

SOCIAL DIALOGUE AND INDUSTRIAL HARMONY AMONG MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between social dialogue and industrial harmony among employees of selected manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The increasing incidence of workplace grievances, labour disputes, and strained employer-employee relationships within the manufacturing sector has heightened the need for effective social dialogue mechanisms that promote industrial harmony. Social dialogue was examined using employee participation and collective bargaining, while industrial harmony was measured using conflict reduction and employee cooperation. The study was anchored on the Pluralist Theory of Industrial Relations and supported by the Systems Theory of Industrial Relations. A correlational research design was adopted. The population comprised 285 employees drawn from 10 selected manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, with a sample size of 165 respondents determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. From the 165 questionnaires administered, 156 were successfully retrieved and analyzed. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that employee participation had strong positive and statistically significant relationships with conflict reduction and employee cooperation. Similarly, collective bargaining was found to have strong positive and statistically significant relationships with conflict reduction and employee cooperation. The study concludes that effective social dialogue significantly enhances industrial harmony among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. It recommends that manufacturing firms strengthen employee participation through inclusive decision-making, institutionalize effective collective bargaining practices, establish regular labour-management consultation forums, and periodically evaluate social dialogue mechanisms to sustain conflict reduction, employee cooperation, and harmonious industrial relations.

Keywords: Social Dialogue, Employee Participation, Collective Bargaining, Industrial Harmony, Conflict Reduction.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business environment is characterized by rapid technological advancement, globalization, changing labour market expectations, and intense competition, making harmonious employer-employee relationships increasingly important. In manufacturing firms, productivity, innovation, and sustainability depend largely on stable industrial relations. Although disagreements over wages, working conditions, and organisational policies are inevitable, effective social dialogue promotes industrial harmony by reducing workplace conflicts and strengthening cooperation between management and employees (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2018).

Social dialogue, which includes negotiation, consultation, information sharing, and communication between employers and employees, has gained global recognition as a strategic mechanism for promoting constructive labour-management relations and decent work. At the organisational level, it fosters mutual trust, participatory decision-making, and peaceful resolution of workplace issues, leading to improved employee commitment, productivity, and industrial peace (ILO, 2018). Its key

dimensions are employee participation, which enhances trust, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Kim & Kim, 2021; ILO, 2018), and collective bargaining, which promotes fairness, transparency, and industrial democracy despite implementation challenges in Nigeria (Igbinedion et al., 2024; Kelsey et al., 2023).

Industrial harmony is reflected in peaceful labour-management relationships characterized by effective communication, mutual trust, and shared commitment, resulting in improved morale, productivity, lower labour turnover, and enhanced organisational performance (Nwokocha, 2015; Fajana & Shadare, 2012). It can be assessed through conflict reduction, achieved by resolving grievances through dialogue and negotiation (ILO, 2018; Igbinedion et al., 2024), and employee cooperation, demonstrated through teamwork, information sharing, and commitment to organisational goals (ILO, 2018; Nwokocha, 2015).

Despite the economic importance of Nigeria's manufacturing sector, firms continue to experience wage disputes, inadequate employee participation, weak communication, poor implementation of collective agreements, and declining trust between management and employees, resulting in low morale, work stoppages, and strained labour-management relations (Igbinedion et al., 2024; Kelsey et al., 2023). In Rivers State, these challenges persist despite various employee relations initiatives, suggesting that existing social dialogue mechanisms may be insufficient in promoting conflict reduction and employee cooperation. Moreover, few empirical studies have specifically examined the relationship between employee participation, collective bargaining, conflict reduction, and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. This study therefore investigates the relationship between social dialogue and industrial harmony among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Industrial harmony is vital for the productivity and competitiveness of manufacturing firms, yet many organisations continue to experience industrial relations challenges arising from ineffective communication, inadequate employee involvement in decision-making, poor implementation of negotiated agreements, and declining trust between management and employees. These challenges contribute to workplace grievances, conflicts, work disruptions, low employee morale, and reduced organisational performance (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022).

Although social dialogue, through employee participation and collective bargaining, is recognized as an effective mechanism for promoting constructive labour-management relations and sustainable organisational performance (ILO, 2022), its implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in developing countries. In Nigeria, many manufacturing firms still limit employee participation and fail to effectively implement negotiated agreements, leading to dissatisfaction, strained labour-management relations, declining commitment, and reduced cooperation (Adebayo & Nwagbara, 2023; ILO, 2022). Similar challenges are evident in Rivers State, where workplace disagreements, communication gaps, and low collaborative behaviour continue despite various employee relations initiatives.

