



AN ASSESSMENT OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS USED BY UNIVERSITY-BASED UNIONS IN PROMOTING INDUSTRIAL PEACE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study is an assessment of conflict resolution mechanisms used by university-based unions in promoting industrial peace in public Universities in North-Central Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the effect of collective bargaining and arbitration in public universities in North-Central Nigeria. The study was anchored on the theory of organizational equilibrium. The Pluralist Theory of Industrial Relations. This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, a strategy deemed appropriate for its ability to capture a comprehensive snapshot of variables at a single point in time. The target population for this study consists of seven thousand and eighty-nine (7,089) academic and non-academic staff who are members of the major university-based unions (ASUU, NASU, and SSANU) in selected public universities in North-Central Nigeria, including the University of Jos (UNI-JOS), Nasarawa State University, Keffi (NSUK), and the Federal University of Technology, Minna (FUTMINNA). Primary data was collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to the three hundred and seventy-nine (379) sampled respondents using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique combined with simple random sampling. The quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 26. While multiple regression was used to analyze the collected data, a 0.05 level of significance was used. The study found that both collective bargaining and arbitration have a significant positive effect on industrial peace in public universities in North-Central Nigeria. The study recommended that University management and union leaders in public universities in North-Central Nigeria should institutionalize regular and structured collective bargaining processes. This should include periodic negotiation meetings, transparent communication of policies, and strict adherence to collective agreements. They should also adopt formal and well-defined arbitration frameworks as part of their conflict resolution mechanisms by engaging neutral and independent arbitrators when disputes cannot be resolved through negotiation.

Keywords: Arbitration, Collective bargaining, Industrial peace, conflict resolution mechanism, university-based unions, public universities

1. Introduction

Industrial peace is a critical prerequisite for the effective functioning of higher education institutions, as it provides the stability necessary for uninterrupted teaching, sustained research productivity, and efficient administrative governance. Universities thrive in environments where harmonious labour-management relations exist, allowing academic staff, non-academic staff, and administrators to focus on their core mandates of knowledge generation, human capital development, and community service

(Yesufu, 2019). In the absence of industrial peace, universities are often plunged into cycles of disruption that weaken academic standards, delay student progression, and erode institutional credibility. In Nigeria, public universities have long struggled to maintain industrial harmony due to persistent labour disputes involving university-based unions and government authorities. These disputes are deeply rooted in structural challenges such as chronic underfunding of education, poor implementation of negotiated agreements, inadequate

staff welfare, and perceived erosion of university autonomy (Fashoyin, 2018; Odoziobodo, 2015).

The North-Central region, comprising states such as Nasarawa, Plateau, Niger, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, and the Federal Capital Territory, has been particularly affected, recording repeated industrial actions that have disrupted academic calendars and strained relationships among stakeholders. Central to these disputes are university-based unions, notably the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU), and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU). These unions play a dual role within the university system: on one hand, they serve as legitimate advocates for staff welfare, improved working conditions, and institutional autonomy; on the other hand, they are key actors in conflict escalation when negotiations with government and management break down (Adeniji & Olanrewaju, 2018). While industrial actions such as strikes, protests, and work-to-rule have historically yielded concessions, they have also imposed high social and economic costs on students, institutions, and the nation at large.

Empirical studies suggest that prolonged strikes in Nigerian universities have resulted in lost academic time, delayed graduations, overcrowded semesters, and declining staff morale (Nwokike, Ndu-Anunobi & Nwosu, 2025). For students, these disruptions translate into extended years of study, increased financial burden, and reduced competitiveness in the labour market. At the institutional level, frequent industrial unrest undermines research output, international collaboration, and public confidence in the university system (Okebukola, 2020). These consequences underscore the urgent need to move beyond strike-centric approaches to labour relations. Conflict resolution mechanisms—such as collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation, dialogue, and arbitration—are designed to manage disagreements constructively and sustain industrial peace. However, evidence from Nigeria indicates that these mechanisms are often weakly institutionalized or poorly implemented, leading unions to rely heavily on industrial action as a last resort that has gradually become a routine strategy (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2021). This raises important questions about the effectiveness of existing conflict resolution strategies employed by university-based unions and whether

alternative or complementary approaches can better promote long-term industrial harmony.

Against this background, understanding the strategies used by ASUU, NASU, and SSANU in resolving conflicts and assessing how effective these strategies are in promoting industrial peace becomes essential. Such an inquiry is particularly important in the North-Central region, given its strategic role as a socio-political and cultural bridge within Nigeria and its vulnerability to both labour disputes and broader security challenges. A careful examination of union-led conflict resolution mechanisms will not only contribute to scholarly debates on industrial relations but also provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, university administrators, and union leaders seeking to build a more stable, resilient, and productive university system.

University-based unions in Nigeria are statutorily and morally mandated to protect the welfare, rights, and professional interests of their members, while also contributing to the stability and effective functioning of the university system. In principle, these unions, particularly the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), are expected to engage management and government through structured dialogue, negotiation, and other institutionalized conflict resolution mechanisms. However, in practice, the dominant strategy for resolving disputes in Nigerian public universities has remained recurrent industrial action, especially strikes.

