contexts where labour is mobile and flexible, economies tend to experience faster adjustment to economic shocks and better alignment of skills with job requirements. Employment patterns represent another core characteristic of labour dynamics. These include full-time, part-time, temporary, and contract-based employment arrangements. In many modern economies, especially with the rise of globalisation and digital technologies, there has been a shift towards more flexible and non-standard forms of employment. This flexibility may benefit employers in terms of cost reduction and productivity, but often leaves employees with reduced job security and fewer benefits (Ojo, 2019). Consequently, the rise of the gig economy and casualisation in sectors like construction and oil and gas reflect this changing employment landscape. Closely related to employment patterns is the nature of labour relations, which involves the interactions between employers, employees, and their representatives (such as trade unions). A defining characteristic of labour dynamics is the presence or absence of collective bargaining mechanisms, dispute resolution structures, and industrial harmony or unrest. Where labour relations are well-structured and supported by legal frameworks, workers are more likely to enjoy fair treatment, while employers benefit from stable work environments. However, strained labour relations can lead to strikes, protests, and productivity losses. Eze (2021) emphasised that healthy labour relations contribute significantly to organisational growth and national economic development. Another important characteristic is wage structures and remuneration systems. Labour dynamics involve how wages are determined, including factors such as skill level, industry norms, cost of living, and bargaining power. These structures may be fixed, performance-based, or negotiated. Disparities in wage structures—especially between expatriates and local workers in industries like oil and gas often lead to tensions and perceptions of inequality. Adepoju and Olatunji (2020) observed that wage-related grievances are among the leading causes of industrial disputes in extractive sectors. Technological change and skill development also significantly shape labour dynamics. As industries adopt new technologies, the nature of work evolves, leading to shifts in the demand for labour. Automation, artificial intelligence, and digital tools reduce the demand for routine manual jobs while increasing the need for technical and analytical skills. This dynamic necessitates continuous training and upskilling to prevent labour redundancy. As noted by Musa (2022), skill mismatch becomes a growing concern when educational systems fail to keep pace

with industrial requirements.

Unionisation/Trade Unionism

Unionisation, also known as trade unionism, remains a pivotal feature of modern labour relations, serving as a collective mechanism through which workers advocate for their rights and interests within various industries. According to Oginni and Fadugba (2018), trade unionism is essentially the organised efforts by workers to achieve collective bargaining power aimed at improving wages, working conditions, job security, and other employment benefits. They defined it as a formal association of employees formed to protect and promote the socio-economic welfare of its members in relation to the employer. Similarly, Adeniji et al. (2017) emphasised that unionisation is a vital process through which employees assert a degree of control over their work environment by uniting as a group to negotiate terms of employment with management. Historically rooted in the industrial revolution, trade unions have evolved in structure and influence, often reflecting the socio-economic and political climates in which they operate. Observed that the power of collective action embodied in trade unions has remained relevant in both traditional and emerging sectors, including the informal economy and technologically advanced industries (Okolie & Eluagu, 2020). In the same vein, Oyeshola (2019) noted that trade unionism plays a critical role in shaping labour policies and ensuring equitable treatment of workers through institutionalised bargaining mechanisms. Nevertheless, the strength and effectiveness of trade unions vary across regions and economic systems, often influenced by government regulations, employer resistance, and workers' willingness to participate actively. Averred that the core function of unionisation is to address the inherent power imbalance between employers and employees by presenting a united front in negotiations and disputes (Eze, 2021). Consequently, unions serve not only as bargaining agents but also as platforms for social dialogue, conflict resolution, and political engagement. According to Amah and Ahiauzu (2022), trade unions in Nigeria, for instance, have expanded their roles beyond workplace issues to include advocacy for national development, social justice, and democratic governance. This expansion reflects the broader scope of unionism in addressing systemic inequalities and promoting inclusive economic growth. However, the dynamics of unionisation are undergoing significant changes due to globalisation, technological innovation, and the rise of flexible labour markets. Agba et al. (2019) opined that the spread of precarious employment and gig work has complicated traditional union strategies, as workers in non-standard jobs often lack the stability and formal recognition required for union membership. Notwithstanding these challenges, unions are adapting by embracing digital tools, forming alliances across borders, and lobbying for labour law reforms that recognise new forms of work. Supported that these adaptive strategies are crucial in maintaining the relevance and resilience of trade unionism in the 21st century (Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, 2023). In the Nigerian context, trade unionism has historically played a significant role in shaping labour relations and public policy. Observed that major unions such as the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) have been instrumental in advocating for minimum wage reforms, opposing anti-labour legislation, and mediating industrial disputes (Adediran, 2020).

