

## **A Critical Analysis of Employee Voice Notion in Nigeria's Petroleum Industry**

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### **Abstract**

It is nearly five decades on – since Hirschman coined employee in his epic book - “Exit, Voice, and Loyalty”, however, scholars still perceive the concept to be severely under-researched, particularly from the developing countries’ perspective - such as Nigeria, which is the context of this study. Against this backdrop, this study hopes to contribute to the existing literature on employee voice notion by linking the participatory dynamic of how this concept is constructed, understood and facilitated by employers of labour, for cordial employer-employee relationship, which Hofstede attributes to the cultural-environmental dynamics of individual countries. To achieve the above, this study relied on data gathered from semi-structured interviews with 25 managerial and non-managerial employees across 4 organisations in the Nigeria’s petroleum sector, which are qualitatively analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA). Consequently, whilst the logic of employee voice differs significantly between managers and employees; the study uncovered a growing trend of employer-employee relationship that is characterised by employees’ silence, disengagement and voice marginalisation, which hallmarks Nigeria’s cultural-environmental dynamics of high power distance and paternalism.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Employee Voice, Legitimacy, Engagement; CDA.

### **Introduction**

This empirical study investigates the cultural-environmental underpinning of employee voice notion and the efficacy of its delivery strategies, via critical discourse analysis (CDA) of responses drawn from respondents across the Nigeria’s petroleum sector. In doing so, this research hopes to make contributions to the extant literature, by linking cultural dynamic to organisational behaviours and stakeholder (employees) outcome. Thus, by linking Hofstede’s (1980) cultural theory of power distance (PD) to Suchman’s (1995) organisational legitimacy theory (which is a precursor to organisational behaviour) and Albrecht’s (2010) engagement theory (which explores stakeholder-employees’ outcomes), this study hopes to establish the participatory dynamics of how case study’s respondents construct and perceive employee voice. The key aim is to provide more nuanced understanding of the various cultural inclinations that influences how employees voice perception is constructed and delivered, via qualitative analysis of case study’s data, which multi-theoretical credentials of

critical discourse analysis (CDA) can facilitate - being a problem-oriented language tool (Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2011).

Employee Voice (EV) is more prominent in the modern world of work, because of its promise of mutual employer-employee benefits (Freeman & Medoff 1984; Holland et al, 2014). The concept of EV (if positively harnessed) is expected to promote better employee work engagement, commitment and can motivate employees to express their personal grievances and work-related barriers (Macleod and Clarke, 2009). This (is hoped) can positively help alter the existing working procedures and potentially reduce not only employees' discontent, retreat or possible disruptive actions; but broadly improve managerial control, continuity of production, profit maximisation and minimisation of losses (Gollan et al., 2015). In spite of these benefits, '*disagreement*' still abounds on the notions and consequential '*outcomes of employee voice*', regardless of whether it is facilitated via either union or non-unionised employee representations (NERs) or both channels (Burriss et al, 2013: p. 23).

The unions adopt collective attributes and confrontational (or militancy) approach to represent the interests of their members, which explains why they are considered the most effective channels of employee voice, although some field commentators have argued against unions' inflexibility, citing them as stumbling block for management of change in critical time (Wilkinson et al, 2014). In contrast, NERs is viewed as moderate, corporative and individual-based management-oriented voice channels, which are built on the anvil of flexibility and promise of mutual employer-employee relationship, high performance and rewards systems, but many writers have equally questioned management's ability to deliver authentic employee voice under such managerial-oriented arrangement (Burriss et al, 2013; Cathcart, 2014), hence the co-existence of both has been suggested as a possible solution to the issue of employee voice (Gollan et al, 2015). However, this study looks beyond the efficacy of unions and NERs channels per se, to explore the cultural-environmental factors, which can drive the perception of employee voice notion, its strategies of delivery and the implications on employees' outcomes.

In line with Hofstede's (1980) treatise of cultural consequences on human resource management (HRM), which compares values and behaviours of institutions and organisations across countries, this study agrees there is a strong link between the cultural-environmental

dynamics of the host country and organisational (culture and) behaviours towards stakeholders. The above contention aligns with Aycan et al's (2000) concept of 'cultural fit', which explored how organisational behaviours towards stakeholder (employees, environment and community etc) are being shaped by the host country's culture, which directs how organisations should behave, including in particular mechanics for employee voice delivery (Rao, 2013). However, as Kragh (2016: 53) remarked, researches on this phenomenon has often been shaped around Western "*anthropological concept of culture*", hence the need to explore cultural implications of HRM from both developed and developing countries' perspectives. While this study relies on Hofstede's (1980) cultural dynamism, it is also important to acknowledge the criticisms on Hofstede's cultural treatise, one of which argues that "*Hofstede never studied culture*" (Baskerville, 2003:p.1) - due to its over-reliance on numeric indices and matrices. However, while Hofstede is arguably amongst the most influential pioneer writer on culture and employment relations; the author in his "*reply to Baskerville*" (Hofstede, 2003) countered that "there exist different paradigm" to cultural dynamic in social science, which is why different strategies can be applied in studying this phenomenon, hence Hofstede's concept remains critical to this end.

According to Hofstede (1980), Westerns countries' cultures are shaped around low power distance and individualism, which contrast high power distance and paternalism that characterise developing countries' cultures (Khatri, 2009; Rhee et al, 2014), including Nigeria (Musa and Hassan, 2014), which is currently under review.

