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Abstract

Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) play an important role in terms of growth and development of an economy. Despite this ostensible relevance of small and medium scale enterprises, it is observed that employee performance level especially in Nigeria is low compared to that of other nations. This is evident in declining workforce productivity, inefficiency, and decreased commitment. These challenges have been attributed to a variety of factors, including poor hiring approach, irregular improvement, and poor teamwork. The impact of lean human resource initiatives on employee performance in selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria, was explored in this research. The survey research design was used in this study. In Lagos State, Nigeria, there were 8,396 small and medium-sized businesses. Sample size of 481 was ascertained using the Research Advisory Table. The participants were identified using a simple random sampling approach. Data was collected from the participants using an adapted and validated questionnaire. Construct ranged from 0.74 to 0.89 for Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients and study found that 85% of participants responded. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (multiple regression). According to the findings, lean human resource initiatives had a significant impact on employee performance in Lagos, Nigeria.. Employee performance was significantly affected by lean human resource initiatives (Adj.R2 = 0.095; F (5,401) = 9.509, p 0.05). The study concludes that lean human resource initiatives had significant effect on employee performance of SMEs in Lagos Nigeria. The study recommends that small and medium scale enterprise owner/managers should embrace Lean Human Resource initiatives such as selective hiring, continuous improvement, mentoring, cross-functional team, and flexible information system which is geared towards human capital development to improve employee performance and boost their contribution to the organization.

Keywords: *Continuous Improvement, Employee Performance, Lean Human resource initiative, Mentoring, Selective Hiring.*

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1.0 Introduction

Increasing organizational performance is a goal every business enterprise is pursuing at every point in time. These has made different organizations, managers and academics to regularly source for and adopt diverse strategies and varied action plans to improve business performance. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are essential for the growth and development of any economy. This is due to their significance in terms of job creation, economic development, and sustenance. As a result, SMEs are seen as major elements in the deployment of the local industrial sector, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. It is not surprising given the importance of SMEs in fostering economic growth and development through a variety of channels, including job creation, income redistribution, poverty reduction, and the maintenance of a healthy economy. However, performance has declined, particularly in the areas of employee performance.

Globally, Small and medium businesses play an important role in local, national, and international economies, as well as in the creation of economic opportunities. (Chatterjee, Gupta & Upadhyay, 2020; Chowdhury & Ahmed, 2011; OECD 2014). SMEs account for at least 90% of businesses in both developed and developing countries (Mbuyisa & Leonard, 2017). They represent 40–60% of GDP (Igwe, Ogundana, Egere & Anigbo, 2018) and contribute around 40% of global industrial production and 35% of global exports (Mbuyisa & Leonard, 2017; Sharma & Bhagwat, 2006).

In the United States of America (USA), Europe, Asia, the United Kingdom (UK), and Middle East countries, SMEs firms are regarded to play a key role in growing economy, job creation and poverty alleviation. As a result, they are crucial in the growth of nations (Zimon, 2018). Despite this, SMEs around the world continue to face a number of issues due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and other economic challenges, including high levels of competitiveness, poor quality management, loss of market share, and decreased profitability.

In Malaysia SMEs are important drivers of the country's economic development. However, they face enormous pressure along with multidimensional obstacles as an emerging country in the twenty-first century's latest competition. According to researchers, as a result of the financial crisis, Malaysia's economy has stagnated in recent years. The economic performance is deteriorating due to a steady increase in labor productivity and the loss of its attractiveness as an investment destination (Halim et al., 2015).

In Africa SMEs displayed a high degree of adaptability, as evidence by their ability to build jobs in a difficult environment and a significant contribution to GDP. However, more than 30% of Kenya's SMEs still encounter serious challenges hindering their growth (Viffa, 2019). Reports from Kenya show that SMEs, accounting for over 70 per cent of GDP, are key drivers of Kenya's economy (Osano, 2019). SMEs are increasingly seen as the engines of the economic growth of Kenya (Ogunode, Abereola & Oloyede, 2020). The Kenyan government has taken the following steps to help SMEs by providing liquidity assistance through different tax and non-tax interventions: decreased turnover tax from 3% to 1%; lowered corporate tax from 30% to 25%; and reduced VAT from 16% to 14%, among other things. (Chege & Wang, 2020). Despite these efforts, Kenyan SMEs continue to struggle with access to improved business results, as it is evident that around 2 out of 5 SMEs had to wound up due to pressure to keep up. (Noor & Simiyu, 2020).

