



Pay disparity and workforce turnover in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 14(02), 612-625

Publication history: Received on 02 December 2024; revised on 04 February 2025; accepted on 07 February 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.14.2.0007>

Abstract

This study examined pay disparity and workforce turnover in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study were: to determine the effect of the age pay gap on job satisfaction, as well as explore the effect of the gender pay gap on employee engagement in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was employed to collect data from the respondents with a structured questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency tables and percentages. The arithmetic mean was used to analyse respondents' responses and the hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 27). Results indicated that the age pay gap has a statistically significant effect on job satisfaction. Also, there is a significant negative effect of the gender pay gap on employee engagement in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study concluded that there is a statistically significant negative effect of pay disparity and workforce turnover in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study recommended that the management of oil and gas firms need to implement equitable compensation structures to bridge Indigenous pay gaps and boost employee commitment. Also, Oil and gas firms must eliminate gender pay disparities to enhance employee engagement by conducting regular pay audits, enforcing transparent compensation policies, and providing equal pay for equal work.

Keywords: Pay Disparity; Workforce Turnover; Indigenous; Employee Engagement; Oil and Gas Firms

1. Introduction

The differential compensation earned by employees with equivalent qualifications, experience, and responsibilities but varies in aspects like gender, race, location, or job position is called pay disparity, wage disparity, or income disparity. This phenomenon draws attention to disparities in how money is distributed and may contribute to wider economic disparities in a workforce or community. Orji and Nwosu, (2024) posit that the differential compensation earned by employees with equivalent qualifications, experience, and responsibilities varies in aspects like gender, age, ethnicity, race, or job position is called pay discrepancy, wage disparity, or income disparity. A sizable section of the workforce is employed by the local oil and gas industry, which is vital to the economy of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Even with these companies' important contributions, there are still noticeable differences in employee compensation that can be linked to several things. Factors including length of service with the organization, job function, education, and experience level all affect pay disparity in this industry. For example, workers with advanced degrees or specialized certificates are sometimes paid more than their counterparts who do not possess these credentials (Opara, 2022). Similarly, because their jobs demand specific abilities, people in technical or engineering roles might be paid more. These differences are frequently excused by the varying amounts of responsibility, expertise, and risk associated with various roles within the industry. Chinelo and Okafor (2023) stated that since job satisfaction can influence performance, it appears to be a significant factor in the relationship between business entities and employee

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performance. Employees may be working with an organization but may not be satisfied with the working conditions or terms. When employees are dissatisfied they tend to engage in unethical behaviour such as Stealing organization properties, conflict, absenteeism, grievance, poor attitude to work, delaying task completion, and unethical practices, and in turn, all these affect the organization as cited in (Nwagbala & Ifeoma, 2023).

However, these pay structures also reflect broader trends within the sector, where compensation is aligned with market demands and the availability of skilled labor (Akpieyi, 2024). Georgewill (2023) noted that workforce turnover in Indigenous oil and gas firms is another significant aspect of the industry's dynamics. Numerous factors, including the competitive nature of the industry and the availability of alternative employment opportunities within the region, can influence turnover rates. The oil and gas sector is cyclical, where periods of high demand and investment can lead to increased hiring, while downturns can result in layoffs and higher turnover rates. Wahua, Chukwuma, Akinsete, and Brobbey (2023) state that employees often move between companies for better compensation, benefits, or career advancement opportunities. This movement is further facilitated by a relatively mobile and skilled workforce that can transition between different employers within the sector. Consequently, workforce turnover can lead to a continuous exchange of talent among firms, which can benefit employees seeking growth and development, but also presents challenges for companies striving to maintain a stable and experienced workforce. According to Audu and Nwagbala (2024) strategy is a roadmap and plan of action that describes how management plans to accomplish the organization's goal, it drives performance. The success of a strategy is determined by how well the organization performs. Therefore, the hallmark of an effective strategy is reaching the organization's goal (Philemon & Chinelo, 2024).

Chinelo, Raphael, Ejike, and Francisca (2023) stated that when employees feel that their reward does not align with their efforts and the value they bring to the organization, they may become discouraged and less dedicated to performing at their best (Abosede, Adebisi & Adekunle, 2012; Nwagbala, Nwachukwu, Ani & Ezeanokwasa, 2023). The pay structures within indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt are often influenced by the need to attract and retain top talent in a highly competitive market. Companies frequently benchmark their compensation packages against industry standards to ensure they remain attractive to potential hires. Akhigbe, (2021) opined that the benchmarking process involves analyzing the pay and benefits offered by other firms within the sector, both locally and internationally, to identify competitive rates for various roles. This approach helps firms to provide salaries that not only meet but potentially exceed the expectations of their employees, thus reducing the likelihood of turnover. Additionally, companies may offer performance-based incentives, bonuses, and other financial rewards to motivate and retain high-performing employees. These incentives are designed to align the interests of the employees with the goals of the company, fostering a sense of loyalty and commitment among the workforce (Badom, 2022).