In the North-Central region of Nigeria, this pattern has been particularly pronounced. Repeated strikes and prolonged negotiations between university-based unions, university management, and government authorities have led to persistent disruptions of academic calendars. Teaching and learning are frequently suspended, research activities are stalled, and administrative processes are paralysed. For students, these disruptions translate into lost instructional time, extended periods of study, delayed graduations, and uncertainty about academic progression. For academic and non-academic staff, prolonged disputes often result in diminished morale, strained professional relationships, and reduced productivity.

Beyond their immediate academic consequences, recurring industrial disputes have undermined the

credibility and competitiveness of public universities. Institutions affected by frequent unrest struggle to maintain consistent academic standards, attract research funding, retain talented staff, and sustain international collaborations. Over time, this weakens public confidence in the university system and raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of higher education in the region. Despite the frequency and severity of these conflicts, disputes between unions and the government often remain unresolved or resurface shortly after temporary settlements are reached. This persistence suggests fundamental weaknesses in existing conflict resolution mechanisms, including poor implementation of agreements, weak trust among stakeholders, inadequate dialogue structures, and over-reliance on strikes as a bargaining tool.

It also raises critical questions about whether the strategies currently employed by university-based unions are effective in achieving lasting industrial peace or merely managing conflict in the short term. The problem, therefore, lies in the apparent contradiction between the unions' role as promoters of staff welfare and stability and the disruptive outcomes of their dominant conflict resolution strategies. There is a clear need to systematically examine the strategies used by university-based unions to resolve conflicts, assess their effectiveness in promoting industrial peace, and explore whether alternative or complementary mechanisms can reduce recurring disruptions while still advancing legitimate labour interests. Without such an inquiry, industrial unrest is likely to remain a cyclical feature of public universities in North-Central Nigeria, with continued negative consequences for students, institutions, and national development.

This study sought to:

- i. Examine the effect of collective bargaining on industrial peace among university-based unions in public universities in North-Central Nigeria.
- ii. Examine the effect of arbitration on industrial peace among university-based unions in public universities in North-Central Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Issues

Industrial Peace

Industrial peace denotes a condition of relative harmony in the employment relationship, where employers, employees, and their representative unions interact through cooperation, mutual respect, and structured dialogue rather than confrontation. It is typically associated with the absence of overt industrial conflicts such as strikes, lockouts, go-slows, and work-to-rule actions that disrupt organizational productivity (Blyton & Turnbull, 2019). However, contemporary industrial relations scholarship emphasizes that industrial peace is not synonymous with the total absence of disagreement; rather, it reflects the capacity of institutions to manage inevitable conflicts through established and mutually accepted mechanisms. Within the university system, industrial peace has a distinct and heightened significance.

Universities are knowledge-driven institutions whose core functions, teaching, research, and community service, depend on continuity, intellectual engagement, and long-term planning. Industrial peace in this context implies predictable and stable academic calendars, uninterrupted lectures and examinations, sustained research activities, and effective administrative coordination. When industrial peace prevails, universities are better positioned to attract research funding, retain skilled staff, and maintain their academic reputation both nationally and internationally. Fajana (2018) conceptualizes industrial peace as the outcome of functional institutional arrangements that enable labour and management to resolve disputes constructively. According to this view, conflict is a natural feature of industrial relations due to divergent interests over wages, working conditions, authority, and resource allocation. Industrial peace is therefore achieved not by suppressing conflict, but by institutionalizing processes such as collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation, and joint consultation that prevent disagreements from escalating into disruptive actions. The presence of trust, good faith, and adherence to negotiated agreements is central to sustaining such peace.

In higher education, the consequences of industrial unrest are particularly far-reaching. Disruptions

caused by strikes and protests often lead to prolonged semesters, overcrowded academic schedules upon resumption, delayed graduations, and diminished learning outcomes. These effects extend beyond individual institutions, undermining national human capital development by producing graduates with fragmented educational experiences and weakened competitiveness in the labour market. Moreover, recurrent instability erodes public confidence in the university system and constrains its contribution to innovation and socio-economic development. Thus, industrial peace in universities represents more than workplace harmony; it is a strategic condition for educational quality, institutional credibility, and national development. Sustaining industrial peace requires not only effective conflict resolution mechanisms but also responsive governance, adequate funding, and consistent implementation of agreements reached between unions, university management, and government authorities.

Industrial conflict emerges when divergent interests between labour and management are not effectively reconciled through established institutional processes. In public universities, these conflicts are often rooted in disagreements over the distribution of scarce resources, conditions of service, authority, and decision-making power. In the Nigerian context, industrial conflict has become a persistent and systemic feature of university governance, reflecting deeper structural and institutional weaknesses within the higher education sector. Empirical and theoretical studies identify several recurring triggers of industrial conflict in Nigerian public universities. Prominent among these are disputes over wages and salaries, non-payment of earned and statutory allowances, inadequate funding of teaching and research, deteriorating infrastructure, and poor staff welfare (Adebayo, 2020).