Furthermore, existing empirical studies have largely examined social dialogue in relation to organisational performance, commitment, job satisfaction, and productivity rather than industrial harmony measured by conflict reduction and employee cooperation. Most were also conducted outside Rivers State or within the public sector, leaving limited empirical evidence on manufacturing firms in the state (Addai et al., 2022; OECD, 2021). This study therefore addresses this gap by examining the relationship between social dialogue (employee participation and collective bargaining) and industrial harmony (conflict reduction and employee cooperation) among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the relationship between social dialogue and industrial harmony among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the relationship between employee participation and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- ii. Determine the relationship between employee participation and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iii. Examine the relationship between collective bargaining and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iv. Determine the relationship between collective bargaining and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

- i. What is the relationship between employee participation and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between employee participation and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- iii. What is the relationship between collective bargaining and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- iv. What is the relationship between collective bargaining and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested in the study:

- H01: There is no significant relationship between employee participation and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- H02: There is no significant relationship between employee participation and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- H03: There is no significant relationship between collective bargaining and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- H04: There is no significant relationship between collective bargaining and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

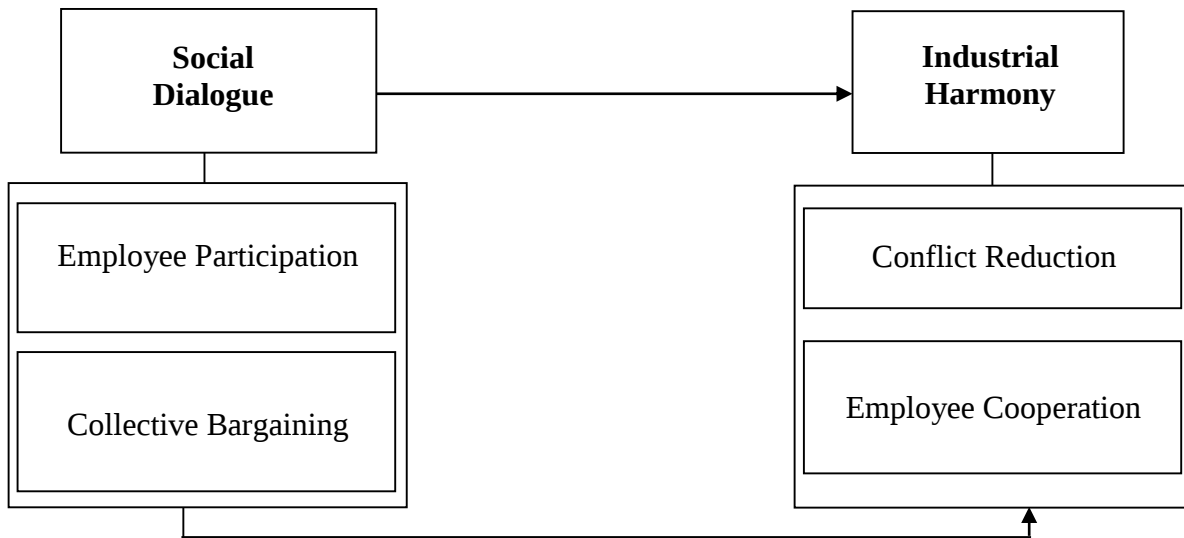


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship between Social Dialogue and Industrial Harmony among Manufacturing Firms in Rivers State, Nigeria

Source: The dimensions of Social Dialogue (Employee Participation and Collective Bargaining) were adapted from the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Social Dialogue Framework (ILO, 2022) and supported by contemporary industrial relations literature (OECD, 2021; Eurofound, 2023). The measures of Industrial Harmony (Conflict Reduction and Employee Cooperation) were adapted from the industrial relations and organisational behaviour literature on harmonious labour-management relations (Nwokocha, 2015; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Dessler, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Concept of Social Dialogue

Social dialogue is a key mechanism for promoting effective labour-management relations, organisational stability, and sustainable economic development. The growing complexity of employment relationships, technological change, globalization, and evolving workforce expectations has increased the need for collaboration between employers and employees. Rather than relying on adversarial industrial relations, organisations use social dialogue to resolve workplace issues through consultation, negotiation, information sharing, and joint decision-making, thereby strengthening employee trust, reducing industrial disputes, and promoting industrial harmony (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022).

The International Labour Organisation (2022) defines social dialogue as all forms of negotiation, consultation, or information exchange among governments, employers, and workers on economic and social policy issues. At the organisational level, it promotes constructive interaction between management and employees to improve communication, resolve workplace concerns, and foster organisational resilience. The ILO (2022) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) further emphasize that organisations with strong social dialogue mechanisms are better able to adapt to organisational change, improve labour relations, enhance employee wellbeing, and achieve sustainable organisational performance. In manufacturing firms, where production activities require close coordination, social dialogue helps address issues relating

to wages, working conditions, occupational safety, and technological change before they escalate into industrial disputes (Eurofound, 2023).