As Hofstede (1980) defined, power distance (PD) describes the extent to which unequal power distribution is accepted and endorsed in a socio-corporate environment. Individuals on a low power distance are more likely to speak up and be listened to than those in a high power distance and paternalistic cultural environment. This is largely due to the issue of face concerns, whereby individual avoids appearing confrontational or challenging to the powers that may be or traditional order (Ting-Toomey, 1988). This cultural-environmental dynamic has a strong implication on how employee voice may be perceived, facilitated or delivered (Roa, 2013; Rhee et al, 2014), and thus can apply to Nigeria's employment relations that is steeped in high power distance index and paternalistic culture (Umar and Hassan, 2014). However, as this study observes, there is dearth of critical enquiry in Nigeria's organizational behavior literature (Bakre, 2004) – particularly with regards to the cultural factors

underpinning employee voice notion and the participatory efficacy of the strategies via which it is facilitated or delivered to employees.

Although a number of studies have approached employee voice discourse from the realm of union decline and the implications of HRM-based flexible work systems (Idiagbon-oke and Oke, 2011; Madu, 2013); these studies are either short of in-depth analysis on cultural-environmental implications or are conducted quantitatively. While some are qualitative studies; they are largely analysed via content and thematic analytical framework, which can be manipulative or constraining of critical information (Bakre, 2004), and therefore are not in tune with the current call for organisational research studies to be less prescriptive – by adopting critical approach (Legge, 1995) and sustained theoretical pluralism (Parker, 2005). Theoretical pluralism and critical theory stress on the need to explore others means of interrogating socio-corporate reality, via critiquing how and why rhetoric are constructed, legitimised and reproduced or apprehended, a hallmark of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which can help provide nuanced understanding of motives driving organisational behaviour (Wodak, 2000, 2011), including notion and efficacy of employee voice and delivery strategies.

It is to this end that CDA, which is a “*problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement*” (Waugh et al., 2015. P. 72), “*multimodal meaning making*” (Djonov and Zhao, 2014:4) and analytical language framework (Woodak, 2001) is employed (along side legitimacy-engagement theory) in the analysis of empirical data drawn from interview respondents. The ultimate goal is to uncover the cultural-environmental influence on employee voice notion across Nigeria’s petroleum sector and how this implicates the participatory dynamics of strategies for engaging and including employees in decision making processes, which would be useful to academics, business researchers and multinational corporations (MNCs) wishing to improve employer-employees’ relationship in their operation across Nigeria. The following sections capture employee voice notion relative to cultural-environmental affiliations, followed by Nigeria’s employment sectors, methodology, conceptual framework and the empirical sections, which is followed by theoretical discussions, implications, contributions and conclusion of study.

### **Defining employee voice notion: towards cultural-environmental affiliations, from global and Nigerian Context**

The historic origin, notion and definition of employee voice (EV) have remained a contested phenomenon. In his *'exit, voice and loyalty'*, Hirschman (1970) traced EV origins to African study of nationalised railways, although the concept has older antecedence, which describes the right of employees to be involved in processes of work-related decision making, via unions' collective bargaining (Marx, 1954). In recent time, the concept has generated much controversy following the emergence of HRM flexible work and representation systems (MacLeord and Clarke, 2009), which are largely anchored on 'fundamental paradox' and managerial prerogative of control, work efficiency and reward (Cathcart, 2014), a hallmark of organisational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), which this studies proposes can be linked to cultural dynamic of the environments where corporations operate (Hofstede, 1980).

While employee voice notion/discourse has matured over time, defining the concept has remained problematic (Wilkinson et al, 2014), which this current study proposes to address via exploring the cultural-affiliation that may compel the extension of its definition. Van Dyne and Lepine (1998. p. 10) define employee voice as rising beyond workplace *'cynicism'* to make positive *'recommendations'* that may alter but improve organisational processes of operation. Similarly, for Premeaux and Bedeian (2003. p. 1538), it is the act of airing individual's opinion openly without fear or intimidation, although *'constructively'* (Tangirala and Ramanijam, 2008a). As can be gleaned from the above, both definitions do not take account of the cultural-environmental dynamic that are linked to individuals' ability to voice out or remain silent (Hofstede, 1980). In attempting to fill this definition gap, employee voice (EV) notion is extended for the purpose of this study. Thus, *EV is the ability of individual employees to make positive or constructive recommendations or contributions that may alter but improve organisational processes of operation and relationship with employees, without fear or intimidation, which however - is largely dependent upon the cultural-environmental dynamic of the host country - which determine whether organisations would encourage or suppress such voice behaviour.*

The above definition is conceived on the predication that regardless of the channels of voice adopted by management, it is essentially the cultural dynamic of the country where corporations operates – that will determine whether organisations would encourage or suppress authentic voice behaviour (Hofstede, 1980; Ayca et al, 2000). In Hofstede and Bond

(1984), cultural dynamic was defined as the crystallisation of history in the way present generation think, feel and act, hence a multidimensional construction, which is explained along different continuums. In masculinity vs femininity culture; the former links societal value to success and competitiveness, while the later is preoccupied with equality and quality of life. Uncertainty avoidance (UA) culture is concerned with the extent to which threats of the unknown are circumvented (Hofstede and Bond, 1984). While the culture of individualism considers how individual relates to own families and relatives (e.g. I or we); collective culture places value on group concession and societal loyalty. In pragmatic and normative culture, the former focuses and addresses the historic challenges of a society for better future, via the employment of proactive measures including scientific research and development (Hofstede, 1980). The power distance culture (as mentioned earlier) interrogates the degree to which inequality in power distribution is accepted and endorsed (Hofstede and Bond, 1984), while paternalistic culture focuses on the extent to which subordinates accepts that their protection, guidance and decision making should be provided by their superiors, who also expects loyalty and deference from subordinates (Aycan, 2000).