The interplay between pay disparity and workforce turnover in Port Harcourt's indigenous oil and gas firms also highlights the importance of strategic human resource management. Companies in this sector must navigate the delicate balance of offering competitive pay while managing costs and ensuring long-term sustainability (Abiola, 2021). Ogundipe (2020) states that effective human resources practices, such as regular salary reviews, employee engagement initiatives, and professional development programs, play a crucial role in maintaining a motivated and productive workforce. Nwagbala, Nwachukwu, Ani, and Ezeanokwasa (2023) stated that fair performance assessments are essential to prevent unfair bias and improve objectivity, productivity, and employee responsibility. By understanding the factors that drive pay disparity and turnover, firms can develop targeted strategies to enhance employee satisfaction and commitment. This, in turn, can lead to a more stable and experienced workforce, which is essential for maintaining operational efficiency and achieving business objectives. Njoku, (2020) argued that the success of these firms in managing pay disparity and workforce turnover has a significant impact on their overall performance and contribution to the local economy in Rivers State

2. Statement of the problem

The oil and gas sector in Nigeria, particularly in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, plays a crucial role in the country's economy, contributing significantly to national revenue, employment, and local development. Despite this sector's importance, indigenous oil and gas firms often struggle with high workforce turnover rates, which disrupt operations, reduce productivity, and lead to substantial financial losses. One of the critical factors contributing to this turnover is pay disparity—differences in wages and compensation between employees within the same organizations and between indigenous firms and foreign counterparts. This disparity is driven by various factors, including limited access to international funding, variations in organizational profitability, and a gap in adherence to global remuneration standards.

Employees in these indigenous firms frequently perceive their compensation as inequitable compared to their peers in multinational firms, leading to dissatisfaction, low morale, and a lack of organizational commitment. Moreover, skilled

personnel often leave for better-paying opportunities, further exacerbating the skills gap within the local industry. This high workforce turnover disrupts knowledge retention and impedes the long-term growth and competitiveness of indigenous oil and gas firms.

Addressing pay disparity and workforce turnover is thus essential to improving employee satisfaction, commitment, and organizational efficiency in the Indigenous oil and gas sector. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research examining the impact of pay disparity on workforce turnover in these firms, especially within the local context of Port Harcourt. This study aimed to fill this gap by exploring the effect of pay disparity and workforce turnover, identifying underlying causes, and proposing actionable strategies for reducing turnover through fairer compensation practices in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt Rivers state, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this is to examine pay disparity and workforce turnover in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study were:

- To determine the effect of the age pay gap on job satisfaction in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
- To explore the effect of the gender pay gap on employee engagement in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

2.1. Research Questions

- How does the age pay gap affect job satisfaction in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?
- What is the effect of the gender pay gap on employee engagement in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?

2.2. Research Hypotheses

- **H₀₁:** The age pay gap has no significant effect on job satisfaction in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
- **H₀₂:** There is no significant effect of the gender pay gap on employee engagement in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

3. Review of related literature

3.1. Conceptual Review

3.1.1. Pay Disparity

Pay disparity is the term used to describe the variation in wages across various worker groups, usually due to factors such as job position, gender, or race (Rouen, 2020). Preethi and Verma (2023) state that pay disparity can show up as uneven bonus and benefit distribution or as wage gaps, where one group is regularly paid less for work that is comparable to another. Pay disparity refers to the significant differences in employee compensation that exist across oil and gas businesses in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, based on factors such as employment status, nationality, ethnicity, and job function. Within this paradigm, indigenous workers from the Niger Delta, non-indigenous Nigerian employees, and overseas workers are often treated differently. Expatriates, who are often hired from other countries to fill high-level technical or administrative positions, typically make far more money than their local counterparts, even in equivalent duties. Pay disparity is attributed to several factors, including differences in perceived skills, the negotiation power of expatriates, and the compensation packages designed to attract foreign talent. A study by Nwankwo and Igbara (2022) identified that expatriates in the oil and gas sector in Port Harcourt could earn up to three times more than indigenous workers in comparable positions, a situation that has fueled resentment and contributed to social tensions in the region. The disparity is further exacerbated by the limited opportunities for Indigenous workers to advance to higher-paying roles due to systemic barriers such as discrimination, lack of access to advanced training, and the dominance of foreign firms in the local labor market (Nwankwo & Igbara, 2022).

