Unveiling the Shocks of Economic Reforms on Nigeria Construction Labor Market.

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Abstract

Nigeria's economy depends heavily on the construction sector, but little is known about how recent economic reforms such as the elimination of fuel subsidies, the unification of currency rates, and tax restructuring directly affect the dynamics of the labor market in this sector. To close this gap, the study used a validated questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.936) to poll 217 professionals in the construction industry to record changes brought about by reform. Strong agreement (mean = 4.01–4.23) was found in descriptive data regarding acute skilled worker shortages, diminishing labor demand, and rising operating costs. Additionally, substantial connections between reforms and labor market outcomes were validated by Pearson correlations ($r = 0.705–0.790$, $p < 0.01$). Significantly, lower opinions about changes in the unorganized sector (mean = 2.52) point to structural mediators and regional differences that go beyond reform initiatives. Although reforms are intended to increase macroeconomic efficiency, the study finds that they unintentionally jeopardize labor stability in the construction industry, endangering sectoral resilience and project delivery. By offering quantitative data from an emerging market setting, it theoretically enhances labor economics. It provides useful information for policymakers, suggesting targeted tax rebates (15–20%) to encourage the use of local materials, inflation-indexed salary adjustments, and the reinvestment of 10% of subsidy savings into the annual training of 50,000 craftsmen. This research offers a new, evidence-based basis for developing solutions that protect workers and promote sustainable construction growth by connecting macroeconomic reforms to sector-specific labor outcomes.

Keywords

Economic reforms, Exchange rate, Fuel subsidy, Labour market, Tax restructuring.

1. Introduction

In developing nations like Nigeria, the construction sector is a key engine of economic growth, making significant contributions to the creation of jobs, the expansion of infrastructure, and the increase of the gross domestic product (GDP) (Oni et al., 2024a; Sanusi, 2024). Nigeria has undertaken a number of significant economic reforms in recent years to improve macroeconomic stability, reduce fiscal imbalances, and encourage private sector involvement. In May 2023, fuel subsidies will be eliminated; in June 2023, currency rates will be unified; and in June 2025, complete tax restructuring legislation will be enacted (Reuters, 2024a, 2025; World Bank, 2025). These policies have affected important industries, including construction, by increasing input costs, increasing inflationary pressures, and changing market dynamics, despite their stated goal of reducing inefficiencies and rerouting resources toward profitable investments (Conifer Konstruktion, 2024; The Nation, 2024).

With over 80% of the workforce being local craftsmen and semi-skilled laborers, Nigeria's construction labor market is characterized by a largely informal structure (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2012; Dantong & Dantong, 2025). These employees are essential to the completion of projects, but they face ongoing difficulties such as inadequate vocational training, poor working conditions, and restricted access to social safety nets (Oni et al., 2024b). These vulnerabilities have been made worse by the aforementioned economic reforms: the elimination of subsidies has led

to a spike in fuel and transportation , which has caused material costs to increase by as much as 50% in some areas (Sanusi, 2024); currency devaluation has made imported tools and safety equipment more expensive; and tax reforms, which were intended to increase revenue, have inadvertently put small-scale contractors under more strain by increasing compliance requirements (Reuters, 2025). To lessen the negative consequences of these reforms on low-income households, the Nigerian government has responded by implementing palliative interventions, such as targeted cash transfer programs (Reuters, 2024b). However, the effectiveness of these policies in supporting the construction labor market is still debatable because they frequently ignore industry-specific requirements such as occupational health protections and skill development (World Bank, 2007; Oni et al., 2024c). Furthermore, there is a clear mismatch between labor supply and demand, especially in skilled trades, as a result of the shift toward a market-driven, private sector-centric development model that has not been accompanied by comparable labor market regulations (Dantong & Dantong, 2025; Sanusi, 2024).

With a focus on employment trajectories, salary dynamics, skill acquisition paths, and occupational circumstances, this study aims to objectively investigate the effects of Nigeria's economic changes on the labor market for construction. The research attempts to shed light on the sector's complex issues and untapped potential by using quantitative data from stakeholder surveys. In the end, the results will guide evidence-based policy suggestions to strengthen the construction workforce's productivity and resilience in the face of shifting economic conditions.