As can be gleaned from the foregoing, while these cultural dynamics can influence organisational behaviour and stakeholder-employee outcomes differently; this study focuses largely on PD and partly on paternalistic cultures, which are central to respondents' construction of employee voice notion and the participatory dynamic of strategies via which it is facilitated (Rao, 2013). As noted in the introductory section, these cultural dynamics differ across nations (particularly between developing and developed countries) and can present different outcomes for individual voice prospect (Kragh, 2016). According to Hofstede (1993), Westerns countries' cultures (including US, Canada, UK and EU) are shaped around low power distance and individualism. Low power distance culture promises better voice prospect for individual as opposed high power distance (Khatri, 2009), which not only characterise African - Nigerian culture, but frowns at individual voice behaviour (Umar and Hassan, 2014). High power distance (and paternalistic) cultures suppresses individual voice, due to related face concerns, which may prevent them from speaking up (Ting-Toomey, 1988), to avoid appearing confrontational against the status quo or bringing their superiors to disrepute (Sanseau and Smith, 2012; Kragh, 2016). This cultural-environmental dynamic subtly explain why management establishment may frown at the rather too

confrontational trade unions and embrace the ‘so called’ cooperative alternative voice systems (NERs) (Cathcart, 2014) - citing strategic reasons (MacLeord and Clarke, 2009).

As Umar and Hassan (2014) concurred, Nigeria has a cultural-environmental dynamics of high power distance index and paternalism (subordinate-superior relationship) that not only characterizes her institutional and employment terrain; but also is consciously and unconsciously accepted and endorsed across board, which subtly is indicative of how actors in this terrain may conceive employee voice notion and the participatory dynamic of its delivery strategies. Indeed, the above cultural ethos (high PD and paternalism) were revalidated by the Nigeria’s senate that overwhelmingly stroke down equal opportunity and gender equality bill in May 2016, due to her cultural value (BBC, 2016), which contradicts orthodox concept of voice and speaking up constructively (MacLeord and Clarke, 2009). Thus, the above presents a strong implication for voice notion, its strategies of delivery and participatory outcomes for employees across Nigeria’s petroleum sector, which is presented next.

### **Brief introduction of Nigeria’s petroleum sector**

Assumed the most populous Black nation in the world with a population of over 177 million (National Bureau Statistics, 2016), the country has a number of operating industries, but the petroleum sector remains the mainstay of her economy (Erapi, 2011; Madu, 2013). Nigeria’s petroleum sector generates over 65% GDP, 95% foreign exchange earnings, and about 80% budgetary revenues of the country. Despite the huge revenue generated from this sector, majority of the population remained not only marginalised (Obi, 2010); but live in abject poverty (Emeseh and Songi, 2014). The origin of the Nigerian petroleum sector is traceable to the 1908 and 1924 oil and mineral laws that were introduced by the British government, which accede monopoly of the sector’s operation to the colonial states (Idemudia, 2010). Following independence, the successive military and civilian governments have effectively enacted policies (including Petroleum Decree 1969 and the Land Use Act 1978), which upheld oil exploration monopoly and its related revenues to the Nigerian government, in collaboration with her multinational partners (Shell, BP, Elf, Chevron and Texaco) (Obi, 2010), whilst the populace are marginalised (Idemudia, 2010).

While the sector has been plagued by well documented historic challenges (including socio-political conflicts, environmental degradation, scramble for power by the multinationals,

stakeholder's disengagement) (Emeseh and Songi, 2014); unemployment has reached a record high of about 10.40% compared to an overall figure of 5.8% in 2006 and currently 12.1% in March 2016 (Udo, 2016; National Bureau Statistics, 2016). Given the dominance of multinational corporations who favours HRM-based flexible work systems (Idiagbon-oke and Oke, 2011), the petroleum sector's unions (which are PENGASSE and NUPPENG) have significantly declined in both membership and relevance – recently (Erapi, 2011), which also explains the declining bargaining prospect for employees across the sector (Ariweriokuma, 2009). Consequently, the rising rate of unemployment (Udo, 2016) which is compounded by the rapid demise of unions places organisations across the sector in an imbalanced bargaining position against employees (Erapi, 2011; Olusoji et al, 2012), particularly in a culture of high power distance and paternalistic work environment, which poses significant implications for employee voice notion, its delivery strategies and employees' outcome in Nigeria. The conceptual framework follows next.

### **Conceptual framework**

This study reconceptualises employee voice efficacy by exploring the cultural-environmental factors that influences how the concept is understood and shaped from the developing countries' perspective, in order to dissect the participatory dynamics of its delivery strategies, for employees' outcome. To achieve this, attempt is made to link cultural theory of power distance to organisational legitimacy theory (which underpins organisational behaviour) and theory of stakeholder engagement (which explores employees' outcomes). Thus, by linking Hofstede's (1980) power distance culture to Suchman's (1995) organisational legitimacy and Albrechts' (2010) engagement theories (legitimacy-engagement theory), this study hopes to provide more nuanced understanding of employee voice notion, as perceived by respondents across case study organisations, which the multi-theoretical imperatives of critical discourse analysis (CDA) can facilitate, being a problem-oriented language tool (Wodak, 2000, 2001). CDA which interrogate rhetoric or text as wider socio-corporate practices (Fairclough, 1992, 2013) can be used to uncover "*how societal structure influences discourse structure*" and the intent behind the "*missing link*" in the construction of rhetoric (Wodak 2011b, p. 60).