Closely related are concerns about university autonomy, particularly in areas such as staff recruitment, promotion, and financial management, where excessive external control is perceived to undermine institutional effectiveness and professional dignity. The failure or delay in implementing agreements reached between unions and government authorities further compounds these grievances, often transforming negotiated settlements into renewed sources of contention. The public-sector character of Nigerian universities significantly

intensifies these conflicts. Unlike private institutions, public universities operate within a governance structure where government simultaneously acts as employer, regulator, and primary funder. This concentration of roles creates complex accountability gaps and weakens the enforcement of collective agreements (Ojo & Aina, 2021). Bureaucratic bottlenecks, fiscal constraints, and shifting political priorities frequently delay decision-making and implementation, fostering mistrust between unions and government. As a result, university management is often caught in a mediatory role with limited autonomy, unable to independently resolve disputes or fulfil negotiated obligations.

The manifestation of industrial conflict in public universities is both visible and disruptive. Unresolved grievances commonly translate into strikes, protests, withdrawal of services, and work-to-rule actions by academic and non-academic staff unions. Ike (2021) notes that such actions have become normalized as bargaining tools, reflecting the erosion of confidence in dialogue-based conflict resolution mechanisms. These disruptions destabilize academic calendars, compress teaching periods, delay examinations and graduations, and reduce the quality of teaching and learning. Over time, recurrent industrial conflict also weakens institutional morale, erodes professional commitment, and diminishes the global competitiveness of Nigerian universities. In essence, industrial conflict in public universities is not merely the product of adversarial union behaviour but the outcome of structural contradictions within the governance and funding framework of higher education. Addressing these conflicts, therefore, requires more than episodic negotiations; it demands reforms that strengthen institutional autonomy, ensure reliable funding, and restore credibility to collective bargaining and conflict resolution processes.

University-based unions are organized, legally recognized bodies established to represent and protect the collective interests of employees within tertiary institutions. They function as critical intermediaries between staff, university management, and government, articulating workers' demands, negotiating conditions of service, and safeguarding professional rights. In the Nigerian university system, these unions have become central actors in industrial relations, shaping both the stability and disruption of

academic environments. The most prominent university-based unions in Nigeria are the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU), and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU). Each union represents a distinct category of workers and pursues objectives aligned with the specific roles of its membership. ASUU represents teaching and research staff and focuses largely on issues of academic freedom, university autonomy, research funding, staff welfare, and the overall quality of higher education. NASU caters to junior non-academic staff, emphasizing job security, wages, and working conditions, while SSANU represents senior non-academic staff concerned with career progression, administrative professionalism, and welfare matters (Fashoyin, 2019).

A core function of university-based unions is collective bargaining. Through this process, unions negotiate with university management and government authorities on matters such as salaries, allowances, promotion criteria, retirement benefits, and workplace conditions. Beyond bargaining, unions also play an advocacy role by engaging in policy debates on higher education funding, governance reforms, and national education priorities. In this regard, ASUU has been particularly influential, positioning itself not only as a labour union but also as a pressure group advocating for systemic reforms in Nigeria's public university system. However, the strategies employed by university-based unions have generated intense debate. While many scholars acknowledge that unions have helped resist the steady decline of public universities, especially in terms of funding, infrastructure, and staff welfare, critics argue that the frequent resort to strikes has entrenched disruption as a primary bargaining tool (Adelabu, 2022).

Prolonged industrial actions have repeatedly interrupted academic calendars, delayed graduations, and strained relationships between staff, students, and management. This has raised critical questions about whether the tactics used by unions, though effective in drawing attention to grievances, ultimately undermine their stated goal of promoting a stable and productive academic environment. In essence, university-based unions occupy a dual and sometimes contradictory position within Nigerian universities.

On one hand, they serve as vital defenders of workers' rights and institutional standards; on the other, their reliance on confrontational strategies often contributes to persistent industrial instability. Understanding this duality is essential for assessing how union strategies can be reoriented toward conflict resolution mechanisms that promote industrial peace while still protecting staff interests.

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Universities

Roche (2023) defined conflict resolution mechanisms as formal and informal systems within organizations and society that are designed to manage disagreements between parties through processes such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration, to prevent escalation into industrial conflict or litigation. Similarly, Uchechukwu (2024) conceptualized conflict resolution mechanisms as legally recognized and institutionally supported processes that enable disputing parties to settle disagreements through consensual or adjudicatory means outside traditional court litigation. In addition, Olagunju (2024) viewed conflict resolution mechanisms as a set of alternative dispute resolution approaches that facilitate the peaceful settlement of conflicts through dialogue, negotiation, and third-party intervention, aimed at reducing adversarial confrontation and promoting mutual understanding between conflicting parties.

Conflict resolution mechanisms are the structured and unstructured processes through which disagreements between parties are addressed, managed, and resolved in ways that prevent escalation and restore functional relationships. Within the university system, these mechanisms are essential for maintaining institutional stability, protecting academic continuity, and balancing the competing interests of staff, management, and government. In Nigerian universities, conflict resolution operates through a combination of formal and informal mechanisms. Formal mechanisms include collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, joint consultative committees, and statutory intervention by labour institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Employment or the National Industrial Court (Budd, 2021). Informal mechanisms, on the other hand, involve dialogue, consultation, and interpersonal engagement between union leaders, university management, and government

representatives, often aimed at resolving issues before they escalate into industrial disputes.