Contemporary literature identifies employee participation and collective bargaining as the principal dimensions of social dialogue because they strengthen trust, communication, organisational justice, and industrial harmony (ILO, 2022; OECD, 2021). Accordingly, this study conceptualizes social dialogue using these two dimensions.

Employee Participation

Employee participation refers to employees' involvement in organisational decisions affecting their work through direct or representative structures. It allows employees to contribute ideas, participate in problem-solving, and influence organisational policies, thereby improving organisational effectiveness (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Participation extends beyond merely informing employees; it encourages active involvement in planning, consultation, policy formulation, and organisational change, resulting in higher motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, and trust between management and employees (Eurofound, 2023).

Organisations that encourage employee participation benefit from improved communication, innovation, knowledge sharing, employee engagement, and organisational resilience (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; OECD, 2021). In manufacturing firms, participation enhances operational efficiency by enabling employees to contribute to production planning, quality improvement, safety initiatives, and continuous improvement programmes, leading to better performance and fewer industrial disputes (Eurofound, 2023). It also promotes transparency, fairness, conflict prevention, teamwork, and industrial harmony by providing continuous communication channels for resolving workplace grievances before they escalate (ILO, 2022; OECD, 2021; Eurofound, 2023).

Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is a cornerstone of social dialogue through which employers and employees negotiate mutually acceptable terms and conditions of employment. It provides a structured process for negotiation, consultation, and joint decision-making, promoting fairness, transparency, industrial democracy, and stable labour-management relations (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022). According to the ILO (2022), collective bargaining covers wages, working conditions, employment benefits, occupational safety, grievance procedures, and other employment matters while strengthening trust, communication, and organisational stability.

The increasing complexity of employment relationships has made collective bargaining more important in addressing workforce restructuring, employee welfare, organisational change, and other workplace challenges. Organisations with effective collective bargaining systems are generally more resilient and better able to resolve disputes through negotiation rather than confrontation (ILO, 2022). In manufacturing firms, collective bargaining facilitates the resolution of issues relating to wages, working conditions, occupational safety, and disciplinary procedures, thereby preventing strikes and other industrial conflicts (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021).

Effective collective bargaining also promotes organisational justice, employee commitment, and cooperation when negotiated agreements are faithfully implemented, whereas poor implementation often leads to dissatisfaction and recurring disputes (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). It further strengthens industrial democracy by improving communication, mutual respect, and employee participation in workplace decisions. Organisations with effective collective bargaining generally experience better employee relations, higher workplace satisfaction, and fewer industrial disputes (Eurofound, 2023). Despite its importance in Nigeria, challenges such as weak implementation, declining trade union influence, inadequate consultation, and ineffective communication continue to

limit its effectiveness, making stronger collective bargaining essential for promoting industrial harmony, organisational stability, and sustainable productivity (Kelsey et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study conceptualizes collective bargaining as structured consultation and negotiation between management and employee representatives aimed at improving labour-management relations and industrial harmony.

Concept of Industrial Harmony

Industrial harmony is a key outcome of effective industrial relations, reflecting peaceful, cooperative, and mutually beneficial relationships between employers and employees. It promotes stable work environments where workplace issues are resolved through dialogue, consultation, and negotiation, thereby enhancing productivity, employee wellbeing, organisational sustainability, and competitiveness (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022). Beyond the absence of industrial disputes, industrial harmony is characterized by mutual trust, effective communication, shared commitment, and collaborative problem-solving, which improve organisational effectiveness and minimize workplace disruptions (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

The increasing complexity of modern organisations has heightened the importance of industrial harmony, particularly in manufacturing firms where uninterrupted production depends on close coordination among employees and management. Organisations that maintain harmonious labour-management relations experience stronger employee commitment, better teamwork, improved organisational performance, and greater resilience, while those with poor industrial relations often face grievances, absenteeism, labour turnover, low morale, and industrial actions (Eurofound, 2023; OECD, 2021). The ILO (2022) further emphasizes that industrial harmony is strengthened through effective social dialogue, employee participation, and collective bargaining, which improve communication, reduce conflict, and enhance employee wellbeing (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Industrial harmony is commonly measured through conflict reduction and employee cooperation, as these directly reflect the quality of labour-management relationships and organisational communication (ILO, 2022; Eurofound, 2023). Accordingly, this study conceptualizes industrial harmony using these two measures.

Conflict Reduction

Conflict reduction refers to minimizing the frequency and intensity of workplace disagreements through effective communication, consultation, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving. While workplace conflict is inevitable, effective conflict management preserves organisational stability and productivity by preventing disputes from escalating into industrial unrest (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022). Modern organisations increasingly adopt dialogue, mediation, negotiation, and participatory decision-making to address conflicts relating to wages, working conditions, promotions, and organisational policies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021).