2. Literature review

The consequences of economic changes on Nigeria's construction industry have been thoroughly studied in the past, which lays the groundwork for comprehending their complex labor market ramifications. According to Oni et al. (2024a), economic pressures combined with a lack of trained workers severely impair project efficiency, increasing dependency on outside knowledge and driving up expenses. Similarly, Sanusi (2024) contends that industry performance has been disturbed by measures including the removal of fuel subsidies and currency depreciation, with a considerable reduction in labor demand as a result of rising material prices. The ongoing skill shortages are further highlighted by Dantong and Dantong (2025), who point out that insufficient training programs restrict the pool of qualified workers, a disparity that has been made worse by post-reform financial limitations. According to Elegbede and Akinbile (2024), who look at professional perspectives, economic volatility is a major obstacle to labor development, with training investments declining as inflation rises. Ozigbo et al. (2025) adds to by outlining the difficulties in integrating craftsmen and implying that the local workforce's adjustment to cost rises brought about by reform is still uneven. The Nation (2024) and Conifer Konstruktion (2024) describe how local regulatory changes and worldwide economic trends have increased operating expenses, leading the sector to shift toward locally produced resources, albeit with little success because of quality issues. Although Reuters (2025a) projects a small 3.1% growth in 2025, it emphasizes how susceptible the labor market is to these changes in the economy.

The ongoing lack of competent workers is a particularly serious issue made worse by these reforms, as it jeopardizes project schedules, quality, and productivity (Oni et al., 2024a; Ozigbo et al., 2025). An appropriately qualified workforce can reduce construction overruns by up to 20%, according to research, but economic pressures have reduced funding for skill development initiatives, which has resulted in a continued reliance on foreign expertise and underemployment in the local area (Dantong & Dantong, 2025; Elegbede and Akinbile, 2024). As inflation erodes real incomes and creates disparities, wage structures have also been upended. While some urban professionals negotiate adjustments to offset rising living costs, rural artisans frequently face cuts or stagnation, which fueled labor unrest as evidenced by the nationwide general strike of 2024, where unions demanded fair compensation (Reuters, 2024b; Sanusi, 2024). Essentially, although crucial for long-term stability, Nigeria's economic reforms have caused disruptions in the construction labor market, ranging from wage disparities and suboptimal circumstances to employment volatility and skill shortages (Oni et al., 2024a; Sanusi, 2024). The topic of wage dynamics has also received a lot of attention; according to Sanusi (2024) and Reuters (2024b), the nationwide strike in 2024 was proof of labor dissatisfaction caused by salary discrepancies and declining purchasing power. According to World Bank (2007, 2025) research, delayed tax implementations and cash distribution programs are intended to alleviate problems, but their effects on construction workers are merely incidental and lack sector-specific customization. Together, these studies the need for focused initiatives to address the resilience of the labor market; this study aims to close this gap by empirically analyzing employment trends, skill development, and working conditions.

2.

2. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research approach to examine how economic reforms affect the labor market in Nigeria's construction industry. This method works well for gathering quantifiable information and identifying statistical correlations between important factors like reform laws and the construction labor market (Oni et al., 2024b). Because they actively participate in the operational facets of construction management and are most likely to be impacted by macroeconomic changes, the study focuses on construction professionals, such as engineers, architects, project managers, site supervisors, and quantity surveyors. Respondents were chosen using a purposive sampling technique in accordance with their experience and participation in building projects that have been impacted by economic reforms. guarantees that the information acquired represents well-informed viewpoints and real-world experience. The main tool for gathering data was a structured questionnaire. Demographic information and opinions regarding the effects of these reforms made up its two main sections. A 5-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" was used to frame the questionnaire's items. The questions were taken from the body of existing literature and modified accordingly.