This approach responds to Legge's (1995) call for critical turn and Parker's (2005) advocacy for theoretical pluralism to be employed in organisational behaviours inquiries,

which most studies have largely captured from the realm of organisational legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995). According to Suchman, the actions or inactions of corporate entities are driven by both institutional and managerial values, largely influenced (fuelled) by cultural factors (Hofstede, 1980) and legitimised via communicative mechanisms including manufacturing consent and persuasion, which CDA can uncover and interrogate (Fairclough, 1992, 2013). In Herman and Chomsky's (1988) description of the above, which relates to impression management strategies, managerial establishment often strive to sway stakeholder's perception of organisational behaviour in good light, by manufacturing (via rhetoric) caring, inclusive, responsible and ethical persona, to persuade stakeholder's endorsement of organisational behaviours. For instance, organisations have justified the avoidance of unions' collective voice and endorsement of (the widely proclaimed disengaging) non-unionised systems (NERs), citing gains of mutual benefits and cordial relationship (Cathcart, 2014; Wilkinson et al, 2014), which implicates Suchman's (1995) organisational legitimacy. The above also links Hofstede's (1980) cultural environmental dynamics, which may frown at disrespectful/confrontational unions and accommodate more cooperative NERs (MacLeord and Clarke, 2009).

In contrast, Albrecht's (2010) engagement theory explores the scope and degree to which stakeholders may perceive inclusion and involvement, which is connotative of employee voice (MacLeord and Clarke, 2009). Within the parameter of scope and level of engagement, this study develop "*under-engagement*" in employees' matters (interests, welfare) and "*over-engagement*" in management-initiated extra roles, including weekend and take home task (Idiagbon-Oke and Oke, 2011), which undermines employees voice (and work-life balance) (Olusoji et al, 2012). As noted, employee may not be able to question managerial "under-engagement" or over-"engagement" in a high power distance (Hofstede, 1980) and paternalistic culture (Aycaan et al, 2000), due to numerous face concerns and power relationship (Ting-Toomey, 1988), hence the notion of employee voice, strategies of delivery and employees' outcome is dependent upon host countries', which influences how organizations behaviors towards stakeholders - employees (Roa, 2013; Rhee et al, 2014). Thus, using the foregoing theoretical wavelength, this study interrogates employee voice in Nigeria's petroleum sector via qualitative methodology, which is presented shortly.

## **Methodology**

This methodological section presents the sample population, method of research and analysis of data drawn from interviews with managers and employees across case study organisations. Relying on interpretivism and social constructionism in making sense of socio-corporate reality (Silverman, 2013), this study utilised purposive sampling of 4 selected firms from the Nigeria's petroleum industry (operating for more than four years), which affords the researchers in-depth insight regarding the nature of relationship that has existed between management and employees in the sectors over the years. Also, the above allows exploratory researchers to not only "*ask questions*" and "*assess phenomenon in a new light*" (Robson, 2002:59); but control some of the variables that may stem from such enquiry (Saunders et al, 2009; Creswell, 2013), which (in this case) interrogates respondents' notion of employee voice and the participatory dynamics of its delivery strategies.

As opposed a positivist research approach which follows scientific procedure of deductive methodology, this study adopts inductive mechanisms which relies of interpretivist methodology to construct socio-corporate reality (Saunders et al, 2009; Creswell, 2013), whereby social actors influence how this reality is constructed and interpreted differently (Silverman, 2013). This process contrast positivist research approach (which collect data, to test existing theory or hypothesis objectively), by constructing reality through subjective interrogation of the complex social-corporate phenomenon (Saunders et al, 2009). Thus, this study interrogates the cultural dynamic driving employee voice notion in Nigerian context and the participatory dynamics of its delivery strategies, as perceived by 25 participants interviewed across case study organisations.

As a consequence, rich data drawn from the above were discursively analysed qualitatively using critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is a problem-oriented language tool, for understanding language function, meaning and the underlying intent behind their construction (Wodak, 2000, 2001). The centrality of CDA is its ability to interrogate rhetoric or text as wider socio-corporate practices, via the use of numerous interpretive and analytical properties, which helps to uncover how social-corporate structure and discourse is framed (Wodak, 2000, 2001; Leeuwen, 2007; Fairclough, 2014). This can be employed to normalise organisational behaviours and actions (Suchman, 1995) and is usually influenced by cultural dynamics (Hofsted, 1980) and calibrated via communicative strategies of manufacturing consent and persuasion (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). As Wodak (2000) explained, organisation manufacture consent of positive persona via communicative strategies, which

must not be confused with genuine effort at facilitating stakeholder's decisional input, but aimed at achieving their endorsement and organisational legitimacy (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), which CDA can identify and apprehend (Fairclough, 2014; Wodak, 2001; Leeuwen, 2007).

While CDA functions along different continuum, the sub-section preferred and adopted in this study is the discourse historical analysis (DHA), which utilise three key dimensions namely; themes of discourse, strategies of discourse and linguistic means of realising discourse themes (Wodak, 2000, 2001), although just the first two dimensions would be applied due to the limited space allowed for this study. Thus, via the first dimension, Cillia et al's (1999: 158) "*matrices of topic*" and Wodak's (2000) treatise of recurring themes was employed to discursively identify and interrogate recurring themes of salient that are drawn from the empirical data set. Additionally, the second dimension was employed via inter-discursive (Wodak, 2000, 2001) and inter-textual (Fairclough, 2013) strategies of discourse, which are requisite in teasing out how respondents may perceive employee voice notion and outcomes, in an employment terrain that is steeped in high power distance index and paternalistic culture. The following section present case study samples and demography.

### **Demography of petroleum sector**

The sample materials for the petroleum sector involved a total of 25 participants across 4 oil companies in Nigeria, of which 9 are managers and 16 employees. While these 15 males and 10 females who made up the total sample have worked with the firm for the minimum of 4 years; 10 participants were selected from Lagos branches, 8 from Abuja branches and 7 from Porthacourt (PH) branches. Lagos is the commercial centre and Western region of the country, Abuja is the capital territory and Northern region, while PH is the heart beat of the Eastern region potentially. These areas also have the highest density of population and offices for these companies (Falola & Heaton, 2008), which is crucial for data saturation (Creswell, 2013). Using pseudonyms, respondents' details were coded for ethics and confidentiality reasons. Although ASSUBIFFI and NUPENG are the sector's unions, respondents admitted that employers are currently adopting non-unionised employee representatives (NERs) platforms. Generally, the foregoing methodological approach denotes Silverman's (2013)

inclusive mechanism in sample framing, which can lend more credence to research outcomes.