In manufacturing firms, conflict reduction is particularly important because industrial disputes can disrupt production, increase operational costs, lower product quality, and reduce employee morale. Organisations that encourage early identification of grievances, continuous communication, employee participation, and collective bargaining generally experience fewer strikes, grievances, disciplinary cases, and legal disputes (Eurofound, 2023; ILO, 2022). Effective conflict reduction also strengthens trust, psychological safety, organisational commitment, teamwork, employee satisfaction, and overall organisational effectiveness while reducing absenteeism, labour turnover, stress, and productivity losses (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Dessler, 2020). In this study, conflict reduction refers to the extent to which manufacturing firms minimize workplace disputes through effective social dialogue, employee participation, and collective bargaining.

Employee Cooperation

Employee cooperation refers to employees' willingness to work collaboratively with management and colleagues through teamwork, communication, mutual support, information sharing, and commitment to organisational goals. It reflects healthy labour-management relationships characterized by trust, respect, and shared responsibility (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). As organisations increasingly rely on teamwork, knowledge sharing, and cross-functional collaboration, employee cooperation has become essential for improving productivity, innovation, employee engagement, and organisational adaptability (Robbins & Judge, 2022).

Employee cooperation is strengthened by fair employment practices, open communication, and opportunities for participation in organisational decisions. Employees who perceive fairness and management support are more willing to cooperate with supervisors and colleagues, whereas poor communication and inadequate consultation weaken cooperation (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022). In manufacturing firms, cooperation improves workflow, quality, safety compliance, operational efficiency, and competitiveness (Eurofound, 2023). Social dialogue, through employee participation and collective bargaining, further strengthens trust, organisational commitment, adaptability during change, and collaborative behaviour, thereby enhancing organisational resilience and industrial harmony (OECD, 2021; ILO, 2022; Robbins & Judge, 2022). In this study, employee cooperation refers to the willingness of employees and management to work together effectively in achieving organisational objectives through harmonious labour-management relationships.

Social Dialogue and Industrial Harmony

Social dialogue and industrial harmony are closely linked because effective communication, consultation, negotiation, and collaboration provide the foundation for peaceful and productive labour-management relations. Social dialogue enables workplace concerns to be discussed and resolved before they escalate into industrial disputes, thereby reducing workplace conflicts, strengthening employee cooperation, and promoting sustainable industrial peace (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022). The ILO (2022) identifies social dialogue as a strategic pillar of decent work, emphasizing that consultation, negotiation, and joint decision-making foster mutual trust and shared responsibility while addressing workplace issues through consensus rather than confrontation.

Employee participation promotes industrial harmony by increasing employees' involvement in decision-making, strengthening trust, improving communication, and encouraging commitment to organisational objectives (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Likewise, collective bargaining enhances industrial harmony by establishing mutually acceptable employment conditions and providing structured mechanisms for resolving disputes, leading to stronger labour-management relationships and greater industrial peace (ILO, 2022). Social dialogue also contributes to conflict reduction by providing legitimate channels for resolving grievances (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021) and enhances employee cooperation through participatory management, transparent negotiations, teamwork, and mutual trust (Eurofound, 2023).

The relationship between social dialogue and industrial harmony is particularly important in manufacturing firms, where production efficiency depends on effective communication and collaboration. Weak social dialogue often results in grievances, work disruptions, and industrial unrest, whereas effective dialogue promotes employee commitment, conflict reduction, uninterrupted production, and organisational success (OECD, 2021). In Nigeria, despite existing labour legislation, inadequate consultation, ineffective communication, and poor implementation of negotiated agreements continue to undermine industrial harmony, making stronger social dialogue essential for improving organisational performance (Kelsey et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study proposes that social dialogue, measured through employee participation and collective bargaining,

is positively related to industrial harmony, measured through conflict reduction and employee cooperation, among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Pluralist Theory of Industrial Relations developed by Alan Fox (1966), with the Systems Theory of Industrial Relations developed by John T. Dunlop (1958) providing complementary support. These theories are appropriate because they explain how cooperative labour-management relationships, employee involvement, and structured negotiation promote industrial harmony.

Pluralist Theory of Industrial Relations

The Pluralist Theory views organisations as coalitions of management, employees, and trade unions with legitimate but sometimes conflicting interests. It recognizes conflict as inevitable but argues that it can be effectively managed through consultation, negotiation, collective bargaining, and employee participation rather than confrontation. According to the theory, industrial harmony is achieved when organisations promote communication, employee involvement, and structured negotiation, resulting in lower industrial conflict, stronger employee cooperation, improved commitment, and higher productivity (Fox, 1966; Budd, 2020; International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022).