Another dimension of pay disparity in the oil and gas industry in Port Harcourt is the difference in earnings between skilled and unskilled workers, which often correlates with the division between non-Indigenous and Indigenous employees. Skilled positions, such as engineers, geologists, and project managers, are typically filled by individuals with

higher education and specialized training, who are often non-Indigenous Nigerians or expatriates. These roles command significantly higher salaries compared to unskilled or semi-skilled positions, which are more likely to be occupied by Indigenous workers from the local communities. This pay gap is rooted in historical and structural inequalities, where Indigenous populations have had less access to quality education and technical training, limiting their ability to compete for higher-paying jobs within the industry. Ekpo and Asuquo (2021) indicate that while the oil and gas sector in Port Harcourt generates substantial revenue, the economic benefits are unevenly distributed, with Indigenous workers receiving lower wages and fewer benefits compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. This disparity not only reflects the unequal distribution of resources but also perpetuates the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment in the Indigenous communities of the Niger Delta (Ekpo and Asuquo, 2021).

3.2. Age Pay Gap

The term "age pay gap" describes the variations in income or salary between employees of varying ages. Numerous factors, like as age discrimination, seniority, experience, and perceived productivity, might contribute to this difference (Olufunmilola, and Kemisola, 2024). Because of their tenure and expertise, older workers often make more money, although in some fast-evolving industries, where fresh skills are in demand, younger workers may make more money. The difference in pay between workers of different age groups in the local labor market, especially in sectors like oil and gas that drive the region's economy, is known as the "age pay gap" in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Younger workers typically experience lower earnings and fewer possibilities for promotion while maybe possessing equivalent or more educational credentials and skills than their older counterparts (Rouen, 2020). This pattern is commonly used to characterize this disparity. Akinlo and Fadeyi's (2023) study indicates that older workers in Port Harcourt, who are frequently promoted to management or specialized posts, typically enjoy better compensation, whereas younger workers are typically concentrated in lower-paying, entry-level positions. Age-related biases in recruiting and promotions, where older workers may be viewed as more dependable or experienced, maybe one reason for this discrepancy in remuneration for these professions. Furthermore, the study highlights that younger workers often face challenges in negotiating salaries or securing promotions, partly due to a lack of experience and established professional networks, which reinforces the age pay gap. Chinelo, Ndidamaka and Ejike (2023) stated that if the employer doesn't comply with the workers' demands, there will be an industrial dispute (strike), which is typically used as a first rather than a last resort by labour union. Addressing this issue requires targeted policies that ensure fair pay across age groups, such as transparent salary structures and equal opportunities for career progression regardless of age (Morchio and Moser, 2024).

The age pay gap in Port Harcourt also reflects broader regional economic inequalities and the varying economic pressures faced by different age groups. For instance, older workers may have accumulated significant professional experience and educational qualifications, leading to higher pay, while younger workers, who are entering the labor market amidst economic uncertainties and high competition, often face lower starting salaries and less job security. As per the Rivers State Economic Review (2024), the high cost of living in Port Harcourt is a contributing factor to this discrepancy, particularly for younger people who could find it difficult to obtain higher-paying positions or stable employment. Furthermore, the job market in Port Harcourt is significantly impacted by the economic instability and volatility of sectors like oil and gas, which can result in erratic pay scales that exacerbate the age pay gap. The study emphasizes the necessity of all-encompassing economic policies that promote equitable wage practices, strengthen job stability, and expand career progression chances for people of all ages to overcome these disparities.

3.3. Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap is the difference in compensation between men and women performing the same work with the same level of education and status; it is typically stated as a percentage. This disparity may be impacted by several variables, including discrimination, differences in work experience, education, and occupational segregation. Talks about justice and equality in the workplace still have this as a big issue (Orji and Nwosu, 2024). The disparity in average salaries between men and women in employment is known as the "gender pay gap," and it is a chronic and complicated problem. To draw attention to the discrepancies in pay that might result from a variety of issues, such as occupational segregation, discrimination, variations in work experience, and cultural expectations, and this disparity is frequently stated as a percentage of men's salaries. The World Economic Forum (2023) reports that women earn, on average, roughly 77% of what men earn, indicating that there is still a sizable gender pay gap worldwide.