See table 1 below for more details on demography

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Case Study's Sample**

Serial No	Code	Roles	Sex	Mode of Rep	Educational Level	Office Branch	Experience
<b>Oil Company 1</b>							
1	OL11	Middle Line Manager	M	NERs	MSc	Lagos	5 Yrs
2	OL 12	Human Resource Manager	F	NERs	MBA	Abuja	7 Yrs
3	OL 13	Employee	M	NERs	MSc	Lagos	6 Yrs
4	OL 14	Employee	F	NERs	HND	PH	N/A
5	OL 15	Employee	M	NERs	BSc	Lagos	N/A
6	OL 16	Employee	M	NERs	BSc	PH	6 Yrs
<b>Oil Company 2</b>							
7	OL 21	Senior Manager	F	NERs	MSc	Abuja	8 Yrs
8	OL 22	Brand Manager	M	NERs	MBA	PH	7 Yrs
9	OL 23	Employee	M	NERs	Msc	Abuja	5 Yrs
10	OL 24	Employee	F	NERs	BSc	Lagos	7 Yrs
11	OL 25	Employee	M	NERs	BSc	PH	8 Yrs
12	OL 26	Employee	F	NERs	MSc	Abuja	6 Yrs
<b>Oil Company 3</b>							
13	OL 31	Senior Executive Manager	M	NERs	MBA	Lagos	7 Yrs
14	OL 32	Human Resource Manager	M	NERs	BSc	PH	8 Yrs
15	OL 33	Employee	F	NERs	MSc	Lagos	5 Yrs
16	OL 34	Employee	M	NERs	MSc	Lagos	5 Yrs
17	OL 35	Employee	F	NERs	BSc	PH	4 Yrs
<b>Oil Company 4</b>							
18	OL 41	Marketing Manager	F	NERs	MSc	Lagos	7 Yrs
19	OL 42	Middle Line Manager	M	NERs	MSc	Abuja	6 Yrs
20	OL 43	Human Resource Manager	M	NERs	MBA	PH	8 Yrs
21	OL 44	Employee	F	NERs	BSc	Lagos	6 Yrs
22	OL 45	Employee	F	NERs	HND	Abuja	5 Yrs
23	OL 46	Employee	M	NERs	BSc	Abuja	4 Yrs
24	OL 47	Employee	M	NERs	BSc	Lagos	4 Yrs
25	OL 48	Employee	M	NERs	HND	Abuja	6 Yrs
<b>Total: 25</b>		<b>Manager - 9 Employees - 16</b>	<b>Male - 15 Female - 10</b>			<b>L-10 A- 8 PH-7</b>	<b>Minimum: 4 Years</b>
<b>Key Guides:</b>							
Respondents have educational qualifications ranging from HND, BSc, MSc and MBA							

NERs: Non-unionised employee representations  
 OL 11 – OL 16 = Respondents from Oil Company 1  
 OL 21 – OL 26= Respondents from Oil Company 2  
 OL 31 – OL 35= Respondents from Oil Company 3  
 OL 41 – OL 47= Respondents from Oil Company 4

Source: The Researchers (2017)

The following section presents framework informing data themes and strategies of discourse.

### Framework informing themes and strategies of discourse

Informed by cultural theories of power distance (PD) and paternalism, legitimacy-engagement theory and critical discourse analysis (which forms the conceptual framework), themes of salient and strategies of discourse were constructed and interrogated based on the combined synthesising of field literature, researchers' background knowledge on employee voice, and the rigorous interrogations of participants' responses. A tabulated framework of themes and strategies of discourse below will guide readers through this empirical section

**Table 2**

Framework for Themes & Discursive strategies of Employee Voice Notion

<i>Themes of Salient: Employee Voice Notion</i>						
Managerial perspective				Employees' Perspective		
Privilege	Mutuality	Conditionality	Commitment (Efficiency & High Productivity)	Quality Family Time	Time for Leisure, and Religious Devotion	Quality Health Condition
↔						
<i>Strategies of Discourse</i>						
Cultural theory of Power Distance and Paternalism, Legitimacy theory → Engagement theory (Legitimacy-Engagement Theory)						
<i>(Sub)Strategies of Discourse</i>						
<b>Legitimacy Strategy</b>	Persuasion	Manufacturing consent	<b>Strategy of Engagement</b>	Under- Engagement	Excessive engagement	

Source: Researchers (2017)

***Managerial notion of employee voice in Nigeria's petroleum industry***

From managerial perspective, employee voice is captured as **privilege** (or olive branch) extended to employees to be involved in organisational discourse. It also includes **mutuality**, which captures how management establishment depicts employee voice as a mutual construct, which serves the interests of all parties. However, employee voice is also captured as a phenomenon that is attached with specific conditions (**conditionality**) which are cultural-environmental oriented. These conditions includes that employees must be respectful, cooperative and committed (**commitment**) to organisational goals, which includes **efficiency** and **high productivity**, in order to get rewarded, which (in management's view) may translate to employee voice being sorted. Reflecting the shared opinion amongst managers, one responded noted that employee voice:

depends on what it is used for; voice I believe is a means of communication between management and employees, but it is not in isolation of company's policy (OL12 )

While the above indicates that employee voice construct is tendentious, some managers opined it is a **privilege** and a:

medium for improving employer-employee relationship, which is a big privilege for employees' involvement and satisfaction (OL21)

process for extending olive branch to employees, to come out and be part of the work process, which reflect our collective culture (OL11)

Employee voice was also captured from the context of **mutuality**. Accordingly:

Employee voice is a concept of mutual interests which works for both employers and employees. Management provides the voice channels and employees respect the rules of the platforms (OL22).

it promotes creativity in the thought process of individuals - in a peaceful work environment, so that employees and business owners can achieve their rewards and satisfactions (OL31).