The theory is highly relevant because the study's dimensions of social dialogue (employee participation and collective bargaining) and measures of industrial harmony (conflict reduction and employee cooperation) are central to its assumptions. Although critics argue that the theory assumes equal bargaining power between employers and employees and management's willingness to negotiate, it remains one of the most influential frameworks for explaining labour-management relations (Budd, 2020).

Systems Theory of Industrial Relations

The Systems Theory, developed by John T. Dunlop (1958), explains industrial relations as a system involving management, employees and their representatives, and government operating within technological, legal, economic, and social environments. The theory emphasizes that stable industrial relations depend on effective communication, consultation, and collective bargaining among these actors. When these interactions are effective, organisations experience greater cooperation, reduced conflict, and stronger organisational stability (Budd, 2020; ILO, 2022). The theory complements the Pluralist Theory by explaining that employee participation and collective bargaining strengthen communication, establish mutually accepted workplace rules, and promote conflict reduction and employee cooperation.

Relevance of the Theories

The Pluralist Theory serves as the principal theoretical foundation because it directly explains how employee participation and collective bargaining foster harmonious labour-management relations. The Systems Theory complements it by emphasizing that industrial harmony results from continuous interaction among management, employees, and institutional actors. Together, the theories provide a comprehensive explanation of how effective social dialogue promotes conflict reduction and employee cooperation within manufacturing firms.

Empirical Review

Kim and Kim (2021) conducted a systematic review and found that employee participation improves communication, organisational trust, labour-management relations, and reduces workplace conflict. However, the study was conducted outside Nigeria and used a systematic review approach.

Eurofound (2023) found that organisations with effective employee participation mechanisms experienced fewer workplace grievances, reduced industrial disputes, and stronger labour-management cooperation. However, the study was conducted within Europe.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2022) reported that organisations promoting employee consultation and participation experience fewer industrial disputes because employees can express concerns before conflicts escalate. However, the evidence was based on international comparisons rather than Nigerian organisations.

Amah and Ahiauzu (2013) found that participative decision-making improved trust, commitment, and cooperation among employees in Nigerian manufacturing firms. However, the study did not specifically examine conflict reduction as an outcome.

Aboramadan et al. (2020) reported that employee participation significantly enhanced trust, collaboration, and positive workplace relationships while reducing interpersonal tensions. However, the study focused on public sector institutions outside Nigeria and did not specifically examine industrial harmony.

Finally, the reviewed studies consistently show that employee participation strengthens communication, trust, and collaboration, thereby reducing workplace conflict (Kim & Kim, 2021; Eurofound, 2023; ILO, 2022; Amah & Ahiauzu, 2013; Aboramadan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, most studies were conducted outside Nigeria, focused on organisational performance or commitment rather than conflict reduction, or adopted systematic review or different methodological approaches. These conceptual, methodological, and geographical gaps justify the present study on employee participation and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between social dialogue and industrial harmony among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The design was appropriate because it enabled the study to determine the nature, strength, and direction of the relationship among employee participation, collective bargaining, conflict reduction, and employee cooperation without manipulating the study variables.

The study population comprised 285 management and non-management employees drawn from ten purposively selected manufacturing firms in Rivers State. The selected firms represented major manufacturing subsectors, including petrochemical, brewery, food processing, chemical, and consumer goods industries. Firms were selected from different manufacturing subsectors to ensure broad representation of the manufacturing industry in the state. This approach reduced the possibility of sector-specific bias and enhanced the applicability of the findings across manufacturing firms in Rivers State. It also reflected differences in organisational characteristics, workforce composition, and industrial relations practices that may influence social dialogue and industrial harmony. The study population included production managers, human resource personnel, supervisors, administrative staff, technicians, machine operators, quality control officers, and other factory employees. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table, a sample of 165 respondents was selected. A stratified random sampling technique was employed by first grouping respondents into management and non-management staff, after which simple random sampling was used to proportionately select participants from each group.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire consisting of Section A (demographic information) and Section B, which contained items measuring employee participation, collective bargaining, conflict reduction, and employee cooperation using a five-point Likert scale. Secondary data were obtained from textbooks,

journal articles, conference proceedings, government publications, International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports, and other relevant scholarly sources.

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Management and Research Methodology. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha based on a pilot study conducted outside the study area and analyzed with SPSS Version 27. A minimum reliability coefficient of 0.70, as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), was considered acceptable.

The questionnaires were administered personally with the assistance of trained research assistants. From the 165 questionnaires distributed, 156 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 94.55%. The retrieved questionnaires were considered adequate for the analysis. Social dialogue was measured using employee participation and collective bargaining, while industrial harmony was measured using conflict reduction and employee cooperation.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while the hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) with SPSS Version 27. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level. Accordingly, the null hypotheses were rejected where $p < 0.05$ and retained where $p > 0.05$.