A report by the International Labour Organization (2021) highlights that even within the same occupations, women often earn less than men, a phenomenon that can be partly explained by differences in hours worked, experience, and job tenure, but also by discriminatory practices and cultural norms that devalue women's work. Moreover, the gender pay gap is influenced by the "motherhood penalty," where women who have children face a decline in earnings due to career interruptions, reduced working hours, or the need to balance work and family responsibilities (International

Labour Organization, 2021). In contrast, men often experience a "fatherhood bonus," where their earnings increase after having children. These patterns reinforce gendered expectations and contribute to the persistence of the pay gap across different stages of women's careers.

The cumulative impact of workplace prejudices and institutional impediments that prevent women from advancing in their professions also shapes the gender wage gap. Even though women now make up a sizable share of graduates in many sectors due to advancements in education, women are frequently subjected to a pay gap that grows as their careers advance when they enter the workforce. Blau and Kahn (2020) posit that women have a lower chance than men of being promoted to executive and managerial roles that pay more, a phenomenon referred to as the "glass ceiling." Gender disparities in networking opportunities, performance reviews, and access to leadership development programs frequently serve to reinforce this barrier. Moreover, women are more likely to hold flexible or part-time employment, which, although necessary for maintaining a work-life balance, sometimes have lower compensation, fewer benefits, and fewer prospects for development (Blau & Kahn, 2020).

3.4. Workforce Turnover

The pace at which workers depart from an organization and are replaced by new hires is known as workforce turnover. It can be expressed as a proportion of the entire workforce for a given time frame. Yilmazdogan, (2024) high employee turnover rates may be a sign of problems in the company, such as poor management, low pay, pay disparity (discrimination), or low job satisfaction. On the other hand, some employee turnover is normal and might provide new insights into a company (Dixit, Somani, Gupta, and Pathak, 2023) Pay disparity has a major impact on workforce turnover in oil and gas companies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. It is a crucial issue that has far-reaching effects on employee morale and organizational stability. Pay disparity which (Ihemeje, Ezechi, Ajefu, and Olasehinde, 2023) define as a notable variation in pay between employees in similar positions or at various levels of the hierarchy, makes workers feel unfairly treated and unsatisfied. In the fiercely competitive oil and gas sector, where workers are well aware of industry norms and competing companies' compensation packages, even minor wage discrepancies can give rise to feelings of unfair treatment. Bayode and Duarte (2022), argue that when employees believe they are under-compensated compared to their peers or industry standards, they are more likely to seek employment elsewhere, leading to high turnover rates. This turnover can disrupt operations and increase recruitment and training costs, making it a critical issue for firms to address.

The relationship between pay disparity and workforce turnover in the oil and gas sector in Port Harcourt is further explored by Boateng, Opoku, Ayisi-Boateng, Sulemana, Mohammed, Osarf, and Hogarh, (2022) who highlight the role of perceived equity in employee retention. Their research suggests that employees are not only concerned with their absolute pay but also with how their compensation compares to that of their colleagues, both within the organization and across the industry. When significant disparities exist, particularly where there is a lack of transparency in pay structures, it fosters a sense of inequity and discontent among workers. Nwobu, Ojukwu, Enemuo-Uzozie, and Ugbechie, (2024) found that such perceptions of unfairness are a major driver of turnover, as employees who feel undervalued are more likely to leave in search of better-paying opportunities. This trend is especially pronounced in Port Harcourt, where the high concentration of oil and gas firms creates a competitive labor market, making it easier for employees to find alternative employment with more equitable pay structures.

3.5. Job Satisfaction

The term "job satisfaction" describes how happy or contented workers are with their jobs, which has an impact on their dedication, productivity, and general well-being. Workplace dynamics, pay, job stability, connections with coworkers, and chances for career progress are some of the aspects that frequently influence it (Popoola and Fagbola, 2023). Job satisfaction in oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, is significantly influenced by the presence of pay disparity, which has become a critical issue in the region's workforce dynamics. As observed by Orji and Nwosu, (2024). Pay disparity often arises from differences in qualifications, experience, and negotiation power, leading to significant variations in salaries among employees who perform similar roles. This inequality in compensation can create a sense of unfairness and injustice among employees, leading to diminished job satisfaction. Resentment, demotivation, and disengagement are more common among workers who believe their pay is unjust in comparison to that of their peers. Since the perceived absence of pay equity presents a barrier to their feeling of self-worth and value inside the business, these negative emotions have the potential to damage their overall job happiness. Resolving pay disparity is essential to enhancing job satisfaction and preserving a motivated and effective staff in the oil and gas industry (Yeasmin, 2024). Akinsanya and Ogunbakin (2024) suggest that in the context of Port Harcourt's oil and gas firms, where the industry is highly competitive and the work is demanding, the effects of pay disparity are even more pronounced. The authors recommend that organizations implement more transparent pay practices and provide clear communication about the criteria for salary decisions to mitigate the negative impact of perceived inequity on job satisfaction. By doing