There is an attempt here to manufacture consent of caring and inclusive organisation (Herman and Chomsky, 1998), in the ways employee voice notion is constructed, which Suchman (1995) described as organisational legitimacy strategy for soliciting stakeholder's endorsement of organisational behaviour. Also, there appears to exist some degree of conditions (**conditionality**) attached to it, as noted in the extracts below:

voice is often misappropriated and abused in this part of the world. So, voice must be checked to be in alignment with organisational culture and goals (OL32),

voice is a dialogue between company and employees, but our people are often over the top and needs to be controlled (OL41).

As a hierarchical organisation, we also respect and take orders from our ogas (superiors), before embarking on any initiative, to avoid backlash (OL42)

Some employees tend to overstep laid out boundaries to prove something, which may encourage others to create disorderliness (OL43).

Employee voice means understanding and obeying the rules of the organisation first, complain later at the right time and place, to the right person (OL11)

As can be gleaned from the foregoing, employee voice is associated with a lot of conditions; employee must be cooperative and respectful, they must also commit to organisational goals, which include **efficiency** and **high productivity**.

we discuss work efficiency and effectiveness, which can help deliver high productivity that can translate to increase in wages and rewards for employees (OL21).

There needs to be orderliness and peace for there to be quality performance, high production and rewards, which is the voice employees actually care about (OL12).

Managers understood employee voice to mean commitment to work efficiency and high productivity that will bring more profit to company and rewards to employees, for all party to be satisfied. However, they admitted that the achievement of the above is dependent on the cooperative/peaceful nature of the strategies or channels via which employees are encouraged to voice out. The following quotations below typify some of the shared views of respondents;

We have PENGASSAN & NUPENG- but they are not for contracted workers, we use alternative voice programmes, such as village meeting (OL22)

The company adopts breakfast with CEO, staff forum and a host of other effective systems of engagement (OL 32)

our voice strategies are Joint Consultation Council and Hr Office & Team Brief forum, but no unions (OL31)

most oil firms avoid union, they are trouble makers, loud mouthed and often confrontational (OL43)

From the above extracts, managements have resorted to the adoption of a range of alternative voice systems (NERs), notably the dominant village meeting, which they view will facilitates more peaceful work environment, requisite for efficiency, high productivity and rewards. While the above is consistent with Erapi's (2011) evidence of unions' decline, which respondents above attributed to their confrontational and disrespectful nature; essentially, some elements of Herman and Chomsky's (1998) theory of manufacturing consent and persuasion strategy were also replete in the extracts, which is aimed at justifying the choice of NERs strategies and the persuasion of employees to endorse them. The choice of NERs may not equate to a motive of power/decision sharing intention (MacLeord and Clarke, 2009; Cathcart, 2014), but a drive towards achieving organisational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995; Leeuwen, 2007), which Hofstede (1980) linked with cultural dynamic. This notion of voice denotes of high power distance and paternalistic cultures (Aycaan et al, 2000), which promotes subordinate-superior relationship and thus accomodates the more cooperative NERs and frowns at the big mouthed, disrespectful and confrontational unions. Turning to employees' definition of voice will provide more insight into the phenomenon.

### ***Employees' notion of employee voice in Nigeria's petroleum industry***

The overall response from employees painted an interesting picture of employee voice notion that is largely tied around cultural dynamics of high power distance (Hofstede, 1980) and paternalism (Aycaan et al, 2000). Given this apparent and all-encompassing cultural background, which is compounded by the rising NERs and unemployment; themes realised include silence, voice marginalisation and the desire to be able to express their need for '*quality family time*', '*time for leisure and religious devotion*' and '*quality health condition*'. To majority of employees;

Voice is the ability of individual to express their mind and concerns to the Ogas (management) without fear or intimidation, however, our traditions forbids a child to say everything he or she sees (OL13)

it means silence, which is often advised unless you were guided to comment or if you are a union member, which we are not unfortunately (OL14)

The current economic situation necessitates salary increase, but confronting your boss for salary increase would be suicidal (OL23).

It's hard to express your mind in the village meeting or breakfast with the CEO, you are on your own, because they lack collective attributes (OL24)

As majority of employees expressed, they are represented via NERs platforms only, which makes it harder voicing out. This mood is well reflected across board, as the below extracts suggest:

Voice in this country is a taboo; your father will flog you at home for challenging your elders or superiors –regardless of your motives (OL33).

Voice is alien here; it is not natural for employees to demand liberty of expression from the Ogas (OL34).

you can easily get fired for voicing out carelessly and without this work –I cannot survive for now (OL44).

Thus, employee voice in this terrain is not about (constructively or unconstructively) challenging the status quo or demanding to be included in decision making process, but more about making the best of what is obtainable within the remit of the cultural environment. According to OL15, “*where the desirable is not available, the available becomes the desirable. We may not have a voice on key decisions here, but ‘quality family time’ is a core part of our culture*”. Most employees connote voice with the ability to be able to manage and stabilize their family including being physically present, to help bring up the children and to attend families’ and friends’ events, which reflect Nigeria’s cultural value of family-hood (Ahiauzu, 1986; Ajala, 2013). Extracts below indicates:

voice is when my work is not depriving me of having quality time with my family’ and that is too much to ask here (OL45).