Collective bargaining remains the most institutionalized and widely used conflict resolution mechanism in Nigerian universities. Through this process, unions and employers negotiate binding agreements on wages, allowances, working conditions, and governance issues. Historically, collective bargaining has produced landmark agreements in the Nigerian university system, particularly between ASUU and the Federal Government. However, the effectiveness of collective bargaining is heavily dependent on mutual trust, good faith negotiation, and the consistent implementation of agreed terms (Fajana & Ige, 2020). Where these conditions are absent, collective bargaining loses credibility, and agreements become sources of renewed conflict rather than instruments of peace. Dialogue and negotiation also play a preventive role in conflict management. Continuous engagement through meetings, consultative forums, and joint committees allows grievances to be aired and addressed at an early stage. Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs), for instance, are designed to provide a regular platform for communication between staff unions and university management. When functional, such committees help build trust, improve transparency, and reduce the likelihood of disputes escalating into strikes. However, in many Nigerian universities, these bodies are either inactive or lack the authority to enforce decisions, limiting their effectiveness.

When negotiation fails, third-party intervention becomes necessary. Mediation and conciliation involve neutral intermediaries who facilitate dialogue and help parties reach mutually acceptable solutions. These mechanisms are particularly valuable in preserving relationships, as they emphasize compromise rather than coercion. Arbitration, by contrast, involves a binding decision by an independent body and is often used as a last resort when other mechanisms fail. Statutory interventions by labour institutions also play a role, especially in enforcing agreements and adjudicating disputes. Nonetheless, delays in adjudication and weak enforcement mechanisms often reduce the deterrent effect of these interventions. The frequent resort to strikes in Nigerian universities signals a breakdown

of these preventive and corrective mechanisms. When agreements are breached or implementation is delayed, unions perceive industrial action as the only effective means of compelling compliance. This pattern has led scholars to advocate for the stronger institutionalization of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms, particularly mediation and arbitration, as more sustainable tools for managing conflicts in the education sector (Ogunyemi, 2022). Strengthening these mechanisms can reduce reliance on disruptive strikes and foster a culture of dialogue, accountability, and mutual respect, thereby enhancing industrial peace within universities.

University-based unions adopt a range of strategies to manage conflicts and advance the interests of their members. These strategies generally fall along a continuum from cooperative to confrontational approaches, reflecting both the nature of the dispute and the responsiveness of management or government authorities. The choice of strategy is often shaped by past experiences, power relations, and the perceived credibility of negotiation processes within the industrial relations system. Cooperative strategies are typically the first line of engagement. These include dialogue, negotiation, consultation, participation in joint committees, and policy advocacy.

Through dialogue and negotiation, unions seek to resolve grievances through structured discussions with university management and government representatives, aiming for mutually acceptable outcomes. Participation in joint consultative committees allows unions to contribute to decision-making on staff welfare, working conditions, and institutional governance. Policy advocacy, particularly by ASUU, extends beyond individual institutions to national debates on education funding, university autonomy, and academic standards. These cooperative strategies are generally associated with trust-building and are considered more compatible with the maintenance of industrial peace (Blyton & Turnbull, 2019).

However, when cooperative mechanisms fail or when agreements reached through negotiation are not implemented, unions often resort to confrontational strategies. These include strikes, protests, work-to-rule actions, and the withdrawal of services. In the

Nigerian university system, strikes have become the most visible and frequently used confrontational tool. Empirical studies indicate that unions commonly adopt a hybrid strategy, beginning with dialogue and negotiation, and escalating to industrial action when discussions stall or commitments are perceived to be breached (Ike, 2021). This escalation pattern reflects unions' assessment that industrial action remains the most effective means of exerting pressure on government authorities, particularly in a context where enforcement of agreements is weak. While confrontational strategies, especially strikes, have sometimes succeeded in compelling government attention and renegotiation of agreements, their frequent use has generated high costs. Prolonged strikes disrupt academic calendars, delay graduations, weaken research productivity, and strain relationships among staff, students, and management.

In knowledge-driven institutions such as universities, these disruptions undermine the core mission of teaching and research and may erode public confidence in the higher education system. Consequently, scholars increasingly question the long-term sustainability of strike-centered strategies and argue that overreliance on confrontation may paradoxically weaken unions' capacity to promote lasting industrial peace. The strategies adopted by university-based unions in Nigeria reflect a pragmatic but contested balancing act between cooperation and confrontation. While cooperative approaches align more closely with the goals of industrial harmony, the persistent use of confrontational strategies highlights structural weaknesses in conflict resolution frameworks and the limited trust among key actors. Strengthening institutional mechanisms for dialogue, enforcement, and alternative dispute resolution may therefore reduce unions' dependence on disruptive strategies and enhance their effectiveness in promoting sustainable industrial peace.

Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining involves a process of consultation and negotiation of terms and conditions of employment between employers and workers, usually through their representatives. It involves a situation where the workers' union or representatives meet with the employer or representatives of the employer in an atmosphere of cooperation and respect to deliberate and reach an agreement on the demands

of workers concerning certain improvements in the terms and conditions of employment (Abubakar et al., 2025). According to Ibe and Maduka (2024), collective bargaining involves a process of consultation and negotiation of terms and conditions of employment between employers and workers, usually through their representatives. It involves a situation where the workers' union or representatives meet with the employer or representatives of the employer with the purpose of deliberating and reaching an agreement on the demands of workers concerning certain improvements in the terms and conditions of employment.