so, companies can enhance employee well-being and loyalty, thereby improving overall job satisfaction and organizational performance (Akinsanya and Ogunbakin, 2024). As stated in Nwagbala, Ezeanokwasa, and Aziwe (2023), job satisfaction in general, contributes to morals, ethics, and citizenship behaviour within the company as well as employment retention.

3.6. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement pertains to the level of emotional and psychological dedication that workers possess towards their firm and its objectives. Anas and Isichei, (2024) expressly posit that employees who are engaged are usually more driven, effective, and eager to help the company succeed. Leadership, corporate culture, communication, and chances for individual development are elements that affect employee engagement (Nwagbala, Ezeanokwasa, and Ani, 2023). Employee engagement in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, refers to the level of commitment, motivation, and emotional attachment that employees, particularly indigenous workers, feel towards their jobs and the organization. In this context, engagement is influenced by various factors such as job satisfaction, alignment with the company's values, and the perception of fair treatment within the workplace.

The level of empowerment and involvement of employees in decision-making processes, as well as the organizational cultures, are significant determinants of employee engagement in Indigenous oil and gas companies. Encouraging Indigenous workers to feel a strong sense of ownership and participation is essential to sustaining high levels of engagement in the fiercely competitive Port Harcourt oil and gas industry. Okwurume and Sunday (2024) postulate that Indigenous workers frequently exhibit better levels of involvement when they believe their opinions are appreciated in both operational and strategic decisions. This sense of inclusion not only enhances their commitment to the organization but also leads to improved job performance and satisfaction. The authors argue that to boost engagement, Indigenous oil and gas firms must create an environment that encourages open communication, provides opportunities for skill development, and addresses the specific needs and concerns of Indigenous workers. This includes recognizing the unique challenges they face and offering support systems such as mentorship programs, flexible working arrangements, and clear pathways for career progression within the company (Okwurume and Sunday, 2024).

The influence of management styles and leadership on the work environment is a crucial component of employee engagement in Indigenous oil and gas companies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. To create an engaged culture where workers feel appreciated, supported, and inspired to contribute to the success of the company, effective leadership is crucial. Ordua and Nwabali, (2023) emphasize that higher levels of engagement among Indigenous workers are more likely to be the outcome of leadership styles that place a high priority on employee involvement, transparency, and equitable treatment. In Indigenous oil and gas firms, where historical and cultural factors play a significant role, leaders who demonstrate an understanding of these dynamics and actively work to create an inclusive and supportive workplace are better positioned to engage their employees. The study highlights that leaders who involve employees in decision-making processes, provide regular feedback, and recognize their contributions foster a sense of belonging and commitment. This is particularly important in Port Harcourt's Indigenous firms, where employees may have experienced marginalization or exclusion in the broader socio-economic context. Therefore, cultivating leadership practices that emphasize inclusivity, empowerment, and recognition is crucial for enhancing employee engagement in these firms (Ordua and Nwabali, 2023).

Employee engagement in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt is also influenced by the availability of professional development and career growth opportunities. For many Indigenous workers, access to training and development programs that enhance their skills and career prospects is a key factor in their overall engagement with the organization. Research by Ekong and Ogunbawo, (2023) suggests that Indigenous employees who have access to continuous learning opportunities, whether through formal training programs, on-the-job learning, or mentorship, are more likely to be engaged and committed to their employers. This is because these opportunities not only improve their job performance but also provide them with the tools to advance within the company, leading to increased job satisfaction and loyalty. In contrast, the lack of career development opportunities can result in disengagement, as employees may feel that their potential is being overlooked or underutilized. The study recommends that Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt invest in comprehensive training and development initiatives tailored to the needs of their workforce, which can significantly enhance the engagement and retention of talented employees (Ekong and Ogunbawo, 2023).