In Nigeria, as a result of rapid technological advances, increased competition, and unpredictable economy, the global production system is underperforming. SMEs experience difficulties in their day-to-day operations. (Donati & Sarno, 2015; Kafigi, 2015). The situation is deteriorating because of the global energy shortage, as they are being threatened by rising

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input costs and shrinking profit margins; among other things, the performance of SMEs is becoming increasingly difficult (SMEDA, 2019). This is because these businesses use their limited resources to cover operating costs that cannot be fulfilled by businesses whose production horizon is hampered by resource constraints. (Adoyi, Agu, Adoli, & Inalegwu, 2015; Kafigi, 2015). This has left SMEs in Nigeria with production and operational constraints. According to Ebitu, Basil and Ufot (2016) Small and medium-sized firms account for over 50% of employment and 30% of manufacturing production, and they account for roughly 97% of all businesses in the sector. SMEs currently provide 48% of Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP), account for 96% of businesses, and employ 84% of the country's workforce. It also accounts for 7.27% of Nigeria's exports of products and services. (Akpan, Udo, & Okon, 2020). Lagos had the most micro-enterprises (8,395), followed by Oyo as well as Osun States (6,131 and 3,007, respectively), and Yobe State seemed to have the least (102).

The concept of Lean Human Resource initiatives has attracted various studies (Martínez Sánchez & Pérez Pérez, 2019; Rymaszewska, 2018) that have led to the adoption of various ways to dig deep into the concept's implementation and learn more about it. Lean human resource initiatives are now practiced in business organizations across different industries where its implementation was first mentioned (Pearce & Pons, 2019). The concept of Lean Human Resource initiatives are primarily about identifying methods in an organization's process to minimize or eliminate waste, improve on-time delivery, lower overall costs, and improve the quality of the organization's output that benefit both the organization and its customer. (Fullerton, Kennedy, & Widener, 2014; Jackson & Mullarkey, 2020).

There has been a number of studies on lean human resource initiatives and performance of businesses in different areas with diverse results and outcomes (Honda, Bernardo, Gerolamo, & Davis, 2018; Sinha, & Matharu, 2019; Niewiadomski, Pawlak & Tsimayeu, 2018). However, there is observed a paucity of research on the extent to which Lean Human Resource initiatives affect the performance of SMEs in Nigeria with keen respect to small and medium scale enterprises (Afunwa, Agbaeze, Ike & Isichei, 2020; Nwanya & Oko, 2019; Maware & Adetunji, 2019). Therefore, a gap is observed between the idea of Lean Human Resource initiatives and the performance of SMEs in Nigeria. Some SMEs in Nigeria fail to adopt different measures of lean such as continuous improvement, waste minimization or elimination, adoption of a flexible information system, and enforcement of a cross functional team (Maware & Adetunji, 2019). Furthermore, it has been noticed that employees in Nigerian SMEs are not effectively mentored, and there is lack of cohesion among existing teams. Because of this, their expansion has become a major challenge, as staff performance is inadequate, there is no obvious competitive advantage, and customer patronage is declining, product quality is big a problem, firm size is reducing, and the level of skill acquisition and development is not encouraging. (Afunwa et al., 2020). From the discussion above, this study investigates the effect of lean human resources initiatives on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Lean Human Resources Initiatives

Lean Human Resource refers to a technique for reducing process waste and increasing human resource value generation while maintaining high standards of work quality. (Jekiel, 2011). Lean Human Resource Initiatives is a way of increasing skills and capabilities of the employees to contribute to job quality and task accomplishment while emphasizing on waste reduction. Lean Human Resource's core promotes each employee's abilities and talents to a large extent. Individuals' passion is not developed in traditional workplaces. Employee competencies with

customers, improvement, involvement, processes, problem-solving, evaluation, and leadership are all emphasized in Lean Human Resource principles.

