

STRIKES AND EMPLOYEE WORK ENGAGEMENT OF ALUMINIUM FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE.

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Abstract

This study examined strikes and worker engagement at aluminum businesses in Rivers State, Nigeria. The purpose of the research was to determine the relationship between picketing and dedication among employees in Rivers State's aluminum firms, vigor and wildcat strikes, and slowdown strikes and job engagement. The research was based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. A correlational research design was used. There were 150 employees from 15 aluminum firms in Rivers State. At the company level, a census approach was used because to the small number of enterprises. 142 copies, or 94.7% of the total, were successfully retrieved and evaluated using a methodical questionnaire. Spearman's rank order correlation was used to examine the data. The results demonstrated a slightly negative, statistically significant relationship between slowdown strikes and work engagement. Additionally, a considerable, negative, and statistically significant correlation was found between picketing and dedication as well as wildcat strikes and energy. The findings demonstrate how various forms of strikes erode employees' sense of pride, zeal, and psychological dedication to their profession. The study concludes that strikes significantly and negatively affect workers' job satisfaction in aluminum firms in Rivers State. In order to address employee concerns before they become slowdowns or wildcat strikes, it was recommended, among other things, that management establish responsive grievance-handling systems. Keywords: picketing, aluminum companies, Rivers State, slowdown strikes, wildcat strikes, employee work engagement, and strikes

Background to the Study

Thousands of people engage in production, fabrication, engineering, and administration in Rivers State's aluminum industry, which is one of the major industrial sectors in Nigeria's South-South area (Okafor & Nwosu, 2021). However, aluminum companies in Rivers State, like many other Nigerian manufacturing sectors, have regularly faced strikes and other types of industrial unrest, which has a noticeable impact on output levels, organizational morale, and the engagement of employees who stay on the job even after a strike is resolved (Adeyemi & Okon, 2022). When employees jointly halt or cut down on work as a form of protest, it's often due to unresolved disputes with management on pay, working conditions, job security, or perceived unfairness (Clark, 2012). There are several types of strikes: picketing, where employees stand at the entrance of the workplace to deter others from entering and to send a public message of protest (Clark, 2012); wildcat strikes, which are abrupt work stoppages without prior notice or official union authorization (Nwachukwu & Ibe, 2023); and slowdown strikes, in which employees purposefully slow down their pace of work without completely stopping (Eze & Okoro, 2020).

The degree to which an employee is passionately engaged, passionate, and dedicated to their work and the company is known as employee work engagement. The degree of employee engagement in aluminum companies, where production primarily relies on physical skills, cooperation, and continuous equipment operation, impacts both the amount of output produced and the level of worker safety (Ugwu & Onyishi, 2018). Industrial conflicts weaken the psychological resources that maintain participation over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), and workers who have engaged in strikes often return to work with unresolved complaints, less confidence in management, and

decreased commitment (Amadi & Eze, 2022). In light of this, this research investigates the connection between employee job engagement and strikes at aluminum companies in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Recurring industrial actions including slowdown strikes, wildcat strikes, and picketing in Rivers State's aluminum companies are rapidly undermining employee job participation. The psychological connection between employees and their occupations has been eroded by ongoing strikes, which has led to a decline in zeal, dedication, and engagement in work-related activities. While wildcat strikes cause abrupt disruptions that increase tension, emotional exhaustion, and mistrust, weakening worker vigor, slowdown strikes decrease job involvement as employees purposefully reduce their work effort, which gradually normalizes low performance even after disputes are resolved.

Additionally, picketing exacerbates workplace divides by fostering apparent confrontation between employees and management as well as among employees themselves. This often leads to emotional detachment, resentment, and a decline in organizational pride, all of which have a direct impact on devotion. Despite the importance of these topics, research on strikes in Nigeria has mostly focused on their economic repercussions and causes, paying little attention to their behavioral and psychological effects on worker involvement, especially in the aluminum industry. The present research aims to fill this gap.