The questionnaire was examined by academic researchers and experts with knowledge of construction labor and economic policy to guarantee content validity. To find any ambiguities or inconsistencies in the instrument, a pilot study with 15 participants was also carried out. The required modifications were made to improve clarity considering the pilot's findings. Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the instrument's reliability; an internal consistency threshold of 0.7 was deemed acceptable. To increase response rates, data was gathered both electronically and in person. To enable sufficient statistical analysis, a total of 200 to 250 responses were sought. After two months, 217 responses in all were collected. Both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed on the gathered data. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and percentages were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, including Pearson's correlation, were used to explore the relationships between economic reforms and the construction labor market. The statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Strict adherence to ethical standards was maintained during the entire data collection and analysis process. All participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time, and participation was completely voluntary. All respondents gave their informed consent, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Neither the analysis nor the results reporting contained any personal identifiers. In Nigeria's high-risk construction environment, this methodological approach offers a systematic way to assess how changes in macroeconomic policy affect the construction labor market. The study seeks to offer evidence-based insights that can support industry-level and policy-level improvements in the construction labor market by utilizing the expertise of experts and applying rigorous statistical analysis.

4. Results

4. 1 Results (Respondents Background)

As shown in figure 1, 99.5% of the respondents possess a diploma qualification and above, while more than 60% have a bachelor's degree and above, an indication that the respondents are academically qualified to fill out the question correctly, and this increases confidence in their responses.

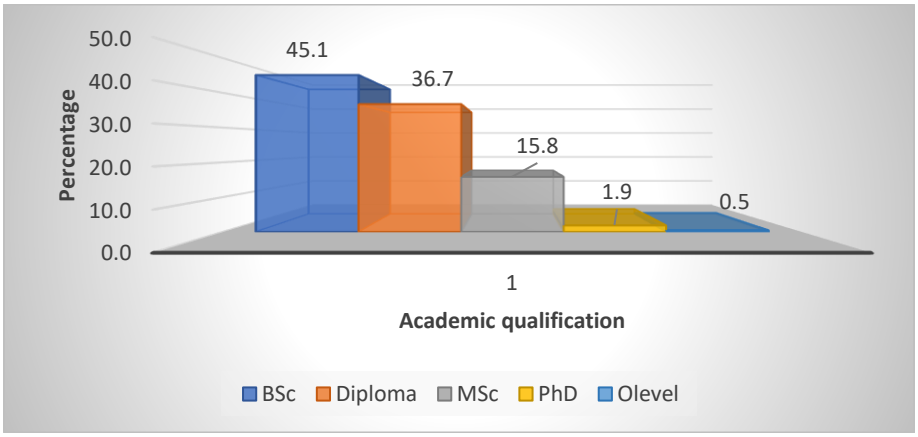

Fig. 1. Academic qualification

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Figure 2 shows that the respondents appear to reflect different roles within the organization, particularly key executives who are familiar with economic reforms and sustainable construction; this further increases the confidence that the responses are representative of different key designations in the construction industry.