Ethical standards were observed throughout the study. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the selected manufacturing firms. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured. The information provided by respondents was used solely for academic purposes.

Population of the Study

Table 1: Sample Size Allocation and Questionnaire Distribution among Selected Manufacturing Firms in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Manufacturing Firm	Population	Sample Size	Questionnaire Distributed	Questionnaire Retrieved	Questionnaire Used
1	Ace Footwear	45	26	26	25	25
2	Air Liquide Nigeria Plc	35	20	20	19	19
3	Danelec Limited	35	20	20	19	19
4	Eastern Enamelware Factory Limited	35	20	20	19	19
5	Green Hills Integrated Service Limited	30	17	17	16	16
6	Indorama Eleme Petrochemicals Limited	30	17	17	16	16
7	International Breweries Limited	25	14	14	13	13
8	Notore Chemical Industries Plc	20	12	12	11	11
9	Pure Flour Mills	18	10	10	10	10
10	Siat Nigeria Limited	12	9	9	8	8
Total		285	165	165	156	156

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2026); Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), Rivers/Bayelsa Branch, and official records of the selected manufacturing firms.

The study involved 285 employees from ten selected manufacturing firms in Rivers State, from which 165 respondents were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table. From the questionnaires administered, 156 were successfully retrieved and usable, representing a 94.55% response rate, indicating adequate data for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. The participating firms represented diverse manufacturing sectors, including petrochemical, brewery, food processing, chemical, and consumer goods industries.

Table 2: Variables Measurement/Operationalization

S/N	Variables	Dimensions/Measures	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Social Dialogue	Employee Participation	5	0.842
		Collective Bargaining	5	0.856
2	Industrial Harmony	Conflict Reduction	5	0.871
		Employee Cooperation	5	0.863
	Overall Reliability Coefficient		20	0.858

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2026

The reliability analysis showed that all constructs demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.842 (employee participation), 0.856 (collective bargaining), 0.871 (conflict reduction), and 0.863 (employee cooperation), all exceeding the recommended 0.70 threshold. The overall reliability coefficient of 0.858 confirms that the research instrument was reliable for measuring social dialogue and industrial harmony among manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Table 3: Response Rate of Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

Details	Frequency	Percentage
Number of Copies Distributed	165	100%
Number of Copies Retrieved	156	94.55%
Number of Copies Not Returned	9	5.45%
Number of Copies Invalid	0	0%
Number of Copies Used for Analysis	156	94.55%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 shows that 165 questionnaires were distributed, of which 156 were successfully retrieved and valid for analysis, representing a 94.55% response rate. The remaining 9 questionnaires (5.45%) were not returned, and none was invalid. The high response rate indicates that the data were adequate and suitable for descriptive analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) hypothesis testing.

DATA RESULTS

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Employee Participation

S/N	Employee Participation Items	N	Min.	Max.	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Employees are involved in decisions affecting their work activities.	156	1.0	5.0	646.0	4.141	0.781
2	Management encourages employees to provide suggestions and opinions on workplace issues.	156	1.0	5.0	651.0	4.173	0.764
3	Employees participate in organisational problem-solving processes.	156	1.0	5.0	639.0	4.096	0.812
4	My organisation considers employees' views when making important decisions.	156	1.0	5.0	644.0	4.128	0.793
5	Employees have opportunities to contribute ideas for improving organisational performance.	156	1.0	5.0	653.0	4.186	0.758
	Valid N (listwise)	156					

Source: SPSS (Version 27) Result, 2026.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on Collective Bargaining

S/N	Collective Bargaining Items	N	Min.	Max.	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Management and employees engage in negotiations on workplace conditions.	156	1.0	5.0	642.0	4.115	0.786
2	Collective agreements are used to address employees' concerns.	156	1.0	5.0	635.0	4.071	0.824
3	Employees' representatives effectively communicate workers' interests to management.	156	1.0	5.0	648.0	4.154	0.775
4	Negotiated agreements between employees and management are fairly implemented.	156	1.0	5.0	637.0	4.083	0.809

5	Collective bargaining promotes fairness in employment relationships.	156	1.0	5.0	655.0	4.199	0.746
	Valid N (listwise)	156					

Source: SPSS (Version 27) Result, 2026.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics on Conflict Reduction