Conceptual Framework

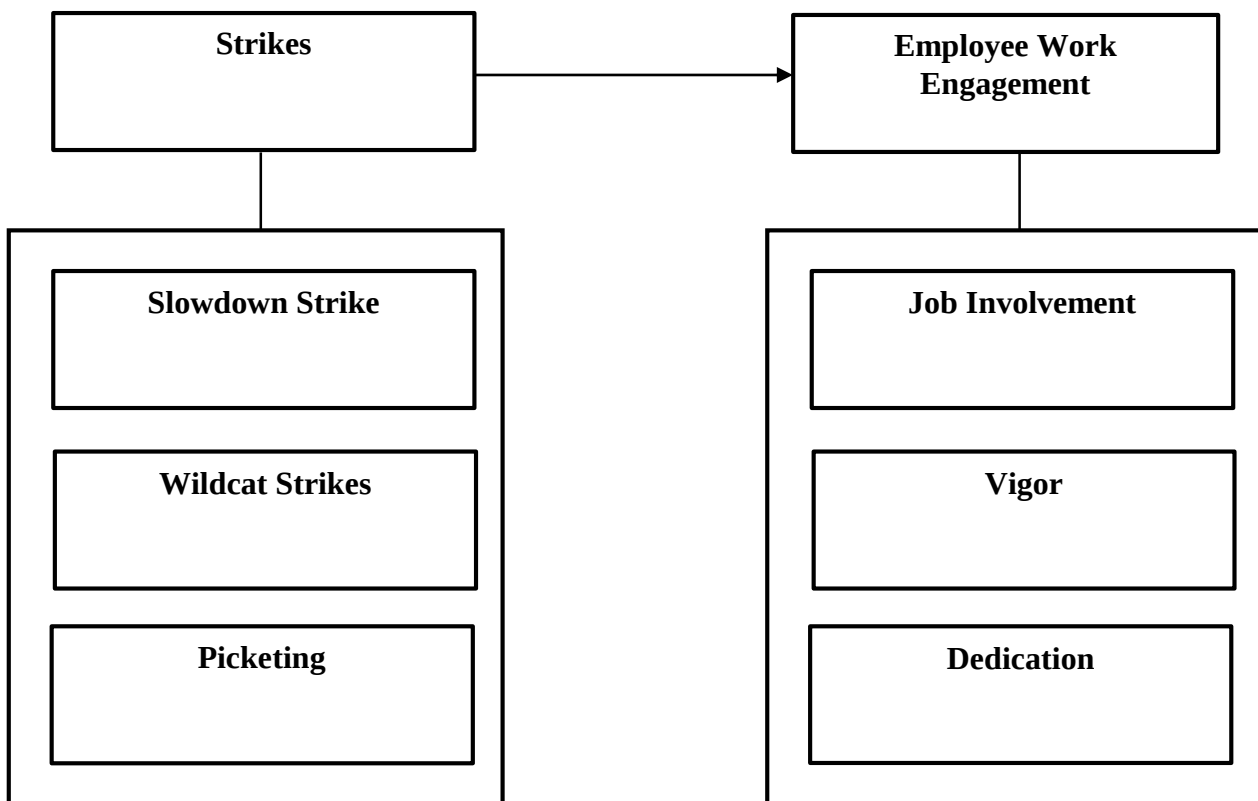


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework showing Strikes and Employee Work Engagement.

Source: Dimensions of Strikes were adopted from Clark, (2012) while measures of Employee Work Engagement were adopted from Ugwu & Onyishi, (2018).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between strikes and employee work engagement of aluminium firms in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

1. investigate the relationship between slowdown strikes and job involvement among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.
2. determine the relationship between wildcat strikes and vigor among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.
3. assess the relationship between picketing and dedication among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between slowdown strikes and job involvement among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between wildcat strikes and vigor among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between picketing and dedication among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

- H0₁: There is no significant relationship between slowdown strikes and job involvement among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.
- H0₂: There is no significant relationship between wildcat strikes and vigor among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.
- H0₃: There is no significant relationship between picketing and dedication among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.

Review of Related Literature

Strikes

A strike is a collective act of industrial protest in which workers agree to stop or significantly reduce their normal work activities as a way of pressuring management to address a specific grievance. Clark (2012) defined a strike as an organized cessation of work by a group of employees, undertaken to force an employer to meet certain demands or to draw public attention to workplace injustices. Strikes are not acts of individual indiscipline but collective decisions made by workers who have concluded that direct dialogue with management has broken down, and they therefore often represent the final stage of unresolved workplace conflict. Okafor and Nwosu (2021) documented that manufacturing industries in the South-South region, including aluminium producers in Rivers State, have experienced recurring strikes driven by unpaid wages, poor working conditions, inadequate safety equipment, job insecurity, and the failure of management to honour collective bargaining agreements. In the aluminium sector, strikes are often rooted in the physically demanding and hazardous nature of the work, which makes workers feel that fair compensation and adequate safety provisions are necessities rather than luxuries (Eze & Okoro, 2020).