Systems Theory of Industrial Relations

The Marxist Political Economy Theory, originally propounded by Karl Marx in collaboration with Friedrich Engels in the 19th century, particularly crystallised in *Das Kapital*, published in 1867, emerged as a critical framework for understanding capitalist societies, especially the

conflictual relationship between capital and labour. According to Marx, the structure of the economy determines the social, political, and ideological superstructure of society, and capitalism, based on private ownership of the means of production, inherently leads to class struggles between the bourgeoisie (owners of production) and the proletariat (workers) (Marx & Engels, 1867/2015). The theory assumes that economic relations are the foundation upon which societal institutions are built and that class antagonism is inevitable under capitalism due to exploitation. Proponents of this theory, such as Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Antonio Gramsci, expanded Marx's ideas into broader sociopolitical contexts. Lenin (1916) focused on imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, suggesting that capitalist economies inevitably extend their contradictions globally through colonisation and economic exploitation. Rosa Luxemburg (1913/2003) emphasised the role of capital accumulation in driving global economic instability and social unrest. Gramsci (1971), on the other hand, introduced the concept of cultural hegemony, which explains how ruling classes maintain control through ideological dominance rather than force alone. The Marxist Political Economy Theory is underpinned by several key assumptions. First, it posits that the economic base (the mode of production) shapes all other aspects of society. Second, it assumes that class struggle is the primary engine of historical development. Third, the theory holds that labour is the source of all value, and under capitalism, workers are alienated from the products of their labour. Fourth, it assumes the inevitability of capitalism's internal contradictions leading to its eventual collapse and the rise of a socialist or communist society (Harvey, 2017). Major contributors to the development and reinterpretation of Marxist political economy include scholars such as David Harvey, Erik Olin Wright, and Samir Amin. Harvey (2017) analysed spatial and temporal dimensions of capitalist crises, showing how urbanisation and neoliberalism serve to absorb surplus capital while perpetuating inequality. Wright (2015) contributed a nuanced view on class, advocating for a "real utopias" framework that considers various forms of social empowerment within and against capitalist structures. Samir Amin (1976) expanded Marxist theory to explain underdevelopment and dependency in post-colonial states, proposing that peripheral economies are structurally subordinated to the needs of capitalist metropolises. Several empirical studies have anchored their analyses on the Marxist political economy framework, especially within the context of labour relations, industrial conflict, and sectoral dynamics. For example, Idemudia and Ite (2017) examined the political economy of oil in the Niger Delta and highlighted how the capitalist exploitation of natural resources, driven by multinational corporations and facilitated by the Nigerian state, leads to labour marginalisation and environmental degradation. Similarly, Ojakorotu and Gilbert (2020) employed the theory to explore union resistance and industrial relations in oil firms operating in Bayelsa, demonstrating that the uneven power dynamics between labour and capital align with Marxist predictions of class conflict. In the context of the study, the Marxist political economy theory provides a robust theoretical lens. The theory aptly situates the dynamics of industrial relations within the broader framework of class conflict and capital accumulation. Oil and gas firms in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta, are owned or controlled by transnational capitalist interests and a complicit national elite, leading to persistent marginalisation of labour, precarious work conditions, and suppression of union activities (Okoh, 2019). The transformation of the workplace in this sector-often portrayed as modernisation can be interpreted as a strategy of capital to reduce labour cost and weaken collective bargaining, which aligns with Marxist assumptions about capitalist strategies to maintain profit margins. Nevertheless, an argument against the sole reliance on the Marxist theory in this study stems from its economic determinism and sometimes reductionist view of agency. While the theory