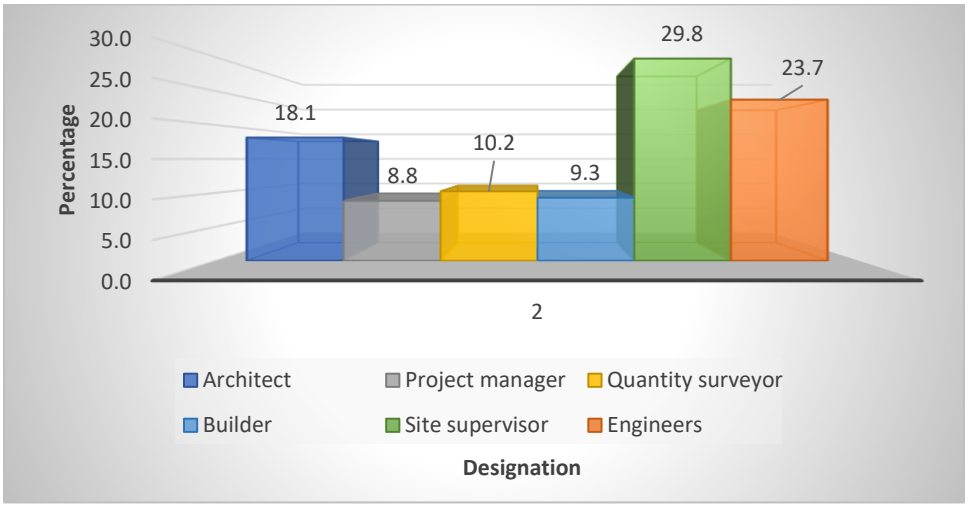

Fig. 2. Designation of respondents

4.2 Results Descriptive statistics)

As contained in Table 1, the 19 items' Cronbach's Alpha rating of 0.936 denotes exceptional internal consistency, exceeding the generally recognized cutoff point of 0.7 (Oni et al., 2024b). Similarly, strong construct validity is indicated by validity values (Sig. = 0.000) for each variable, indicating that the items measure the intended concepts in a significant way (Table 2). The validity and generalizability of later findings are improved by this high dependability, which confirms the questionnaire's strength in assessing the impact of economic reforms on building materials in Nigeria's construction sector.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.936	19

As contained in Table 2, on a 5-point Likert scale, where 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree, respondents' mean scores range from 4.01 to 4.23, indicating substantial agreement with the negative effects of economic modifications on labour market, according to the descriptive statistics. In line with Sanusi (2024), who reported a 50% increase in material costs, the highest mean score of 4.23 for "Increased Operational Costs" (Std. Dev. = 1.001) shows that growing costs as a result of fuel subsidy removal and currency devaluation are almost universally acknowledged. In line with Dantong & Dantong (2025), "Labor Demand Reduction" (Mean = 4.19, Std. Dev. = 0.975) and "Skilled Labor Shortages" (Mean = 4.15, Std. Dev. = 0.972) both represent the reduced project affordability and training investment limits. Wage-related issues like "Wage Stagnation or Erosion" (Mean = 4.15, Std. Dev. = 0.946) and "Wage Inequality" (Mean = 4.14, Std. Dev. = 0.949) was also in accordance with Reuters (2024b), relating the general strike in 2024 to inflation (33.95% in May 2024). Interestingly, "Shift to Informal Employment" had the lowest mean of 2.52 (Std. Dev. = 1.302), showing a more neutral position and perhaps a range of experiences with the rise of the informal sector. According to Oni et al. (2024a), regional variations may be reflected in this variability (greater standard deviation), as labor markets in urban and rural areas react differently to economic pressures.

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Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Code	Variable name	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Validity	Mean	Std. Deviation
ICL1	Increased Operational Costs	.933	0.000	4.23	1.001
ICL2	Labor Demand Reduction	.934	0.000	4.19	.975
ICL3	Skilled Labor Shortages	.933	0.000	4.15	.972
ICL4	Wage Stagnation or Erosion	.935	0.000	4.15	.946
ICL5	Unemployment and Underemployment Rise	.934	0.000	4.15	.946
ICL6	Health and Safety Risks	.934	0.000	4.15	.946
ICL7	Wage Inequality	.936	0.000	4.14	.949
ICL8	Delayed Wage Payments	.933	0.000	4.12	1.023
ICL9	Increased Reliance on Casual Labor	.934	0.000	4.11	1.017
ICL10	Decline in Productivity	.935	0.000	4.11	.989
ICL11	Labor Unrest and Strikes	.931	0.000	4.11	.894
ICL12	Mismatch Between Labor Supply and Demand	.932	0.000	4.10	.890
ICL13	Reduced Access to Credit for Training	.932	0.000	4.09	.911
ICL14	Migration of Skilled Workers	.931	0.000	4.07	.903
ICL15	Gender Disparities in Employment	.932	0.000	4.06	.918
ICL16	Youth Unemployment Surge	.932	0.000	4.06	.870
ICL17	Informal Sector Dominance	.932	0.000	4.03	.879
ICL18	Job Losses in SMEs	.931	0.000	4.01	.895
ICL19	Shift to Informal Employment	.932	0.000	2.52	1.302