There is no voice when you leave home around 5:30am - when the children are still asleep and come back between 8pm and 10pm when they have gone to bed (OL46).

Traditionally, employees are within their right to have quality time with their families, however, the current work trend undermines this effort. Furthermore, majority of participants express voice as the ability to have *time for leisure and religious devotion*, which Olusoji et al (2012) noted in their treatise of work-life balance that includes attending social-community events without interference from work over-task. Also, being a highly religious

country, (Ajala, 2013), employees feel satisfied if their job permits them to worship God as often as required by their faith. As indicated in some extracts:

The current 24-7 working trend does undermine people's ability to socialise, we don't have life in this country o! (OL15)

its appalling, work, work and work, no allowance to worship God nowadays, its is immoral and shameful (OL25)

Apart from the need to balance work, leisure and worshipping God, respondents found health care concerns for themselves and their families as critical to employees' perception of satisfaction, as the state does not provide this. Voice to some respondents therefore is:

when the work conditions and work environment are not posing health risk' to employees, which is not the case here – i'm afraid! (OL35).

I want to be able to provide healthcare for my children and my aging mother, it is hard with the nature of this job, it's a do or die afire (OL48)

While respondents understood voice concept as explained in the extant literature (MacLeord and Clarke, 2009); managerial notion of employee voice remains sharply at odd with employees', although both perspectives rely largely on Nigeria's cultural-environmental dynamic of high power distance (Hofstede, 1980) and paternalism (Aykan et al, 2000). Thus, given the above cultural background, themes of mutuality and privilege, were discursively drawn, to reflect managerial notion of voice, which was also attached with conditions of respects, cooperation and commitment to efficiency and high productivity, for rewards. For employees however, voice is not about challenging the status quo or demanding inclusivity in decision processes, but the desire to be able to express their need for '*quality family time*', '*time for leisure and religious devotion*' and '*quality health condition*', particularly on the hills of rising NERs, unemployment and economic hardship in the country.

The foregoing informed the extension of employee voice (EV) definition proffered in this study, which not only acknowledges voice concept as defined in the literature, but also highlight its dependence upon the cultural-environmental dynamic of the host country, which determines whether organisations would encourage or suppress such voice behaviour. In this case, voice is suppressed due to Nigeria's culture of high power distance and paternalism.

### **Theoretical discussions, implications and conclusion of study**

This study responds to the issue of using overly prescriptive (Legge, 1995) and non critical approach (Parker, 2005) in organisational behaviour studies, through the employment critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is a precursor to critical theory and a “*problem-oriented*” language tool (Waugh et al, 2005: 72), for understanding language use and the intent underpinning why and how it is constructed (Wodak, 2000). Being a “*multimodal meaning making*” language tool (Djonov and Zhao, 2014: 4), CDA is employed in this study to reconceptualise employee voice notion, via linking cultural-environmental factors (particularly power distance Hofstede, 1980) and paternalistic (Aycañ et al, 2000) dynamic to organisational behaviours and legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), which influences how organisations interpret and facilitates stakeholder’s (employees’) voice and engagement (Albrecht, 2010). Thus, this study links cultural theories (power distance (PD) and paternalism), to (the combined) organisational legitimacy theory and engagement theory (legitimacy-engagement theory), to provide in-depth analysis of employee voice notion and its participatory dynamic, as perceived by respondents across case study organisations, using CDA framework.

As noted in the methodology section, the CDA sub-section utilised in this study is the discourse historical analysis (DHA), which adopts three key dimensions: themes of discourse, strategies of discourse and the linguistic means of arriving at discursive themes (Wodak, 2000) (which however was not used in this study due to space limitation). Relying on Cillia et al, 1999: 158) “*matrix of topics*” and Wodak’s (2000) discursive strategies, this empirical study discursively identified themes of privilege, mutuality, conditionality, commitment, efficiency and high productivity from managerial perspectives, against the themes of quality family time, time for leisure and religious devotion and quality health condition from employees perspective, which defines voice notion from Nigerian context. The managerial notion of voice is noted to be influenced by the culture of high power distance and paternalism (acceptance and endorsement of unequal power distribution between employees and their superiors), which implicates the strategies via which employee voice is facilitated, such as the overriding village meeting platforms adopted across the case study organisations - that largely suppresses voice input.

As against the traditional (trouble making and confrontational) unions, the village meeting (has the same characteristic as other range of representation platforms adopted across board

and) is a non-unionised employee representations (NERs), which is moderate, cooperative and non-confrontational, and thus aligns with Nigeria's culture of high PD and paternalism, hence their (NERs) preponderant adoption by employers in this terrain. In Nigeria, villagers are represented by their leading chieftains in the village meetings before the traditional king, to deliberate on societal issues (Ahiauzu, 1986). Thus, the term 'village' is tendentiously adopted as employees' representative platform in the Nigeria's employment sectors, to show symbol of collectivism, in order to sway stakeholder/employees' perception and subsequent endorsement of the NERs platform (village meeting). The implication however is, like the real village meeting where people are less likely to challenge the king, the village meeting, breakfast with the CEO and others would not permit employees to challenge the status quo. Drawing from the above, 'ogas' or 'my oga' is a recurring themes in this study's empirical data, which also implicates voice marginalisation.