S/N	Conflict Reduction Items	N	Min.	Max.	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Workplace disagreements are effectively resolved in my organisation.	156	1.0	5.0	641.0	4.109	0.801
2	Employees and management address grievances before they escalate.	156	1.0	5.0	647.0	4.147	0.778
3	My organisation experiences minimal labour-related conflicts.	156	1.0	5.0	633.0	4.058	0.836
4	Open communication helps to prevent workplace disputes.	156	1.0	5.0	652.0	4.179	0.752
5	Negotiation and dialogue are used to resolve workplace disagreements.	156	1.0	5.0	655.0	4.199	0.741
	Valid N (listwise)	156					

Source: SPSS (Version 27) Result, 2026.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics on Employee Cooperation

S/N	Employee Cooperation Items	N	Min.	Max.	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Employees cooperate effectively with colleagues to achieve organisational goals.	156	1.0	5.0	654.0	4.192	0.748
2	Employees willingly support one another in performing work responsibilities.	156	1.0	5.0	648.0	4.154	0.771
3	There is teamwork and collaboration among employees in my organisation.	156	1.0	5.0	656.0	4.205	0.739
4	Employees demonstrate commitment toward achieving organisational objectives.	156	1.0	5.0	645.0	4.135	0.786
5	Employees maintain positive working relationships with management and colleagues.	156	1.0	5.0	651.0	4.173	0.760
	Valid N (listwise)	156					

Source: SPSS (Version 27) Result, 2026.

Interpretation of Descriptive Results

The descriptive results in Tables 4–7 indicate that respondents generally agreed that social dialogue enhances industrial harmony among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Employee participation recorded high mean scores ranging from 4.096 to 4.186, indicating active employee involvement in decision-making and organisational improvement. Collective bargaining recorded mean scores ranging from 4.071 to 4.199, reflecting its role in promoting fairness, transparency, and positive labour-management relations. Conflict reduction recorded mean values ranging from 4.058 to 4.199, suggesting that effective communication, negotiation, and dialogue help minimize

workplace disputes. Similarly, employee cooperation recorded mean scores ranging from 4.135 to 4.205, indicating strong agreement that teamwork, mutual support, and collaboration are essential indicators of industrial harmony. Broadly, the findings show that employee participation and collective bargaining positively contribute to industrial harmony by promoting conflict reduction and strengthening employee cooperation.

Inferential Statistical Analysis

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to test the study hypotheses because it measures the strength and direction of the relationship between continuous variables derived from Likert-scale responses. The analysis examined the relationships between social dialogue (employee participation and collective bargaining) and industrial harmony (conflict reduction and employee cooperation) among employees of selected manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. All hypotheses were tested using SPSS Version 27 at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 8: Employee Participation and Conflict Reduction

Pearson Correlation		Employee Participation	Conflict Reduction
Employee Participation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.781
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
	N	156	156
Conflict Reduction	Correlation Coefficient	0.781	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
	N	156	156
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: SPSS (Version 27) Result, 2026.

Table 9: Employee Participation and Employee Cooperation

Pearson Correlation		Employee Participation	Employee Cooperation
Employee Participation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.754
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
	N	156	156
Employee Cooperation	Correlation Coefficient	0.754	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
	N	156	156
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: SPSS (Version 27) Result, 2026.

Table 10: Collective Bargaining and Conflict Reduction

Pearson Correlation		Collective Bargaining	Conflict Reduction
Collective Bargaining	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.768
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
	N	156	156

Conflict Reduction	Correlation Coefficient	0.768	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
	N	156	156
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: SPSS (Version 27) Result, 2026.

Table 11: Collective Bargaining and Employee Cooperation

Pearson Correlation		Collective Bargaining	Employee Cooperation
Collective Bargaining	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.789
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
	N	156	156
Employee Cooperation	Correlation Coefficient	0.789	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
	N	156	156
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: SPSS (Version 27) Result, 2026.

Interpretation of the Results

The results presented in Tables 8 to 11 reveal strong positive and statistically significant relationships between social dialogue and industrial harmony among employees of selected manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Specifically, Table 8 shows that employee participation has a strong positive relationship with conflict reduction ($r = 0.781$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that organisations that actively involve employees in decision-making and organisational activities are more likely to experience fewer workplace conflicts and industrial disputes.

Table 9 indicates a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between employee participation and employee cooperation ($r = 0.754$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that greater employee involvement promotes teamwork, mutual trust, and collaborative workplace relationships.

Similarly, Table 10 reveals that collective bargaining has a strong positive relationship with conflict reduction ($r = 0.768$, $p < 0.01$). The finding indicates that effective negotiation and implementation of collective agreements help minimize workplace grievances and promote peaceful labour-management relations.

Finally, Table 11 shows that collective bargaining has a strong positive and statistically significant relationship with employee cooperation ($r = 0.789$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that organisations with effective collective bargaining mechanisms experience greater employee commitment, teamwork, and cooperation toward achieving organisational objectives.