Slowdown Strike: A slowdown strike, or go-slow, is a form of industrial action in which employees deliberately reduce their pace of work below the normal rate without completely withdrawing their labour. Clark (2012) defined it as a deliberate reduction in work performance aimed at pressuring management while avoiding the complete cessation of work. Eze and Okoro (2020) observed that slowdown strikes are frequently employed as a preliminary tactic before workers resort to a complete stoppage, and that workers engaged in deliberate underperformance often experience conflict

between their professional pride and the obligations of collective action, which can reduce job involvement.

Wildcat Strikes: Wildcat strikes are spontaneous and unplanned work stoppages undertaken by employees without the formal authorization of a trade union and without prior notice to management. Nwachukwu and Ibe (2023) described them as unauthorized collective stoppages that occur when employees believe that existing grievance procedures or union leadership are too slow or unwilling to respond to urgent concerns. In aluminium firms they are particularly disruptive because production depends on continuous processes and strict adherence to safety procedures, and Adeyemi and Okon (2022) found that workers who participated in wildcat strikes experienced higher psychological stress and job insecurity afterwards.

Picketing: Picketing is the practice whereby employees position themselves at the entrances of their workplace during a strike to discourage or prevent other workers, suppliers, customers, and visitors from entering. Clark (2012) explained that it increases pressure on management through public demonstration and encourages solidarity among workers. Amadi and Eze (2022) noted that picketing in Nigerian aluminium firms has frequently resulted in confrontations between employees and security personnel or management representatives, leaving lasting psychological and emotional effects on the workers involved.

Employee Work Engagement

Employee work engagement describes how fully a worker is absorbed in, energized by, and committed to the job. Schaufeli (2021) described it as a positive, fulfilling, work-related psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Adeyemi and Okon (2022) argued that engagement must be understood as both an outcome and a resource: as an outcome, it reflects the quality of the employment relationship, and as a resource, it provides the energy and commitment workers draw upon in challenging circumstances. Any factor that disrupts the employment relationship, such as a strike, can therefore drain the resource and worsen the outcome. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) similarly explained that engagement declines when job demands become excessive or job resources are reduced, as often happens during and after strike actions.

Job Involvement: Job involvement refers to the degree to which an employee psychologically identifies with the job and considers it a central part of personal identity. Highly involved workers in aluminium firms remain focused on production activities, comply with safety procedures, and take personal pride in producing quality output. Ugwu and Onyishi (2018) observed that job involvement is often one of the earliest dimensions of work engagement to decline during industrial disputes, because strikes symbolize a breakdown in trust, cooperation, and mutual respect between workers and management.

Vigor: Vigor refers to the level of physical energy, mental resilience, and persistence that employees demonstrate while performing their work. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) described it as a core activation dimension of work engagement. In aluminium firms, vigor is particularly important because production requires considerable physical stamina and sustained concentration. Nwachukwu and Ibe (2023) observed that vigor among industrial workers is highly sensitive to the emotional climate of the workplace, as tension, conflict, and uncertainty in organizations that have recently experienced strikes often deplete employees' energy.

Dedication: Dedication is the dimension of work engagement that reflects the extent to which employees experience a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and commitment toward their work (Schaufeli, 2021). Amadi and Eze (2022) noted that dedication among Nigerian manufacturing workers is closely associated with their sense of organizational belonging and their

perception that management values their wellbeing, and that it is one of the most difficult dimensions of engagement to restore after industrial disputes.

Theoretical Review: Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory was propounded by Hobfoll (1989). The central idea of the theory is that people are motivated to obtain, retain, protect, and build resources, which are objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies that are valued in themselves or that serve as a means to achieving other valued resources. When these resources are threatened or actually lost, or when individuals invest resources and fail to receive the gains they expected, psychological stress and disengagement result. In the workplace, resources include not only material resources such as wages and equipment but also psychological resources such as a sense of security, optimism, and organizational belonging.

Assumptions of the Theory: The Conservation of Resources Theory is built on several key assumptions:

1. The threat or actual loss of resources is more psychologically impactful than gains of equivalent magnitude.
2. Resources tend to come in clusters, so that the loss of one type of resource triggers losses across other resource domains.
3. People must invest resources in order to gain more resources, and those already depleted are less able to invest.
4. Individuals actively manage their resources and, when resources are threatened, shift from resource investment to resource protection.

Relevance of the Theory to the Study

The Conservation of Resources Theory is relevant because it explains why strikes undermine employee work engagement in aluminium firms in Rivers State. A strike represents both a loss of resources and a threat of further loss, since workers lose income, risk disciplinary action, and lose the security of a stable employment relationship. Slowdown strikes place workers in a state of psychological conflict that depletes the resources sustaining job involvement; wildcat strikes create sudden resource losses, including emotional security, that reduce vigor; and picketing erodes the sense of belonging and pride that sustains dedication.