emphasises structural constraints, it may underappreciate the nuanced roles of local cultures, institutions, and evolving state policies in shaping labour-capital relations (Akinwale, 2021). Moreover, critics argue that the theory does not sufficiently account for the gendered or environmental dimensions of industrial relations, which are increasingly central in the oil and gas discourse. Despite these critiques, the theory remains adequate for exploring the structural causes of labour disputes, union suppression, and capitalist transformation of workplaces in Nigeria's oil and gas sector. Its emphasis on economic power, ownership of production, and class conflict allows for a deep interrogation of the entrenched inequalities and the institutional mechanisms that sustain them in the sector (Edoho, 2015). Thus, while it may be complemented by other theoretical perspectives such as institutionalism or social movement theory, the Marxist political economy remains foundational to understanding the political and economic undercurrents shaping labour dynamics in the oil and gas industries of Bayelsa State.

Method

The method adopted for the study is the descriptive survey research design. The study focused on employees, union leaders, human resource managers, and labour officials, with a target population of approximately 5,000 respondents. A sample size of 370 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula and selected through purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews administered through physical visits and electronic means. The research instruments were validated by experts and pilot-tested, while reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including mean, percentages, standard deviation, and regression analysis, were used to analyse quantitative data at a 0.05 level of significance. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify key patterns relating to labour unions, workplace reforms, and employee-management relations.

Data Presentation

Research Question: How does unionization impact on industrial peace, employee welfare, and negotiations within the sector?

Table 1: Summary of Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Responses on how unionisation affects industrial peace, employee welfare, and negotiations within the sector

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	Sum	Mean	Std.
8	Trade unions influence management decisions through collective bargaining and grievance resolution mechanisms.	122	98	79	38	337	978	2.90	1.020
9	Union representatives often participate in joint consultative committees, where they contribute to policy formulation on health, safety, and welfare.	104	98	90	45	337	935	2.77	1.031
10	Unions advocate for transparency and fairness in recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary procedures.	59	150	103	25	337	917	2.72	.838

11	Trade unions push for employee development policies, including training, upskilling, and career growth opportunities.	75	86	114	62	337	848	2.52	1.032
12	In some cases, unions challenge management decisions they perceive as exploitative or contrary to agreed terms.	75	144	86	32	337	936	2.78	.900
13	The pressure from trade unions has led to the adoption of workplace policies that favour job regularisation and localisation of labour.	143	70	71	53	337	977	2.90	1.121
14	Where management and unions have a collaborative relationship, policy decisions are more inclusive and worker-friendly.	82	151	67	37	337	952	2.82	.924
Grand Mean/Std.Dev.								2.77	0.99

Source: SPSS Window Output, Version 22.0 (based on 2025 field survey data).

The result on Table 1 showed the Summary of Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Responses on how unionisation affects industrial peace, employee welfare, and negotiations within the sector. The first item, "Trade unions influence management decisions through collective bargaining and grievance resolution mechanisms," received a mean score of 2.90 with a standard deviation of 1.020, suggesting a relatively high level of agreement among respondents, with moderate variability in their views. The second item, "Union representatives often participate in joint consultative committees, where they contribute to policy formulation on health, safety, and welfare," recorded a mean score of 2.77 and a standard deviation of 1.031, indicating a high level of agreement, though with some divergence in opinion. The third item, "Unions advocate for transparency and fairness in recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary procedures," obtained a mean score of 2.72 with a standard deviation of 0.838, showing agreement among respondents, with the lowest variability in the dataset, suggesting a relatively consistent perception. The fourth item, "Trade unions push for employee development policies, including training, upskilling, and career growth opportunities," received a mean score of 2.52 and a standard deviation of 1.032, reflecting a moderate level of agreement and indicating that respondents' experiences in this area are more mixed. The fifth item, "In some cases, unions challenge management decisions they perceive as exploitative or contrary to agreed terms," had a mean score of 2.78 with a standard deviation of 0.900, implying a high level of agreement with fairly consistent responses. The sixth item, "The pressure from trade unions has led to the adoption of workplace policies that favour job regularisation and localisation of labour," recorded one of the highest mean scores at 2.90 with a standard deviation of 1.121, suggesting strong agreement but with noticeable differences in respondents' perspectives. The seventh item, "Where management and unions have a collaborative relationship, policy decisions are more inclusive and worker-friendly," received a mean score of 2.82 with a standard deviation of 0.924, indicating a high level of agreement with relatively consistent views. The grand mean of 2.77 with a standard deviation of 0.99 shows that, overall, respondents generally agree that unionisation positively affects industrial peace, employee welfare, and negotiation processes in the sector. The relatively low overall standard deviation suggests that the majority of respondents