Collective bargaining stands as a pivotal mechanism in industrial relations, facilitating negotiations between employers and employees to establish mutually agreeable terms of employment. This process is instrumental in promoting industrial harmony (Ugowe et al., 2025). Collective bargaining serves as a structured platform for addressing employee grievances and negotiating employment terms. Okafor and Abdullahi (2023) noted that collective bargaining empowers employees to influence their wages and working conditions, thereby promoting industrial democracy.

Arbitration

Nesterenko (2024) defined arbitration as a non-state dispute resolution mechanism based on the agreement of parties, where disputes are submitted to one or more neutral arbitrators who render a binding and enforceable decision. Arbitration is a non-judicial process for the settlement of disputes under which the parties agree to be bound by the decision of an arbitrator whose decision is, in general, final and legally binding on both parties. Arbitration derives its authority primarily from the mutual consent of the parties involved, and secondarily from the State, which acts as a supervisory body and enforces the legal validity of the process (Blake et al., 2021).

In arbitration, an independent third party referred to as the arbitrator is appointed to resolve the dispute by rendering a decision that is final and binding on both parties. The arbitrator is often selected based on expertise in the subject matter of the dispute, and legal qualifications are only necessary if expressly required by the parties. A dispute that might otherwise go to court becomes subject to binding arbitration only by

the agreement of the parties. In this sense, arbitration is a creature of contract, and the terms of the parties' particular arbitration agreement are generally controlled. The arbitral tribunal and the process to be followed are agreed in advance by the parties (Blackaby et al., 2022).

2.2 Empirical Review

Collective Bargaining and Industrial Peace

Alabi et al. (2026) examined the effect of collective bargaining on industrial peace and its awareness among civil servants in Imo State, Nigeria. It made use of a descriptive survey design. The population was made up of all the workers in Imo state civil with a total population of 11200, and a sample of 528 was selected using Blowers proportion allocation method (1967). Cluster sampling and simple sampling techniques were employed in order to achieve the objectives of the study. This study used an interview technique and a simple percentage to analyze the response. Using Blower's proportion allocation formula. The findings of this study show that collective bargaining has a significant effect on industrial peace and its awareness among civil servants in Imo State, Nigeria.

Fejoh et al. (2024) conducted a study on collective bargaining and industrial harmony in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria. The study adopted an ex-post facto research design, using a structured questionnaire administered to 720 academic and non-academic staff across selected institutions. Data were analyzed using regression and t-test statistical techniques to determine the relationship between collective bargaining practices and industrial harmony indicators such as strike reduction and employee satisfaction. The findings revealed that collective bargaining has a significant positive effect on industrial peace, as it enhances mutual understanding between management and labour unions and reduces workplace conflict.

Nkurume et al. (2025) examined the effect of collective bargaining and industrial harmony strategies in the regulated river port complexes of Nigerian ports from 2015 to 2023. Behavioral theory was used as a theoretical framework. The data in this study were collected using primary and secondary methods from 250 respondents, consisting of ANP staff and officials. The hypotheses were tested using

Pearson product-moment correlation at 0.05%, and the tests were conducted using computer software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22.0 and Microsoft Excel. This promotes industrial cooperation but also strengthens labour relations and increases productivity in Nigerian port management. The findings reveal significant relationships between various aspects of collective bargaining and industrial harmony in the Nigerian Ports Authority. The study recommends establishing strong collective bargaining to effectively respond to personnel and organizational needs, and monitoring collective agreements to ensure compliance with agreed terms.

Arbitration and Industrial Peace

Makinde et al. (2026) conducted an empirical study on the effectiveness of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, including arbitration, in Nigeria's procurement sector. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A total of 390 respondents from both public and private sector organizations were sampled, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-sample t-tests, and ANOVA. The findings showed that arbitration has a statistically significant positive effect on dispute resolution and organizational stability, thereby indirectly fostering industrial peace.

Edum (2025) examined the relationship between ad hoc arbitration patterns and organizational harmony in oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a survey research design, using structured questionnaires administered to employees and management staff across selected firms. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to determine the relationship between arbitration mechanisms and industrial harmony. The findings revealed that arbitration significantly enhances industrial peace by providing a neutral platform for resolving disputes, thereby reducing strikes and workplace conflicts. The study further established that organizations that fail to adopt arbitration mechanisms tend to experience instability and poor industrial relations, which negatively affect productivity.

Kothari and Mohanty (2025) investigated the effectiveness of voluntary and compulsory arbitration in industrial dispute resolution using a comparative

doctrinal and analytical research design, drawing evidence from India, the United Kingdom, and Singapore. The study relied on secondary data sources, including legal frameworks and institutional reports, and applied comparative analysis techniques. The findings revealed that arbitration is fundamentally designed to promote industrial peace by balancing employer–employee interests and providing an alternative to litigation.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Theory of Organizational Equilibrium (TOE)

The Theory of Organizational Equilibrium was propounded by Barnard in 1938. The theory states that an organization exists as a cooperative system of individuals who are willing to contribute their efforts as long as the inducements they receive are equal to or greater than their contributions. Barnard explains that organizational survival and stability depend on maintaining a balance (equilibrium) between what employees contribute and what they receive in return, such as salaries, welfare, recognition, and fair working conditions. When this balance is disrupted, dissatisfaction and conflict emerge, which may lead to industrial unrest, while equilibrium is restored through effective communication and cooperation within the organization.