3.7. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Equity Theory by John Stacey Adams in 1963. Equity theory is a vital framework for understanding how employees perceive fairness within organizational settings, particularly in Nigeria's dynamic and competitive work environment. This theory posits that individuals assess their job satisfaction and motivation by

comparing the ratio of their inputs—such as effort, skills, qualifications, and experience—to the outcomes they receive, which include salary, benefits, recognition, and career advancement opportunities. Equity Theory is relevant to the study of pay disparity and workforce turnover as it provides a foundational framework for understanding how perceived fairness—or lack thereof—affects employee attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. The theory posits that employees compare the ratio of their inputs (such as effort, skills, and experience) to their outcomes (including salary, benefits, and recognition) with those of their peers. When employees perceive that their input-to-outcome ratio is less favorable compared to others, particularly in the context of pay disparity, they are likely to experience feelings of inequity, dissatisfaction, and demotivation. This perceived inequity is a significant driver of workforce turnover, as employees who feel under-compensated or unfairly treated may seek employment elsewhere where they believe their contributions will be more equitably rewarded.

3.8. Empirical Studies

Asenge, Dewua, Adudu, and Ama (2024) examined factors influencing employee turnover in private universities in Northern Nigeria. The population for this study was 512 academic and non-academic staff of 16 private universities in the Northern region of Nigeria. A sample of 225 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. The instruments were tested for reliability and validity before the actual collection of data. Data were collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were used for data presentation and analysis. Multiple regression was used for data analysis and test of formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The research findings indicated that career growth, remuneration, and working conditions have a significant influence on employee turnover in Private Universities in Northern Nigeria.

Orji and Nwosu (2024) examined the analysis of the gender wage gap and the Nigerian labour market: new empirical evidence. This study investigated the gender wage gap in Nigeria by analyzing two waves of household surveys (in 2003–2004 and 2018–2019) to understand the dynamics of polarization of the labour market in Nigeria in terms of the gender wage gap over time. The study applied an extension of the Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition that relies on the re-centered influence function (RIF) regressions to analyze the gender wage gap at all points along the wage distribution. The results unambiguously showed that there was a significant gender wage gap in Nigeria at all points along the wage distribution, such that for the two surveys used and after nearly two decades, men still earn more than women.

Emily (2024) explored the impact of the gender pay gap on workplace productivity and employee morale in Canada. This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. Simple linear regression analysis was used. The gender pay gap in Canada negatively affects workplace productivity and employee morale. Disparities in pay can reduce motivation and engagement, leading to lower productivity and higher turnover. Female employees, in particular, experience decreased job satisfaction and trust in organizational fairness, affecting overall morale.

Daudu, Kareem, Olatinwo, Shuaib, and Abdulrahman (2023) examined whether the gender wage gap exists among farm workers in Nigeria. Evidence from decomposition-matching analysis. Using cross-sectional survey data of agricultural farms, the investigated gender-based differences in farm wages among farm workers by randomly allocating farm workers into treatment (female) and control (male) groups with a simple random sampling technique. The study used the Blinder–Oaxaca decomposition method to establish the gender wage gap and Propensity Score Matching to address assumptions and heterogeneity difficulties that plagued the decomposition technique. Results showed that female farm workers earn ₦ 9,170. 83 less compared to their male counterparts, which indicated an unadjusted gender gap.

Ball (2023) investigated the relationship between pay disparity and organizational performance in South Africa. An exploratory research design was utilized for the present study. Using purposive non-probability or judgment sampling, a sample of corporate organizations (n= 185) that were listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) were identified. Pearson Product Moment correlation analyses. A significant positive relationship was found between pay disparity and organizational performance.

3.9. Gap in Literature

There is a significant knowledge gap regarding the effect of pay disparity and workforce turnover in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. None of the studies reviewed have investigated this effect through these proxies: age pay gap, gender pay gap, job satisfaction, and employee engagement. This study aimed to bridge this gap by conducting an in-depth examination of these variables, providing invaluable insights for employees, management, policymakers, and academics to inform strategies that foster sustainable development and optimal performance in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

4. Materials and methods

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to gather data. Information obtained from the Human Resource Department of Head offices of the indigenous oil and gas firms showed that there are one thousand two hundred seventy-five (1275) middle, lower management, and support staff of seventeen (17) Indigenous oil and gas firms. Furthermore, Taro Yamane's formula was adopted to determine the total sample size of 305 from the accessible population. The instrument of the study is a structured questionnaire. The hypotheses were tested with simple linear regression analysis with Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS version 27).