My 'oga' in Nigeria simply means my senior boss, also used interchangeably with 'daddy' or 'mummy' to not only show respect to superiors; but to depict them as miniGods, infallible or beyond correction (Musa and Hassan, 2014), hence the development and application of 'my oga at the top syndrome' (MOTS) in this study. MOTS gained international prominence in 2013 when a Nigerian TV presenter and interviewer demanded the Nigeria's Chief Security officer to clarify issues surrounding the many confusing websites forwarded for job application. To public dismay, the Officer refused to comment and maintained that 'my ogas' (his bosses) must give him permission before doing so (Chukwu, 2013). Indeed, the issue with MOTS is that it discourages individual from taking personal initiative and responsibility as well as suppresses efforts at fairness and accountability. As complemented in one extract:

we .. take orders from our top ogas, our culture demand we respect elders, superiors an also the will of the owners of the job (OL42 )

In playing down the non-participatory nature of employee voice – in order to justify the notion and strategies via which employee voice is delivered; managers employed communicative strategies of manufacturing consent and persuasion, which describe managerial desire to sway stakeholder/employees perception of organisational norms and actions as well as influence their legitimisation (Herman and Chomsky, 1998). According to OL12, *"If you go to Rome, you behave like Romans, you don't try to change their custome,*

*just because you feel so*". Importantly, the above implicates institutional (normative) and strategic (managerial) legitimacy, where the former seeks to 'construct a certain "corporate" persona' (from the perspectives of the wider stakeholder (community, media) as meeting ethical and legitimacy criteria (Leeuwen, 2007). The later focuses on swaying the attention of (internal stakeholder) employees from the harsh reality of organisational behaviors (Suchman, 1995), such as managerial notion of voice and delivery strategies – that are rather exclusive.

Herman and Chomsky (1998) describes this as a rationalisation strategy for agenda setting, to justify corporate actions and inactions, hence organisational legitimacy strategy (Suchman, 1995), which in this case aligns with the adoption of NERs platforms including the rhetorical warnings against employees who may "*overstep laid out boundaries to prove something*" (OL43). Organisational legitimacy in this context also describes managerial notion of employee voice and engagement, whereby employees are forced to endorse take home and weekend task, for high productivity and rewards. As Herman and Chomsky (1998) explained, stakeholder such as employees are not inclined to challenge organisational legitimacy, particularly in a high power distance and paternalistic cultures, which validates it (Hofstede, 2003). However, based on Albrecht's (2010) engagement framework, which considers the degree, level and scope to which stakeholders can perceive the authenticity of voice and engagement; this study develop 'over-engagement' in extra work-related task initiated by management and 'under-engagement' in matters concerning employees' interests and welfare.

This does not balance with what employees may consider voice, and given Nigeria's cultural-environmental dynamic of high power distance and paternalism, employees are not well placed to challenge this phenomenon. Instead, they are only happy to be able to have some degree of quality family time, time for leisure and religious devotion and quality health conditions, which is also difficult, due to the dynamic of this work environment, hence employee voice notion points towards marginalisation and silence across Nigeria's petroleum sector. While it is possibly too late to reverse the current voice strategies or channels via which employees are represented; the key implication of this study is that employers and employees can benefit from an improved relationship in a more participatory work environment, if management can look beyond the cultural-environmental dynamics that

influences how voice is perceived and facilitated. This will enable management to consider what really matters to employees', their satisfaction, commitment and organisational sustainability, which depends on the employees. In conclusion, this study has captured the contrasting notion of employee voice marginalisation from managerial and employees' perspective, which are largely influenced by the cultural dynamic of high power distance and paternalism that endorses subordinate-superior relationship and well as discourages inclusivity, accountability and transparency.

### **Contributions**

This study has made some contributions to the literature. This includes in theory and method adopted in this current employee voice study, from the context of developing world - Nigeria's employment relations. As opposed the dominant quantitative and content analytical frameworks adopted in Nigeria's organisational behaviour studies (Madu, 2013), which are less critical in approach (Bakre, 2004); this study responds to Legge's (1995) call for research to adopt critical turn and theoretical pluralism (Parker, 2005), by employing CDA (Wodak, 2000, 2001), to interrogate employee voice notion and its participatory efficacy in Nigeria, via face-to-face semi-structured interview. Secondly, being a critical theory, which facilitates multi-theoretical affiliation, the use of CDA has enabled theoretical extension in this study, through linking cultural theory of power distance to organisational legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995) and stakeholder engagement theory (Albrecht, 2010), which formed legitimacy-engagement theory and enabled the holistic interrogation of organisational behaviour and stakeholder's outcomes from management and employees perspectives.

Thirdly, CDA is an interdisciplinary study, which has a language, social science and management background and thus can trigger interest in employee voice research from interdisciplinary realm. Fourthly, this study has made empirical contribution to employee voice literature in Nigerian by bringing the attention of the surging non-unionised employee representation (NERs) to the forefront, which hitherto has remained largely under-engaged. Finally, a practical contribution has been achieved in this study, which is considered of immense value to academics, managers, policy makers and employment relations practitioners, particularly, in the context of the cultural-environmental influence on how employee voice is perceived and delivered, which has its own implication on employees' outcomes and commitment.

### **Limitations/ Further research**

Findings here are not being generalised, establishing a trend in employee voice notion in Nigeria requires a lengthier timeframe and expanded sample size, which may necessitate a triangulation of quantitative research approach as well. Furthermore, the CDA framework has come under criticisms as an ideological concept of ‘*self-marketing*’ (Chilton, 2005. P. 21), which strives on ‘*blame game*’ (Van Dijk, 2009a. p. 4) and ‘*does not take context, in a large sense, into account*’ (Breeze, 2011. P. 514). In particular, this can manifest when infused with theories of legitimacy and engagement in attempting to make sense of the phenomenon being investigated, which may be viewed to defy coherency against benchmark upon which discourse can be effectively explored linguistically (Van Dijk, 2009a). However, attempt has been made to reduce this limitation via relying on the heuristic of voice trend in Nigeria’s history of employment relations, to potentially locate problematic areas in data analysis and interpretation of findings.

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