Lean human resource concepts provide a foundation that recognizes the kinds of skills that are frequently wasted in businesses, as well as several of the systems that steer these abilities to more value-oriented applications. However, many Lean Human Resource initiatives have had little success in the past due to a lack of support from well-developed Human Resource departments. A tremendous chance was denied by the leadership of the organization due to several factors (Bamber et al., 2014; Martínez-Jurado & Moyano-Fuentes, 2014; Signoretti & Sacchetti, 2020). Lean Human Resource (LHR) has emerged as a strategy for improving performance of an organization. (Shah & Ward, 2007), where individuals can be utilized in different ways. Managers can utilize lean Human Resource to adopt cost-cutting or people-centered methods along an ideal continuum (Bamber et al., 2014; Janoski & Lepadatu, 2019). The first procedure identifies stressful workplace situations that impede employee involvement. People-centered methods, on the other hand, utilize a specialized set of interrelated human resource management approaches that qualify and empower workers.

Given the reviewed scholarly perspectives to this concept, the researcher defines Lean Human Resource Initiatives as a way of increasing skills and capabilities of the employees to contribute to job quality and task accomplishment while emphasizing on waste reduction.

2.1.2 Selective Hiring

Selective hiring is the process of selecting applicants from a certain group, such as those with a different set of skills or those from an under-represented ethnicity (Stokes, 2019). Selective or targeted hiring entails creating proactive recruitment methods to attract suitable applicants with certain skill sets. Recruiting selectively requires more work to be done upfront before meeting with any prospective candidates. In selective hiring, Organizations start by doing a comprehensive job assessment of the positions they are looking to fill. The recruiter frequently involves the hiring manager in the process to fully understand the job and any specific knowledge, skills or abilities that are required (Merkl & Van Rens, 2019). Selective hiring, therefore, is about ensuring that appropriate people, with the correct attributes and knowledge, are in the proper job, and that they can fit into the organization's culture and climate. (Huselid, 2010). Stokes (2019) opined that selective hiring yields profits increase employee productivity, improve organizational performance and decrease turnover. According to Collins and Clark (2003), selective hiring translates into sales growth. Successful hiring leads to the production of quality products and an increase in economic performance (Paul & Anantharaman, 2003).

It is advantageous to recruit not only a huge number of applications, but also a group of persons who possess the relevant skills and qualifications for the post. Managers must identify those applicants with the greatest potential for success at the firm after collecting a substantial, qualified applications (Seo, Lee, & Moon, 2016). Selective hiring helps prevent the costly turnover of staff and increases the likeliness of high employee morale and productivity.

2.1.3 Continuous Improvement

A systematic attempt to find and implement new ways of performing work is defined as continuous improvement (Berrahal & Marghoubi, 2016). Continuous improvement, according to Caroly, Coutarel, Landry, and Mary-Cheray (2010), is a process that tries to optimize information, physical flows, and products to regulate production costs and quality. Cardona-Mora (2014) went on to say that continuous improvement is a method utilized by organizations all around the world to meet the high demands of the market. Continuous improvement, according to Yuen, Thai, and Wong (2016), is a process that outline the essence of quality and purports to reflect what firms must do to become more competitive and productive over time.

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Continuous improvement is a philosophy that emphasizes process improvement, new ideas, and technology investment (Khan, Ali, & Hongqi, 2018). Bhuiyan and Baghel (2005) define continuous improvement as a culture of sustained improvement targeting the elimination of waste in all systems and processes of an organization.

Given the reviewed scholarly perspectives to this concept, the research defines Continuous improvement is a corporate idea that focuses on strengthening the activities that provide the most value for its clients while eliminating as many unproductive activities as possible. Organizations must explore techniques that support the ongoing development of their product or service processes to strengthen their competitiveness in more globalized market. The notion of organizations as learning place has been prompted by the need for innovation and constant development. (Gonzalez & Martins, 2016). Continuous improvement is a way an organizational instil a culture of continuous improvement and change, which fosters continual learning and innovation within the organization. Based on lean management, continuous improvement can be seen as an organizational capacity that involves a behavior change that establishes an innovative routine in the business (McLean, Antony, & Dahlgaard, 2017). Additionally, constant improvement is also a continuous attempt to enhance products, services, or processes. These efforts can aim for gradual improvement over time or for a time breakthrough. Continuous improvement is a lean strategy for recognizing opportunities for job simplification and waste reduction (Kumar, Dhingra, & Singh, 2018).