Empirical Review

Okafor and Nwosu (2021) investigated the effect of industrial strikes on employee performance in manufacturing firms in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, using a descriptive survey of 480 workers from twelve firms, from whom 342 responses were analysed with multiple regression. The study found that full stoppages, go-slows, and picketing all had a significant negative effect on employee performance, with wildcat strikes showing the strongest negative association with worker output and post-strike commitment. Similarly, Eze and Okoro (2020) examined go-slow industrial action in aluminium and steel manufacturing firms in Anambra and Enugu States and found that it had a significant and lasting negative effect on job involvement, with reduced psychological absorption and output quality persisting for up to three months after the go-slow ended. Nwachukwu and Ibe (2023) found that wildcat strikes had a significant negative relationship with worker vigor in cement and building materials firms in Rivers State and Akwa Ibom State, with the spontaneous and disruptive nature of the stoppages driving emotional exhaustion. However, gaps remain in understanding how each form of strike relates to specific dimensions of engagement in aluminium firms in Rivers State, which the current study addresses. Also, Amadi and Eze (2022) found that picketing had a significant negative effect on employee dedication in oil services and manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, with lower organizational identification and a diminished sense of belonging in the months following the strike. Adeyemi and Okon (2022) reported that industrial conflicts had

a significant negative relationship with job involvement and vigor in food and beverage firms in Lagos State, and that management's handling of conflicts moderated the outcome, since workers in firms where management responded with open negotiation reported higher engagement. Furthermore, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) showed that organizations that maintained high levels of job resources during and after industrial conflict were better able to preserve engagement, while Schaufeli (2021) found that a history of unresolved industrial conflict is one of the most consistent predictors of low engagement across countries. Despite these insights, limited empirical work has simultaneously examined slowdown strikes, wildcat strikes, and picketing in relation to job involvement, vigor, and dedication within a single study of aluminium firms in Rivers State. The current study aims to bridge this gap.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study was 150 employees drawn from 15 registered and active aluminium firms operating in Rivers State, as obtained from the Rivers State Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment (2026). The respondents comprised production supervisors, human resource officers, line production staff, trade union representatives, and administrative staff, with 10 respondents purposively selected from each firm. A census approach was used to cover all registered firms because their number was small, while a purposive sampling technique was used to select employees directly involved in production, labour relations, and administrative operations. Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled the Strikes and Employee Work Engagement Questionnaire (SEWEQ), designed on a four-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated by the study supervisor and an expert in Measurement and Evaluation, and its reliability was established through the test-retest method, with a coefficient of 0.73 obtained. A total of 150 copies were administered, out of which 142 copies representing 94.7% were successfully retrieved and found usable. Data were analysed using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at a 0.05 significance level via SPSS.

Results

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between slowdown strikes and job involvement among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.

Table 1: Correlations between slowdown strikes and job involvement

			Slowdown Strikes	Job Involvement
Spearman's rho	Slowdown Strikes	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.398**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	181	181
	Job Involvement	Correlation Coefficient	-.398**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	181	181

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

The correlation result shows a Spearman's rho value of -0.398 with a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the 0.01 threshold. This indicates a moderate, negative, and statistically significant relationship between slowdown strikes and job involvement among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State. In practical terms, this means that as the incidence and intensity of slowdown strikes increase, employees' job involvement, reflected in their personal connection to and mental absorption in their work, tends to decrease correspondingly. Since the p-value is below 0.01, the null hypothesis (H₀₁), which states that there is no significant relationship between the two variables, is rejected.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between wildcat strikes and vigor among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.

Table 2: Correlations between wildcat strikes and vigor

		Wildcat Strikes Vigor	
Spearman's rho	Wildcat Strikes	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	181
	Vigor	Correlation Coefficient	-.452**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	181

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

The correlation analysis for Hypothesis Two reveals a Spearman's rho value of -0.452 with a significance value of 0.000, indicating a moderate, negative, and statistically significant relationship between wildcat strikes and vigor among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State. This means that as employees experience more wildcat strikes, their vigor, reflected in their physical energy, resilience, and willingness to exert effort at work, tends to decrease correspondingly. Since the p-value (0.000) is below the 0.01 significance threshold, the result is statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0₂).

H0₃: There is no significant relationship between picketing and dedication among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State.