4.1. Result and Analysis

Table 1 Field Data Response Rate

S/N	Names Of Indigenous Oil and Gas Firms in Port Harcourt	Copies of the Questionnaire Distributed	Used Copies	Copies not Retrieved
1	Aiteo Exploration and Production	19	18	1
2	Allied Energy Resources	20	18	2
3	Amni International Petroleum Dev. Company	19	19	-
4	Belema Oil Producing	20	20	-
5	Brittania – U Group	16	16	-
6	Consolidated Oil	18	18	-
7	Continental Oil and Gas	18	18	-
8	New Cross Petroleum	20	18	2
9	Energia Nigeria Ltd	20	19	1
10	Eroton Exploration and Production	19	19	-
11	Express Petroleum and Gas	16	16	-
12	Green Energy International	14	14	-
13	Millennium Oil and Gas	14	14	-
14	Moni Pulo Petroleum Dev. Upstream	17	17	-
15	NDPR – Niger Delta Petroleum Resource	19	19	-
16	Pan Ocean Oil Corporation	18	17	1
17	Prime Exploration and Production	18	18	-
	Total	305	298	7

Source: Field Work, (2024)

4.2. Analysis of Data Related to Research Questions

4.2.1. Decision Rule

The decision in the analysis section is determined by the average of the responses of respondents. Strongly Agreed (5 points), Agreed (4 points), Disagreed (3 points), Strongly Disagreed (2 points) and Undecided (1 point). The average of the responses

$$(5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1) / 5 = 3.0$$

Therefore, a mean score below 3.0 would be considered rejected and a mean score of 3.0 and above would be considered accepted.

4.2.2. Age Pay Gap

Table 2 Research Question 1: How does the age pay gap affect job satisfaction in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remark
1	Age plays a significant role in salary determination within my firm.	298	3.21	Accepted
2	My salary progression has been influenced by my age more than my performance.	298	2.01	Rejected
3	I have discussed concerns about age-related pay gaps with my Human Resource Manager	298	2.38	Rejected
4	My firm has transparent policies on how pay is determined across different age groups.	298	3.77	Accepted
	Job Satisfaction			
5	I am satisfied with my overall job experience in the oil and gas industry.	298	3.54	Accepted
6	My current role provides me with a sense of purpose and fulfilment.	298	3.40	Accepted
7	I am satisfied with the level of work-life balance my job provides.	298	2.12	Rejected
8	I am valued by my superiors and colleagues in my firm.	298	4.43	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 presents the analysis of Research Question 1, which investigated the effect of age pay gap on job satisfaction in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The results reveal that items 17, 20, 21, 22, and 24 exceeded the criterion mean of 3.0, while items 18, 19, and 23 fell below this threshold. Notably, the majority of respondents concurred that the age pay gap has a significant effect on job satisfaction in the specified industry and location.

4.2.3. Gender Pay Gap

Table 3 Research Question 2: What is the effect of gender pay gap on employee engagement in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remark
9	My gender has negatively influenced the salary I receive in my current role.	298	3.58	Accepted
10	I have noticed gender-based differences in pay within my company.	298	2.34	Rejected
11	Women in my company are paid less than their male counterparts for similar roles.	298	4.02	Accepted
12	My experience leads me to believe that the oil and gas industry has a gender pay gap problem.	298	3.60	Accepted
	Employee Engagement			
13	I am engaged and motivated in my current role within the oil and gas industry.	298	1.98	Rejected
14	I am enthusiastic about the tasks and responsibilities assigned to me.	298	4.27	Accepted
15	My company provides opportunities for me to actively participate in decision-making processes.	298	2.01	Rejected
16	My company provides me with opportunities for professional development that enhance my engagement.	298	3.66	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 displays the results of Research Question 2, which probed the effect of gender pay gap on employee engagement in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. A significant majority of items (1, 3, 4, 6, and 8) surpassed the 3.0 criterion mean, while items 2 and 5 did not. These results confirm that the gender pay gap significantly affects employee engagement in the industry and location studied.

4.3. Test of Hypotheses

4.3.1. Hypothesis One

H₀: Age pay gap has no significant effect on job satisfaction in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 4 Model Summary for Hypothesis One

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.351	0.123	0.118	0.741
a. Predictors: (Constant), APG				

Table 5 F-Statistics Output for Hypothesis One

ANOVA ^a		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Model						
1	Regression	23.151	1	23.151	17.693	0.000 ^b
	Residual	148.349	296	0.501		
	Total	171.500	297			
a. Dependent Variable: JS						
b. Predictors: (Constant), APG						

Table 6 Regression Analysis Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.531	0.308		8.133	0.000
	Age Pay Gap	-0.238	0.057	-0.351	-4.213	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction						

The results of the linear regression analysis reveal that age pay gap has a statistically significant negative effect on job satisfaction, as evidenced by the regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.238$) and the corresponding p-value ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, for every unit increase in age pay gap, job satisfaction is expected to decrease by 0.238 units, holding all other factors constant. This shows that as the disparity in pay based on age increases, employees' job satisfaction tends to decline. Furthermore, the model's R-squared value ($R^2 = 0.123$) indicates that approximately 12.3% of the variance in job satisfaction can be attributed to the age pay gap, providing moderate support for the hypothesis that age pay gap has a significant effect on job satisfaction.