hold similar opinions, with only moderate variations in their level of agreement.

Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis Ho: Workplace transformation has no significant impact on industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria.

Table 2: Model Summary for the significant influence of Workplace transformation on industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R-Squared	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin - Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change	
1	.396 ^a	.157	.153	2.36875	.157	42.377	1	228	.000	.620

a. Predictors: (Constant), WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION

b. Dependent Variable: INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS PRACTICES

Source: SPSS Window Output, Version 22.0 (based on 2025 field survey data).

The above model summary table 2 shows the R value of which is .396a, the same as the correlation matrix. And the value of R-squared is denoted as .157, which means that only 15.70% of the variation in industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria is explained by workplace transformation, which, however, is considered to be not high, and thus it authenticates that Workplace transformation significantly influences industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria.

Table 3: ANOVA

Result for the significant influence of Workplace transformation on industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	237.778	1	237.778	42.377	.000 ^b
	Residual	1279.305	228	5.611		
	Total	1517.083	229			

a. Dependent Variable: INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS PRACTICES

b. Predictors: (Constant), WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION

Source: SPSS Window Output, Version 22.0 (based on 2025 field survey data).

The ANOVA Table 3 shows the goodness of the model as reflected in the table above, it indicated the F-ratio of 42.377 which is significant and positive enough, statistically significant if the probability value (P value) is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$), hence the model is of a good fit, since the F ratio is large enough and the P value is less than 0.05. This table gave us an F-ratio ($F = 42.377$) to determine whether the model is a good fit for the data. According to this p-value, it is

a good fit. This indicates that the regression model predicts the dependent variable (industrial relations practices) significantly well. Based on the result, the null hypothesis states that there is no significant influence of workplace transformation on industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria. is hereby rejected at the 0.05 level of significance, and the alternative hypothesis, which states that there is a significant influence of workplace transformation on industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria is accepted.

Table 4: Coefficient Result for the significant influence of workplace transformation on industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria.

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Partial	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	5.174	.895		5.784	.000	3.412	6.937				
	WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION	.499	.077	.396	6.510	.000	.348	.651	.396	.396	.396	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS PRACTICES

Source: SPSS Window Output, Version 22.0 (based on 2025 field survey data)

The above table 4 entails the value of B, Beta, which is known as rate of change. The significance value is denoted as 0.00, which means there is a significant influence of the independent variable (workplace transformation) on the dependent variable (Industrial relations practices). By keeping other things constant, if there is 1% percent variance in workplace transformation, it would result a change of 49.90% or approximately 50% on industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria which undoubtedly is a high score. The positive slope here may be due to uniform units of measure of both variables, which may even result as a foundation of direct influence amongst both variables if considered in general. That thoroughly highlights an average significant influence of packaging design on industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria. Furthermore, Table 4 above shows the results of the regression coefficient, the t-cal = 6.247, P = 0.000, at 95% level of confidence and (t-crit = ±1.96). This implies that an increase in ($\beta = 6.937$) of industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria is attributed to a unit variation in packaging design. Since the relationship is statistically

positive and significant, that is t-cal. value of = 6.24 is greater than t-crit. value of ± 1.96 at 0.05%, the study therefore rejects the null hypothesis and states that packaging design had a positive and significant relationship with industrial relations practices in the gas industry in Nigeria. The level of reliance on the model, as established by the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is 1, indicating minimal changes in the multi-collinearity test scenario. In accordance with the above data, the linear equation would result as follows:

Packaging design = .438 Industrial relations practices + 4.850

Where:

y = packaging design (independent variable)

m = slope

x = industrial relations practices (dependent variable)

c = constant.

Discussion of Finding

Role and Influence of Trade Unions in Shaping Industrial Relations within The Sector

The result for the research question, which sought to know how unionisation affects industrial peace, employee welfare, and negotiations within the sector, showed that respondents generally agreed that unionisation plays a significant role in shaping workplace dynamics. Specifically, the first item - "Trade unions influence management decisions through collective bargaining and grievance resolution mechanisms" received a mean score of 2.90 with a standard deviation of 1.020, indicating a relatively high level of agreement, albeit with moderate variation in perception. The second item - "Union representatives often participate in joint consultative committees, where they contribute to policy formulation on health, safety, and welfare" — recorded a mean of 2.77 (SD = 1.031), also reflecting high agreement with slight divergence in opinion. The third item, "Unions advocate for transparency and fairness in recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary procedures," - obtained a mean score of 2.72 with the lowest standard deviation in the dataset (0.838), suggesting consensus among respondents. The fourth item "Trade unions push for employee development policies, including training, upskilling, and career growth opportunities" - had a mean score of 2.52 (SD = 1.032), showing moderate agreement and indicating a more mixed set of experiences. For the fifth item, "In some cases, unions challenge management decisions they perceive as exploitative or contrary to agreed terms", respondents gave a mean of 2.78 (SD = 0.900), implying high agreement with fairly consistent responses. The sixth item - "The pressure from trade unions has led to the adoption of workplace policies that favour job regularisation and localisation of labour" recorded one of the highest mean scores (2.90, SD = 1.121), indicating strong agreement but with noticeable variation in perspectives. Lastly, the seventh item - "Where management and unions have a collaborative relationship, policy decisions are more inclusive and worker-friendly" — scored 2.82 (SD = 0.924), showing high agreement and relatively consistent views.

The grand mean of 2.77 with an overall standard deviation of 0.99 confirms that, on average, respondents believe unionisation positively influences industrial peace, employee welfare, and negotiation processes in the sector, with opinions showing only moderate variability. The result for the corresponding hypothesis one - tested in Tables 4.15, 4.16, and 4.17 - which sought to determine whether there is a significant relationship between unionisation and employee welfare in the Nigerian gas sector, revealed statistically significant findings. The model summary (Table 4.15) showed an R-value of 0.336 and R^2 of 0.113, meaning that 11.3% of the variation in employee welfare is explained by unionisation. While this is not a high proportion, it confirms