As contained in Table 3, Pearson's correlation analysis examines the connections between 19 labor market impacts (ICL1 to ICL19) and six economic reform factors (ERF1 to ERF6), which stand for policy characteristics such as tax reforms, exchange rate adjustments, and subsidy removal. The labor market results are significantly impacted by these reforms, as evidenced by significant correlations ($p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.01$). ICL11 (Reduced Access to Credit for Training, $r = 0.732$, $p < 0.01$), ICL12 (Mismatch Between Labor Supply and Demand, $r = 0.705$, $p < 0.01$), and ICL13 (Migration of Skilled Workers, $r = 0.790$, $p < 0.01$) all exhibit strong correlations with ERF1 (e.g., Subsidy Removal), which backs up Dantong and Dantong (2025), who claim that lower training funding and increased energy prices following the loss of subsidies are to blame for skill shortages. Similarly, multiple reforms (ERF2-ERF6) are significantly correlated with impacts such as "Decline in Productivity" (ICL10, $r = 0.344$-0.376, $p < 0.01$) and "Increased Reliance on Casual Labor" (ICL9, $r = 0.332$-0.372, $p < 0.01$ across ERF2-ERF6), which reflect the compounding effects of inflation and policy uncertainty (Sanusi, 2024). Finally, some impacts, like "Shift to Informal Employment" (ICL19, $r = 0.159$, $p = 0.019$ with ERF5) and "Gender Disparities in Employment" (ICL15, $r = 0.125$, $p = 0.066$ with ERF2), exhibit weaker correlations, indicating that sociocultural factors may have an impact on these that goes beyond the immediate reform effects (Oni et al., 2024a).

Table 3: Correlations

		ERF1	ERF2	ERF3	ERF4	ERF5	ERF6
ICL1	Pearson Correlation	.196**	.263**	.321**	.207**	.293**	.324**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.000	.002	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL2	Pearson Correlation	.147*	.245**	.246**	.232**	.244**	.272**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL3	Pearson Correlation	.203**	.253**	.242**	.208**	.252**	.287**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000	.002	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL4	Pearson Correlation	.128	.248**	.286**	.254**	.294**	.301**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.060	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217

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ICL5	Pearson Correlation	.145*	.310**	.274**	.279**	.268**	.306**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL6	Pearson Correlation	.126	.268**	.268**	.220**	.258**	.330**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL7	Pearson Correlation	.069	.265**	.297**	.264**	.220**	.329**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.308	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL8	Pearson Correlation	.186**	.274**	.287**	.194**	.272**	.282**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.000	.000	.004	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL9	Pearson Correlation	.208**	.332**	.322**	.270**	.308**	.372**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL10	Pearson Correlation	.073	.344**	.354**	.259**	.301**	.376**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.284	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL11	Pearson Correlation	.732**	.165*	.075	.022	.101	.135*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.015	.271	.748	.138	.047
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL12	Pearson Correlation	.705**	.084	.046	.005	.043	.068
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.217	.496	.939	.526	.320
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL13	Pearson Correlation	.790**	.122	.030	-.013	.033	.087
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.073	.664	.848	.628	.200
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL14	Pearson Correlation	.684**	.196**	.149*	.059	.120	.222**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.004	.028	.390	.079	.001
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL15	Pearson Correlation	.777**	.125	.062	-.004	.053	.127
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.066	.364	.952	.435	.062
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL16	Pearson Correlation	.794**	.163*	.110	.055	.125	.176**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.017	.105	.418	.066	.009
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL17	Pearson Correlation	.760**	.204**	.109	.031	.133	.164*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	.108	.646	.050	.015
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL18	Pearson Correlation	.751**	.137*	.107	.021	.102	.155*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.044	.117	.763	.133	.023
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217
ICL19	Pearson Correlation	.789**	.159*	.123	.067	.159*	.183**

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Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.019	.070	.329	.019	.007
N	217	217	217	217	217	217

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

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

ER1 = Fuel Subsidy Removal; ER2 = Foreign Exchange Market Liberalization; ER3 = Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) Implementation; ER4 = Finance Act Reforms; ER5 = Central Bank Monetary Policy Tightening; ER6 = Economic Recovery and Growth Plan