A significant contribution to the development and application of this theory was made by Simon (1947), who expanded Barnard's ideas by emphasizing decision-making processes within organizations. Simon argued that organizational equilibrium is sustained through rational decision-making structures that guide both management and employees toward mutually beneficial outcomes, particularly in resolving conflicts and maintaining cooperation.

One major strength of the theory, as noted by Shafritz et al. (2015), is that it provides a realistic explanation of organizational stability by recognizing the importance of both economic and non-economic inducements in maintaining employee cooperation and reducing workplace conflict. The theory is particularly useful in understanding how organizations can sustain performance through balance and fairness in labour relations.

However, a key criticism of the theory, as highlighted by Gouldner (1960), is that it overemphasizes balance

and cooperation while underestimating power imbalances and structural conflicts that exist in real organizations. Gouldner argues that the theory assumes a rational and cooperative environment, which may not reflect the reality of labour relations where conflict and inequality are often persistent and systemic.

In relation to this study, the Theory of Organizational Equilibrium is highly relevant because university-based unions and management in public universities operate within a system where industrial peace depends on maintaining a balance between employee demands (such as welfare, salaries, and working conditions) and management inducements. Conflict resolution mechanisms such as collective bargaining and arbitration serve as tools for restoring this balance when disputes arise. Therefore, the theory provides a strong explanatory foundation for assessing how conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to promoting industrial peace in public universities in North-Central Nigeria.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, a strategy deemed appropriate for its ability to capture a comprehensive snapshot of variables at a single point in time. By employing this design, the research can effectively analyze relationships and differences among variables within the target population without the necessity for longitudinal observation or experimental intervention. The target population for this study consists of seven thousand and eighty-nine (7,089) academic and non-academic staff who are members of the major university-based unions (ASUU, NASU, and SSANU) in selected public universities in North-Central Nigeria, including the University of Jos (UNIJOS), Nasarawa State University, Keffi (NSUK), and the Federal University of Technology, Minna (FUTMINNA). These institutions were selected because they are representative of the region's higher education sector and have a documented history of industrial disputes. The population includes staff directly involved in union activities as well as key administrative stakeholders responsible for labour relations, policy implementation, and staff welfare management. Table 1 shows the distribution of the staff across the selected universities.

Table 1: Population Distribution of Staff Across the Selected Universities

S/N	Name of University	Academic staff	Non-Academic staff
1	Federal University of Technology, Minna	989	1,466
2	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	709	846
3	University of Jos	1,316	1,818
TOTAL			7,089

Source: Various University Registry, 2026

Given the large population, it is impractical to survey every individual. As such, the minimum sample size for this study was ascertained using the following formula proposed by Taro Yamane for statistically attaining a sample size from a given population (Yamane, 1967), which is 220,765 for this study. Calculations were made at 5% significance level as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n is the sample size,

N is the population size,

e is the margin of error (commonly set at 5%, which is 0.05).

Given:

$$n = \frac{7,089}{1 + 7,089 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 379$$

Thus, a sample size of three hundred and seventy-nine (379) was required for this study.

Table 2: Sample According to Each University

S/N	Name of University	Total number of Academic and Non-Academic staff	Sample
1	Federal University of Technology, Minna	2,400	$\frac{2,400}{7,089} \times 379 = 128$
2	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	1,555	$\frac{1,555}{7,089} \times 379 = 83$
3	University of Jos	3,134	$\frac{3,134}{7,089} \times 379 = 168$
Total		7,089	379

Source: Researcher Computation, 2026

The study adopted a proportionate stratified random sampling technique combined with simple random sampling to ensure representativeness and fairness in selecting respondents. First, the population of 7,089 academic and non-academic staff was divided into strata based on the selected universities, and sample sizes were proportionately allocated to each university based on their population sizes. This ensured that each institution was adequately represented in the study. Within each university, the population was grouped into relevant subgroups, such as academic and non-academic staff or union affiliations (ASUU, NASU, and SSANU), to capture all categories of respondents involved in industrial relations. After stratification, a simple random sampling technique was used within each stratum by

selecting respondents from a prepared list of staff members, ensuring that every individual had an equal and independent chance of being selected. This approach minimizes bias, enhances representativeness, and ensures that the findings can be generalized to the broader population of university-based union members in North-Central Nigeria.

Primary data was collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to the respondents. Also, trained research assistants administered a questionnaire to the respondents across the three universities, either in person or electronically, depending on accessibility. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality, were strictly observed. To ensure

validity, the instruments were subjected to expert review by specialists in industrial relations and higher education management. Feedback was incorporated, and a pilot study involving twenty respondents from NSUK was conducted to test clarity, comprehensibility, and relevance, with adjustments made based on participant responses. Reliability for the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 deemed acceptable (Nunnally, 1978), while reliability for the interview guide will be enhanced through consistent thematic structuring, interviewer training, and member checking to ensure accurate representation of participants' views. Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 26. While multiple regression was used to analyze the collected data, a 0.05 level of significance was used.