2.1.4 Mentoring

Ofobruku and Nwakoby (2015) define a mentor as the person that facilitates the personal and professional growth of an individual by sharing the knowledge and insight that have been learned through the years. Mentoring is a source of interpersonal connection in which someone with more experience or knowledge assists someone with less expertise. Mentoring, according to Mullen and Klimaitis (2021), is a process in which people of higher status and prestige train, counsel, lead, and support the intellectual and/or career growth of protégées. Mentoring is a close, developmental relationship between two people in which a partner willingly avails him/herself of the full range of superior experience, knowledge, skills, or status of the other partner in all spheres of human endeavor (Garvey, Garvey, Stokes, & Megginson, 2017).

Mentoring helps to extend strategic knowledge and skills throughout the business by sharing and disseminating what has been learned. It allows the student to get new skills, abilities, and knowledge that will help him improve his competencies and advance his profession. Opportunities for advancement and development within an organization or field of study are referred to as career development (McKinsey, 2016). It is a lifetime process of balancing learning, employment, leisure, and changes to accomplish a defined future (Pennanen, Bristol, Wilkinson, & Heikkinen, 2016).

2.1.5 Cross-Functional Team

A cross-functional team is a collection of persons from various functional areas who work together to achieve a shared goal. It could include personnel from the departments of finance, marketing, operations, and human resources (Daspit, Tillman, Boyd, & Mckee, 2013). Employees from various levels of an organization are usually included. A cross-functional team is made up of people who have varied skill sets but are all working toward the same goal. It usually includes employees from various areas and divisions within the company, but it can also include people from outside the company (De Oliveira et al., 2016). Cross-functional teams (CFTs) are a widespread practice among executives looking for methods to make their companies more responsive (Parker, 2003). CFTs are groups of people from different parts of the company who collaborate to achieve a common goal (Laurent & Leicht, 2019; Webber,

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2002). CFTs are used to create new goods (Bunduchi, 2009), alter companies (Hsieh, 2010), accelerate time to market (Griffin, 1997), and perform a number of other jobs. Members from various functional areas provide different viewpoints to CFTs, which can result in a problem-solving team that is creative (Stipp et al., 2018).

2.1.6 Flexible Information System

According to Ejedafiru (2010), information communication technology (ICT) refers to technology that transmits, stores, creates, displays, shares, or exchanges information by electronic means. Technically, an information system is a collection of interconnected components that collect, process, store, and distribute data to assist decision-making and organizational functions (Laudon & Laudon, 2014). Flexible information systems involve a variety of information technologies such as computers, software, databases, communication systems, the Internet, mobile devices and much more, that helps in performing specific tasks, interact with and inform various actors in different organizational or social contexts (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). The diffusion of information to an organizational level is required for the efficient running of an organization, with the goal of delivering timely and meaningful information to personnel.

Flexible information communication technology refers to any technology that allows communication and the collection, processing, use and transmission of information electronically (Apulu, Latham & Moreton, 2011). Flexible information communication technology also entails the application of technology as a tool for executing communication processes and channels in a variety of settings, including different geographical situations, times, and locations (Bohari, Hin, & Fuad, 2017). There are three main components of information communication technology (ICT) development namely computer technology, communication technology and media technology, including products and services such as computers, internet, web use, fixed-line phones, mobile phones and other devices including communication without wires, networks and broadband (Domazet, Zubović, & Lazić, 2018). The combination of these three technologies can drive and create a high potential for use in a country's economic, social, political and technological processes. In view of the reviewed scholarly perspectives to this concept, the researcher defines a flexible information system as a way and manner information's are freely used within the organization to achieve the organizational goal.

2.1.7 Employee Performance

Faiza and Nazir (2015) describe employee performance as reactions in the form of behaviors that reflect what the employee has learned or the type of training that the employee has received. This is to say that it involves the outcome of individuals' mental and psychological abilities. Employee performance is the result or level of success of an employee as a whole within a certain period in performing the task compared to other things, such as the standard of work, target or criteria that have been determined beforehand and mutually agreed upon (Ulfa, 2015). Performance comes from the words job performance and also called actual performance or the actual performance or achievement that an employee has achieved. Performance refers to a person's overall result or progress during particular periods of duty about the job norm, the goals or standards that have been set in advance and decided upon (Rivai, 2004).