5. Discussion

The study's results strongly support previous research, confirming the idea that Nigeria's recent economic reforms have made labor market issues in the construction industry much worse. The high degree of agreement on "Increased Operational Costs" (Mean = 4.23) and "Labor Demand Reduction" (Mean = 4.19) is in perfect agreement with Conifer Konstruktion (2024), which blames the removal of fuel subsidies in May 2023 for the operational stress and reduced project viability. This change in policy has increased input costs, particularly by as much as 50% in some areas (Sanusi, 2024), which has reduced job possibilities and highlighted the sector's susceptibility to macroeconomic changes. Additionally, a critical gap in workforce development is highlighted by the significant correlation between the removal of subsidies (ERF1) and skill-related impacts, including "Mismatch Between Labor Supply and Demand" (ICL12, $r = 0.705$, $p < 0.01$), "Reduced Access to Credit for Training" (ICL11, $r = 0.732$, $p < 0.01$), and "Migration of Skilled Workers" (ICL13, $r = 0.790$, $p < 0.01$). This finding is in line with Elegbede and Akinbile (2024), who emphasize the need for focused educational activities to support skill acquisition and retention by pointing to a reduction in training investments amid high inflation (33.95% in May 2024).

Strong mean scores (e.g., "Wage Stagnation or Erosion" at 4.15) and significant relationships with ERF2-ERF6 (e.g., "Labor Unrest and Strikes," $r = 0.332–0.372$, $p < 0.01$) further highlight the socioeconomic effects of these policies. These patterns are consistent with the inflationary pressures reported by Reuters (2024b), which sparked the 2024 nationwide general strike as workers sought fair pay in the face of growing living expenses. Ozigbo et al. (2025) posit that while reforms push workers toward informal roles, other structural factors, like cultural norms, regional labor practices, and limited access to the formal sector, may mediate this transition. This is supported by the weaker correlation with "Shift to Informal Employment" (mean = 2.52, $r = 0.159$, $p < 0.05$ with ERF5). This subtlety suggests that factors other than policy interact in a complicated way. These findings tell two stories: economic transformations create opportunities for strategic policy recalibration while also posing immediate risks to labor stability in the form of productivity drops (mean = 4.11) and increases in unemployment (mean = 4.15). In line with the World Bank's (2025) recommendations for sector-specific interventions, the strong associations with reform factors (such as ERF1-ERF6) imply that addressing fuel cost constraints, stabilizing exchange rates, and improving training access could lessen negative effects. This evidence-based conclusion, derived from 217 responses, emphasizes how important it is to have robust labor market regulations. If such measures address both short-term relief and long-term capacity building, they could not only improve worker welfare and productivity but also establish the construction sector as a pillar of Nigeria's economic recovery.

6. Conclusions

This study offers strong evidence of the significant detrimental effects of Nigeria's recent economic reforms on the construction labor market. It is based on a comprehensive dataset of 217 responses from a diverse cohort of construction professionals, including engineers, architects, project managers, site supervisors, and quantity surveyors. The analysis shows strong statistical correlations ($r = 0.705–0.790$, $p < 0.01$) connecting these issues to reform measures like fuel subsidy removal, exchange rate unification, and tax restructuring. For critical issues like increased operational costs, labor demand reduction, and acute skilled labor shortages, the mean agreement scores range from 4.01 to 4.23 on a 5-point Likert scale (Oni et al., 2024a; Sanusi, 2024). Despite the sector's crucial 3.1% GDP contribution to Nigeria in 2025, these data show a recurring cycle of rising unemployment, wage erosion, and deteriorating productivity (Reuters, 2025a). By establishing a measurable link between macroeconomic reforms and labor market dynamics in an emerging market setting, this study theoretically advances the area of labor economics and addresses a hitherto unexplored aspect of the impact of economic policy. In practice, it gives policymakers useful information to improve focused interventions, such as skill-building projects and cash transfer programs, in line with World Bank (2025) suggestions for sector-specific tactics to lessen the negative effects of reform. The study's

ramifications go beyond quick changes to policy; it offers a strategy to improve sectoral resilience and worker well-being. To increase the breadth and depth of knowledge, future study could profit from comparative studies with other developing economies or longitudinal observation of similar modifications. The study recommends inflation-linked pay adjustments, implementing 15–20% tax refunds to encourage the use of local materials, and allocating 10% of subsidy savings to train 50,000 craftsmen yearly.

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