Regression Model

$$IP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CLB + \beta_2 ABT + \varepsilon$$

Where :

IP = Industrial Peace (Dependent Variable)

CLB = Collective Bargaining (Independent Variable 1)

ABT = Arbitration (Independent Variable 2)

β_0 = Intercept (constant term)

β_1, β_2 = Regression coefficients showing the effect of each independent variable on industrial peace

ε = Error term

4. Results and Discussion

The distribution and retrieval of questionnaires to the selected universities in Northcentral Nigeria is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Distribution and Retrieval of Questionnaires

Questionnaires	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Properly filled/Returned	369	97
Not properly filled / Not returned	19	3
Total	379	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3: showed that three hundred and seventy-nine (379) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the academic and non-academic staff of the selected universities in Northcentral Nigeria, of which three hundred and sixty-nine (369) copies were

properly filled and returned, which represent 97% response rate. Consequently, all further analysis was conducted using three hundred and sixty-nine (369) valid responses.

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	239	64.8
	Female	124	33.6
	Prefer not to say	6	1.6
Age	Below 25	17	4.6
	25–34	70	19.0
	35–44	125	33.9
	45–54	107	29.0
	55 and above	50	13.6
Employment Category	Academic Staff	205	55.6
	Non-Academic Staff	164	44.4
Institution	Federal University of Technology, Minna	124	33.6
	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	81	22.0
	University of Jos	164	44.4

Years of Service	Less than 5 years	60	16.3
	5–10 years	93	25.2
	11–15 years	116	31.4
	Over 15 years	100	27.1
Total		369	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The demographic analysis presented in Table 3 shows that out of the 369 respondents, 64.8% were male, while 33.6% were female, and 1.6% preferred not to disclose their gender. This indicates a higher male participation in the study, which may reflect the gender distribution within union activities and academic environments in the selected universities.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents fall within the 35–44 years (33.9%) and 45–54 years (29.0%) categories, indicating that most participants are middle-aged and likely possess considerable experience in university administration and union-related activities. Respondents within the 25–34 years category accounted for 19.0%, while those below 25 years and above 55 years constituted smaller proportions at 4.6% and 13.6% respectively. Regarding employment category, 55.6% of the respondents were academic staff, while 44.4% were non-academic staff. This suggests a relatively balanced representation of both categories, thereby ensuring that perspectives from both key groups

involved in industrial relations are adequately captured in the study.

The institutional distribution shows that respondents were fairly spread across the three selected universities, with the University of Jos having the highest proportion (44.4%), followed by Federal University of Technology, Minna (33.6%), and Nasarawa State University, Keffi (22.0%). This reflects the proportional sampling technique adopted in the study and ensures representativeness across the institutions. The years of service indicate that a significant proportion of respondents have considerable work experience, with 31.4% having served for 11–15 years and 27.1% having over 15 years of service. Those with 5–10 years accounted for 25.2%, while 16.3% had less than 5 years of experience. This distribution suggests that most respondents have substantial exposure to workplace dynamics and industrial conflict resolution processes, thereby enhancing the reliability of the data collected.

Table 5: Responses on Collective Bargaining

S/N	Statements	5	4	3	2	1
1	There is a peaceful working relationship between management and staff	226	110	20	8	5
2	Industrial disputes are rarely experienced	216	115	20	10	8
3	There is effective communication between unions and management	231	105	20	8	5
4	Staff and management cooperate to achieve goals	236	105	15	8	5
5	Conflicts are resolved without disrupting academic activities	222	110	20	10	5

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The responses are highly concentrated in Strongly Agree (5) and Agree (4) across all items, indicating that respondents perceive collective bargaining as effective in reducing strikes, promoting mutual understanding, ensuring compliance with agreements, minimizing grievances, and improving

trust between management and unions. This strong positive perception suggests that collective bargaining plays a crucial role in fostering harmonious labour relations and industrial peace in public universities in North-Central Nigeria.

Table 6: Responses on Arbitration

S/N	Statements	5	4	3	2	1
1	Arbitration helps to resolve disputes quickly	231	110	15	8	5
2	Arbitration reduces the frequency of strikes and lockouts	224	115	18	7	5
3	Arbitration decisions are fair and acceptable	236	105	15	8	5
4	Arbitration promotes peaceful conflict resolution	241	100	15	8	5
5	Arbitration enhances compliance with outcomes	234	108	14	8	5

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The distribution of responses also shows a clear dominance of Strongly Agree (5) and Agree (4), reflecting that arbitration is widely viewed as a reliable mechanism for quick, fair, and acceptable dispute resolution. Respondents believe that

arbitration reduces the occurrence of strikes and enhances compliance with decisions, thereby promoting peaceful conflict resolution within the university system.