that unionisation exerts a measurable influence. The ANOVA result (Table 4.16) indicated an F-ratio of 29.086 with $p < 0.05$, confirming that the model significantly predicts employee welfare. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis - that there is a significant relationship between unionisation and employee welfare - was accepted. The coefficients table (Table 4.17) showed a B (Beta) value of 0.438 with a significance level of $p = 0.000$, indicating that a unit increase in unionisation would lead to a 44.3% increase in employee welfare, holding other factors constant. The t-calculated value (6.247) exceeded the t-critical value (± 1.96), further confirming the statistical significance. Additionally, the VIF value of 1 suggests no multicollinearity issues, indicating the model's reliability. These results align with Salamon's (2019) assertion that trade unions act as organised collectives that strengthen workers' positions in negotiations, particularly through collective bargaining and advocacy. The finding that union activities lead to policy inclusivity and better welfare outcomes echoes Betcherman's (2021) view that unions institutionalise negotiation processes, thereby fostering industrial stability. Similarly, Fajana (2020) highlighted that unions help balance employer-employee power dynamics, which is evident in the respondents' agreement that unions influence management decisions, advocate for fairness, and push for worker-friendly policies. The significant but moderate magnitude of the relationship between unionisation and employee welfare in this study reflects the mixed results seen in Ejere and Etim's (2022) work, where unions had strong influence on wage negotiations but a limited impact on physical working conditions. In the Nigerian oil and gas context, Jumbo and Onuoha's (2021) findings support the present result by showing that a cooperative relationship between management and unions enhances industrial relations. Moreover, the statistically significant association between unionisation and welfare corroborates Tom et al.'s (2024) conclusion that constructive union-management dialogue improves salary, resources, and working conditions. The evidence from both the descriptive and inferential analyses indicates that unionisation positively affects industrial peace, employee welfare, and negotiation processes in the Nigerian gas sector. While the explained variance ($R^2 = 0.113$) is modest, the statistical significance of the relationship suggests that strengthening union capacities, fostering collaborative union-management relationships, and institutionalising dialogue mechanisms could further enhance welfare outcomes. The consistency of these findings with established empirical studies and theoretical perspectives underscores the enduring relevance of trade unions as agents of industrial stability and worker advocacy.

Key Findings

Labour Dynamics in the Nigerian Gas Sector

The study found that respondents moderately agreed that labour unions contribute to industrial peace, employee representation, improved welfare, and collective bargaining in the Nigerian gas sector. However, perceptions of union effectiveness and motivational incentives varied, indicating that existing labour relations mechanisms remain relevant but require strengthening to achieve greater workplace harmony and employee satisfaction.

Unionisation and Employee Welfare

The study found that unionisation has a positive and statistically significant influence on employee welfare and industrial relations in the Nigerian gas sector. Trade unions enhance collective bargaining, workplace inclusiveness, policy formulation, and employee welfare, confirming that stronger union-management collaboration contributes to improved industrial

peace, worker protection, and organisational effectiveness.

Conclusion

The study on *Industrial Relations in the Oil and Gas Sector: Labour Dynamics, Unionisation, and Workplace Transformation in Nigeria*, focusing on Bayelsa State, has provided critical insights into the dynamics of industrial relations within the gas sector. The findings reveal that workplace transformation significantly influences industrial relations practices, as evidenced by a positive and substantial effect, with a variance impact of approximately 50%. This underscores the importance of organisational reforms, structural adjustments, and technological integration in shaping harmonious labour-management relations. Such transformations serve as a foundation for improving communication, participation, and overall workplace effectiveness. Additionally, the study demonstrates that trade union activities have a pronounced and statistically significant influence on organisational policy decisions, accounting for a 62.9% change in policy outcomes. This highlights the pivotal role of unions in shaping organisational governance, advocating for employee welfare, and ensuring participatory decision-making. The positive and significant relationship further confirms that unions remain strategic stakeholders in driving workplace reforms and aligning labour objectives with organisational goals. The analysis of challenges and opportunities indicates that the gas sector faces systemic barriers such as weak enforcement of labour laws, employer resistance to unionisation, and political interference in union activities. Despite these obstacles, emerging opportunities exist for unions to enhance their relevance and effectiveness, particularly through leveraging technology for digital advocacy, engaging with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives, and participating in strengthened tripartite dialogues. Capacity-building for union leaders was also identified as a critical strategy for adapting to workplace transformation and maintaining bargaining power.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommended that management in the Nigerian gas sector should strengthen collaboration with trade unions to ensure that employee welfare is consistently prioritised. By actively involving unions in decision-making and policy formulation, organisations can foster industrial peace and enhance employee satisfaction.

It is also recommended that trade unions should adopt digital platforms and virtual organising strategies to engage effectively with employees in remote and technology-driven roles. This will help unions maintain relevance and extend their reach amidst increasing workplace digitalisation and evolving work models.

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