In its entirety, the findings demonstrate that social dialogue, through employee participation and collective bargaining, significantly enhances industrial harmony by reducing workplace conflicts and strengthening employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Summary of Hypotheses

Table 12: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

S/N	Hypothesis	Result	Decision
H01	There is no significant relationship between employee participation and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State.	$r = 0.781$, $p = 0.000$	Reject H01 since $p\text{-value} < 0.05$
H02	There is no significant relationship between employee participation and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State.	$r = 0.754$, $p = 0.000$	Reject H02 since $p\text{-value} < 0.05$
H03	There is no significant relationship between collective bargaining and conflict reduction among manufacturing firms in Rivers State.	$r = 0.768$, $p = 0.000$	Reject H03 since $p\text{-value} < 0.05$
H04	There is no significant relationship between collective bargaining and employee cooperation among manufacturing firms in Rivers State.	$r = 0.789$, $p = 0.000$	Reject H04 since $p\text{-value} < 0.05$

Source: Researcher's Field Survey and SPSS Output (Version 27, 2026).

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that social dialogue has a significant positive relationship with industrial harmony among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, employee participation and collective bargaining were found to have strong positive relationships with both conflict reduction and employee cooperation. These findings support the argument that effective social dialogue strengthens labour-management relationships, minimizes workplace disputes, and promotes collaborative work environments. The findings are consistent with the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2022), which emphasizes that social dialogue is essential for achieving stable industrial relations, resolving workplace conflicts, and promoting productive employment relationships.

The study found a strong positive relationship between employee participation and conflict reduction ($r = 0.781$). This indicates that organisations that involve employees in decision-making processes are more likely to reduce workplace grievances and prevent industrial disputes. The finding agrees with Kim and Kim (2021), who reported that employee participation improves communication, trust, and labour-management relationships while reducing organisational conflict. It also supports Eurofound (2023), which concluded that participatory workplaces experience fewer industrial disputes because employees have opportunities to contribute to decisions affecting their work.

Similarly, employee participation exhibited a strong positive relationship with employee cooperation ($r = 0.754$). This suggests that involving employees in organisational affairs enhances teamwork, mutual trust, and collaboration among employees and management. The finding is consistent with Aboramadan et al. (2020), who found that employee participation strengthens cooperation, organisational commitment, and positive workplace relationships.

The findings further revealed a strong positive relationship between collective bargaining and conflict reduction ($r = 0.768$). This implies that organisations that engage in effective negotiation and implement collective agreements are better able to resolve grievances and maintain peaceful industrial relations. The finding corroborates the ILO (2022), which reported that collective bargaining is one of the most effective mechanisms for preventing industrial conflict and promoting workplace stability.

In addition, collective bargaining demonstrated a strong positive relationship with employee cooperation ($r = 0.789$), indicating that negotiated agreements promote fairness, trust, and mutual

respect between employers and employees, thereby encouraging greater collaboration toward organisational goals. This finding aligns with OECD (2019), which concluded that well-functioning collective bargaining systems improve cooperation, trust, and organisational performance.

Finally, the findings support the Pluralist Theory of Industrial Relations advanced by Fox (1966) and further explained by Budd (2020). The theory argues that conflict is a natural feature of employment relationships but can be effectively managed through employee participation, collective bargaining, consultation, and negotiation. The significant positive relationships found in this study confirm that organisations that institutionalize social dialogue are more likely to achieve industrial harmony characterized by reduced conflict and enhanced employee cooperation.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that social dialogue has a significant positive relationship with industrial harmony among manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, employee participation and collective bargaining significantly enhance conflict reduction and employee cooperation. The findings indicate that organisations that encourage participatory decision-making and maintain effective collective bargaining mechanisms experience fewer workplace conflicts, stronger labour-management relationships, and greater employee collaboration. The study therefore concludes that social dialogue is a strategic industrial relations practice that promotes harmonious workplace relationships, organisational stability, and sustainable productivity in manufacturing firms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Management of manufacturing firms should strengthen employee participation by involving employees in decision-making processes, encouraging regular consultations, and providing platforms through which employees can contribute ideas that improve organisational performance and reduce workplace conflicts.
2. Manufacturing firms should promote effective collective bargaining by engaging constructively with employees' representatives, implementing negotiated agreements faithfully, and maintaining transparent communication to foster trust and industrial harmony.
3. Organisations should establish formal social dialogue mechanisms, including joint consultative committees, grievance-handling procedures, and regular labour-management meetings, to address workplace concerns before they develop into industrial disputes.
4. Management should periodically evaluate the effectiveness of employee participation and collective bargaining practices through employee feedback, industrial relations audits, and organisational climate surveys to sustain conflict reduction, employee cooperation, and long-term industrial harmony.

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