4.4. Hypothesis Two

H₀: There is no significant effect of the gender pay gap on employee engagement in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 7 Model Summary for Hypothesis Two

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.317	0.100	0.096	0.823
a. Predictors: (Constant), GPG				

Table 8 F-Statistics Output for Hypothesis Two

ANOVA ^a		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Model						
1	Regression	20.151	1	20.151	14.893	0.000
	Residual	155.349	296	0.524		
	Total	175.500	297			
a. Dependent Variable: EE						
b. Predictors: (Constant), GPG						

Table 9 Regression Analysis Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.192	0.351		9.093	0.000
	Gender Pay Gap	-0.219	0.058	-0.317	-3.863	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement						

The linear regression analysis yields compelling evidence that gender pay gap has a profound effect on employee engagement in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.219$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that pay disparities based on gender can erode employee engagement, undermining organizational performance. Notably, the model reveals that a one-unit increase in gender pay gap corresponds to a 0.219-unit decline in employee engagement, emphasizing the critical need for equitable compensation strategies to foster a motivated and inclusive workforce.

5. Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one indicated that age pay gap has a statistically significant effect on job satisfaction in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. This finding is congruent with the results of Bello and Bello (2021) in their study on job satisfaction and employees turnover in the hotel industry: Evidence from Lagos State Nigeria. It is also in harmony with the findings of Falope (2021) and the study on wage discrimination and its effect on employee job outcomes: Evidence from North Cyprus. This implies that addressing age-related pay gaps is crucial for enhancing employee job satisfaction and overall organizational performance.

Hypothesis two revealed that there is a significant effect of gender pay gap on employee engagement in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. This is in agreement with the findings of Makinde, Tayo, and Olaniyan (2021) in their study on the effect of employee engagement and educational qualification on employee productivity in Nigerian banking industry. Also, it is harmonious with the findings of Emily (2024) in the study on the impact of gender pay gap on workplace productivity and employee morale in Canada. The finding implies that gender pay equity is essential for fostering an inclusive work environment, enhancing employee engagement, and maximizing organizational performance in Nigeria's indigenous oil and gas sector

6. Summary, conclusion and recommendations

Summary of Findings

- Hypothesis one indicated that age pay gap has a statistically significant negative effect on job satisfaction in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
- The second hypothesis revealed that there is a significant negative effect of gender pay gap on employee engagement in indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

7. Conclusion

The study concluded that there is a statistically significant negative effect of pay disparity and workforce turnover in Indigenous oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. This means that pay disparities significantly contribute to increased workforce turnover, leading to reduced employee retention and heightened turnover rates. These findings imply that addressing pay inequities is crucial for minimizing turnover and fostering a stable workforce. By bridging pay gaps, organizations can enhance job satisfaction, reduce voluntary turnover, and decrease recruitment and training costs associated with high turnover rates. Promoting equitable compensation practices is essential for maintaining a skilled and dedicated workforce, driving business continuity, and ensuring long-term success in the indigenous oil and gas sector.

Recommendations

- Management of oil and gas firms needs to implement equitable compensation structures to bridge indigenous pay gaps and boost employee commitment.
- Oil and gas firms must eliminate gender pay disparities to enhance employee engagement by conducting regular pay audits, enforcing transparent compensation policies, and providing equal pay for equal work.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study significantly contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the detrimental effects of Indigenous pay gaps on employee commitment in the oil and gas sector, specifically in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings underscore the importance of location-specific, equity-based compensation structures in bridging indigenous pay disparities and fostering enhanced employee commitment. By contextualizing the pay gap issue within the Nigerian oil and gas industry, this research fills a geographical and sectorial knowledge gap, offering valuable insights for policymakers, HR practitioners, and organizational leaders seeking to optimize employee engagement and retention. This study's conclusions inform evidence-based strategies for promoting equitable compensation practices, improved employee outcomes, and sustainable organizational performance in the region.

Suggestions for Further Studies

- Gender Disparities and Career Advancement in Nigeria's Oil and Gas Sector
- Diversity Management Initiatives in Enhancing Employee Commitment in Nigeria's Energy Industry.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgment

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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