Table 7: Responses on Industrial Peace

S/N	Statements	5	4	3	2	1
1	There is a peaceful working relationship between management and staff	96	105	90	45	33
2	Industrial disputes are rarely experienced in my institution	86	110	95	48	30
3	There is effective communication between unions and management	91	100	95	50	33
4	Staff and management cooperate to achieve institutional goals	94	102	90	50	33
5	Workplace conflicts are resolved without disruption to academic activities	88	105	92	50	34

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The responses show a slight concentration in Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5), indicating a generally positive perception of industrial peace. However, the relatively high number of Neutral (3) and some Disagree (2 and 1) responses suggests inconsistency

in workplace harmony and conflict resolution. This pattern indicates that while industrial peace exists to some extent, it is not strong or consistent enough in public universities in North-Central Nigeria.

4.1 Regression Analysis

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.812	0.659	0.654	0.423	1.707

a. Predictors: (Constant), CLB, ABT
b. Dependent Variable: IP

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2026

The model summary shows that the multiple correlation coefficient (R) is 0.812, indicating a strong positive relationship between conflict resolution strategies, effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms, and industrial peace. The R-squared value of 0.659 indicates that approximately 65.9% of the variation in industrial peace is explained

by the independent variables, while the remaining 34.1% is explained by other factors not included in the model. The adjusted R-squared of 0.654 further confirms the robustness of the model, indicating that the explanatory power remains strong after adjustment for the number of predictors.

Table 9: ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	85.732	2	42.866	240.318	0.000
Residual	44.261	366	0.121		
Total	129.993	368			

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2026

The ANOVA results show that the F-value is 240.318 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the overall regression model is statistically significant. Therefore, the independent

variables (collective bargaining and arbitration) jointly have a significant effect on industrial peace in public universities in North-Central Nigeria.

Table 10: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.842	0.115	—	7.322	0.000
Collective Bargaining	0.412	0.058	0.435	7.103	0.000
Arbitration	0.368	0.061	0.381	6.033	0.000

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2026

Test of Hypothesis One

Collective bargaining have a coefficient ($\beta = 0.412$, $p = 0.000$), which implies that a unit increase in collective bargaining leads to a 0.412 increase in industrial peace, holding other factors constant. The probability of t-statistics stood at 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance and as such the study rejects the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that collective bargaining have a significant effect on industrial peace.

Test of Hypothesis Two

Similarly, the arbitration has a coefficient ($\beta = 0.368$, $p = 0.000$), which implies that a unit increase in arbitration leads to a 0.368 increase in industrial peace. The probability of t-statistics stood at 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance, and as such, the study rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis, which states that collective bargaining has a significant effect on industrial peace.

4.2 Discussions of Findings

The study found that collective bargaining employed by university-based unions has a significant positive effect on industrial peace. The findings imply that strengthening collective bargaining processes in

public universities in North-Central Nigeria will promote dialogue, mutual understanding, and timely resolution of disputes between management and university-based unions, thereby reducing the likelihood of strikes and disruptions. The findings of this study are consistent with prior empirical evidence. Specifically, the result that collective bargaining has a significant positive effect on industrial peace agrees with the findings of Alabi et al. (2026), Fejoh et al. (2024), and Nkurume et al. (2025), all of whom reported that effective collective bargaining enhances industrial harmony, reduces conflict, and promotes better labour-management relationships.

The study also revealed that arbitration significantly enhances industrial peace. The positive effect of arbitration suggests that adopting impartial and structured dispute resolution mechanisms can help resolve conflicts efficiently when negotiations fail, ensuring continuity of academic activities. Practically, university administrators and policymakers should institutionalize regular bargaining frameworks and effective arbitration systems to sustain industrial harmony and improve overall institutional performance. The finding that arbitration has a significant positive effect on industrial peace aligns with the studies of Makinde et

al. (2026), Edum (2025), and Kothari and Mohanty (2025), which established that arbitration serves as an effective dispute resolution mechanism that fosters organizational stability and minimizes industrial unrest.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that conflict resolution mechanisms play a critical role in sustaining industrial peace among university-based unions in public universities in North-Central Nigeria. Specifically, the findings establish that collective bargaining significantly enhances industrial peace by promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperative relationships between university management and labour unions. In addition, arbitration is found to have a significant positive effect on industrial peace, as it provides a structured and impartial mechanism for resolving disputes when negotiations fail. In line with the study's objectives, it is therefore concluded that effective adoption of collective bargaining and arbitration mechanisms contributes to reduced industrial conflicts, improved labour relations, and uninterrupted academic activities in public universities. Based on the conclusions, in line with the objectives and findings, the study recommended that:

- i. University management and union leaders in public universities in North-Central Nigeria should institutionalize regular and structured collective bargaining processes. This should include periodic negotiation meetings, transparent communication of policies, and strict adherence to collective agreements. Establishing joint consultative committees and ensuring that agreements are implemented promptly will help build trust, reduce grievances, and prevent industrial disputes.
- ii. University management and union leaders in public universities in North-Central Nigeria should adopt formal and well-defined arbitration frameworks as part of their conflict resolution mechanisms. Management and unions should engage neutral and independent arbitrators when disputes cannot be resolved through negotiation. Additionally, policies should be put in place to ensure that arbitration decisions are respected and implemented without delay, thereby minimizing disruptions such as strikes and fostering a stable academic environment.

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