Table 3: Correlations between picketing and dedication

		Picketing	Dedication
Spearman's rho	Picketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	181
	Dedication	Correlation Coefficient	-.367**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	181

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

The correlation result for Hypothesis Three shows a Spearman's rho value of -0.367 with a significance level of 0.000, indicating a moderate, negative, and statistically significant relationship between picketing and dedication among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State. This suggests that as employees' exposure to picketing increases, their dedication, reflected in their sense of pride, meaning, and belonging at work, tends to decrease correspondingly. Since the p-value is below 0.01, the null hypothesis (H0₃) is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Slowdown Strikes and Job Involvement

The result of the first hypothesis revealed a moderate and statistically significant negative relationship between slowdown strikes and job involvement among employees in aluminium firms in Rivers State ($r = -0.398$, $p < 0.01$). This finding implies that as workers engage more frequently in deliberate work-pace reduction as a form of protest, their personal connection to and mental absorption in their work decline, which suggests that even non-disruptive forms of industrial action carry a psychological cost for the workers who engage in them. It aligns with Eze and Okoro (2020),

who found that go-slow action was significantly and negatively associated with job involvement in aluminium and steel firms, and with Okafor and Nwosu (2021), who established that strikes were significantly linked to reduced employee performance in South-South manufacturing firms. It also supports the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), since the deliberate withdrawal of effort during a slowdown depletes the psychological resources that would otherwise sustain full engagement. In line with Bakker and Demerouti (2017), persistent unaddressed grievances erode the personal resources that underpin job involvement unless matched by organizational responsiveness, and respondents indicated that slowdown strikes were typically preceded by unresolved grievances.

Wildcat Strikes and Vigor

The analysis of the second hypothesis demonstrated a moderate and significant negative relationship between wildcat strikes and vigor ($r = -0.452$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as employees experience more frequent unplanned and unauthorized work stoppages, their physical energy, resilience, and willingness to exert effort decline. The finding corroborates Nwachukwu and Ibe (2023), who found that wildcat strikes had a significant negative relationship with vigor in manufacturing firms in Rivers State and Akwa Ibom State, and it is consistent with Frangi et al. (2020), who observed that the unpredictability and confrontational nature of wildcat strikes generate heightened emotional and physical strain. Kallas (2025) similarly noted that spontaneous strikes generate more prolonged tension between workers and management than formally organized action, given the lack of a negotiation framework to guide de-escalation. This is the strongest of the three relationships, and respondents most strongly agreed that workers who participate in wildcat strikes often face disciplinary action that increases their insecurity, a pattern consistent with Idike et al. (2020), who found that adverse supervisory responses significantly undermined work engagement, and with Ugwu and Onyishi (2018), who linked perceived organizational frustration to reduced engagement.

Picketing and Dedication

The result of the third hypothesis revealed a moderate and statistically significant negative relationship between picketing and dedication ($r = -0.367$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that as workers' exposure to picketing increases, their sense of pride, meaning, and belonging at work declines. The finding is consistent with Amadi and Eze (2022), who found that picketing had a significant negative relationship with employee dedication in oil services and manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, and with Adeyemi and Okon (2022), who reported that industrial conflicts were significantly associated with reduced engagement in food and beverage firms. It also aligns with Schaufeli et al. (2020), who identify dedication as a component that is particularly sensitive to experiences threatening an employee's sense of organizational identification, such as the public confrontation involved in picketing. The relationship is the weakest of the three, which may be explained by the fact that participation in picketing was reported less frequently than slowdown or wildcat strikes, in line with Arinze and Jakpa (2025), who noted that picketing tends to be used more sparingly because it carries greater reputational and legal risk for participating workers.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between strikes and employee work engagement of aluminium firms in Rivers State. The findings demonstrated that slowdown strikes are negatively related to job involvement, that wildcat strikes are negatively related to vigor, and that picketing is negatively related to dedication. These outcomes underscore that employee work engagement in aluminium firms is not shaped solely by conventional human resource practices but is substantially and adversely affected by strike actions of various forms. Firms that fail to resolve proactively the grievances underlying slowdown strikes, wildcat strikes, and picketing are likely to experience a steady erosion of job involvement, vigor, and dedication among their workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Management should establish responsive grievance-handling mechanisms to address employee concerns before they escalate into slowdown or wildcat strikes.
2. Firms should prioritise early dispute resolution and fair post-strike procedures to minimise the negative effects of industrial actions on employee job involvement, vigor, and dedication.
3. Industry bodies and regulatory agencies should encourage aluminium firms to adopt standardised dispute-resolution frameworks that promote harmonious employee relations.

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