According to Rivai, success is connected to work satisfaction and compensation and is affected by skills, abilities, and personal characteristics. In other words, an employee's capacity, desire, and atmosphere all affect their performance. Employee output is affected by several personal characteristics. Companies undoubtedly need high achievers in the growth of a dynamic and

globalized age. The level of productivity of employees is one of the elements that can be measured.

One of the advantages of employee performance is that it considers the outcomes of employees' actions depending on their knowledge and abilities (Pradhan & Jena, 2017). In organizational settings, employees' performance is the accumulates result of the skills, efforts, and abilities of all the employees contributed to organizational improved productivity leading towards its goal achievement. Improved organizational performance indicates the efforts towards goal achievement while requiring more efforts in terms of improved employee performance (Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003). Employee performance is one of the most important aspects in determining the success of a firm. Learning organizations play a critical role in improving employee productivity by implementing training and development opportunities (Gitongu, Kingi, & Uzel, 2016).

Moreover, management standards to evaluate employee performance also play critical role in improving employee performance as they provide the picture of actual performance and its alignment with the benchmarks. If discrepancies found, then these standards help bringing the outputs again towards their required levels (Rozi, & Sunarsi, 2020). Employee performance also depends on their internal satisfaction towards their job. If employees are satisfied from their jobs as well as the organization than they are more keenly interested to perform well towards organizational goal achievement (Badrianto, & Ekhsan, 2020). This study conceptualizes employee performance as employee productivity, employee satisfaction, and employee commitment and employee engagement. From the review of extant literature, the researcher defines employee performance as how well an employee carried out their job responsibilities and completes their assigned tasks. It refers to the output's effectiveness, consistency, and performance. The importance of an employee to the organization is also determined by their performance.

2.2 Empirical Review

Scholars at different country and context have carried out studies on lean human resources initiatives and employee performance with different results. The studies of Aizzat, Noor and Tan (2015) and Butali and Njoroge (2020) revealed that selective hiring had a significant effect on organizational performance. Further, findings showed that affective commitment and normative commitment moderated the relationship between selective hiring and organizational performance. The findings is in agreement with Naveen and Raju (2014) who found that effective recruitment and selection practices contributed to better organizational outcomes. These findings align with Jolaosho, Shodiya, Olajide and Akintan (2018) in their Nigerian study revealed that recruitment and selection process affect the overall performance of the employees.

In another study on Nigerian banks, Mustapha, Ilesanmi and Aremu (2013) concluded that there was a strong and significant relationship between recruitment and selection and organizational performance. The study findings further revealed that the presence of a poor recruitment and selection strategy led to poor organizational performance due to selection of inappropriate staff. Studies conducted in Kenya revealed that the recruitment and selection process significantly affected the performance of employees (Ombui, Elegwa & Gichuhi, 2014) and the performance of SMEs (Omolo and Otengah, 2015; Omolo, Onginda & Oso, 2012). Makhamara, Waiganjo and Kwasira (2016) established that strategic recruitment and selection had an effect on employee performance in the health sector in Kenya. Their findings of is in consonance with Ekwoaba et al. (2015) who observed the success of any organization or efficiency in service delivery largely depends on the quality of its workforce.

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Likewise, the study of Nadarajah, Kadiresan, Kumar, Kamil and Yusoff, (2012) revealed that the understanding of lean human resources initiatives in developing the association between human resource practices and job performance outcomes could be helpful to top management in the development of HR practices as to ensure high achievements of academic staffs' performance. Merkl and Van Rens (2019) found that selective hiring crucially affects welfare analysis. The study further revealed that selective hiring enables organisations to hire for value creation for the improvement of effective workforce delivery.

In light of the preceding, it was hypothesized that:

Ho: There is no significant effect of Lean Human Resources initiatives on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria

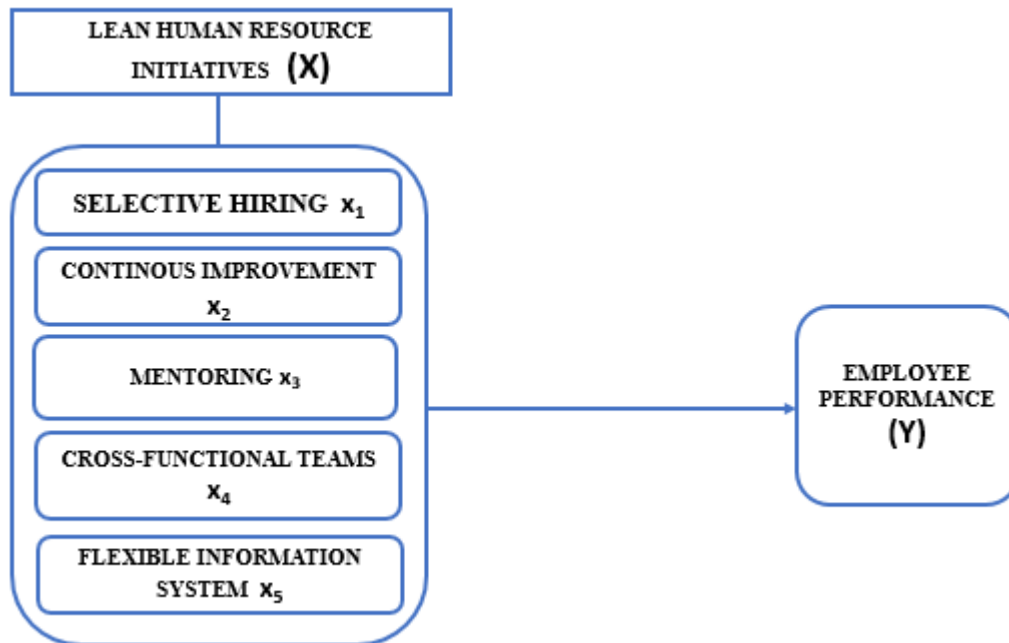
2.3 Theoretical Review

The human capital theory has been adopted as the underpinning theory for this study. The theory of human capital is rooted in the field of macroeconomic development theory. The original idea of human capital can be traced back to Adam Smith in the 18th century (Schultz 1993). The emphasis of the human capital theory as argued by its proponents (Marginson, 2019; Gillies, 2017) is that human capital is knowledge gained through education and training in areas of value to a variety of firms such as generic skills in human resource development. Regardless of the application, Becker (1993) considers education and training to be the most important investment in human capital. Human capital is seen as a group or individual dispositions of a person in the form of a source of knowledge and skills that reflect the education and experience of the person. Ideally, the labour market uses those who can be sufficiently adaptable to the varied conditions so that a potential employer is attracted to the person; the better the human capital of the employee, the higher appreciation of the investment for the employer.

Fix (2018) and Lauder (2015) in support of the theory argued that human capital simultaneously includes both of the instrumental concepts to produce certain values and the endogenous meaning to self-generate it. To dependently/independently create these values, there is no doubt that learning through education and training can be important in terms of defining the concept of human capital. Considering that experience can be included as a category of knowledge, human capital is a synonym of knowledge embedded in individuals. It is noteworthy to say that performance is contingent on human capital development and as such (Slaughter et al., 2015) concluded that nothing happens unless a human being makes a conscious decision to act. However, the human capital theory has been subject to repeated and sometimes damaging criticisms since its inception. Some researchers who stand against the human capital theory, such as Fix (2018) they suggest that the correlation between income and education is weak. Simple correlations between earnings and years of schooling are quite weak.

However, given the research objectives to be addressed in this study, and the criticisms, this study adopts the human capital theory because superiority in employee performance depends on the quality of training, education, educational alignment and employee development in organisation compared with the industry rivals. Human resources need to be treated with care, developed rather than as contingent resources to enhance their knowledge level for mobility and or advancement within the organisation. The organisation must improve the human capital of employee to be able to capture exponential benefits, competencies and capabilities for improved performance. Organisations that engage in human capital development and make greater use of human resources capabilities, are likely to gain a sustainable advantage and enjoys greater performance.

2.4 Research Model



Source: Researcher's Model (2021)

3.0 Methodology

A survey research design was adopted for this study. Primary data was sourced using a structured and self-administered questionnaire. The study population was 8,396 SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Sample size of 481 was determined using the Research Advisory Table. A pilot study was conducted to assess the research instrument's suitability for measuring the items under consideration, as well as to determine the questions' simplicity for respondents, particularly in the areas of validity and reliability. The sample is made up of 10percent (10%) of the total sample size for the main study. The pilot was considered essential to determine the validity and reliability of the questionnaire's items. SME's in Ogun state were used in the pilot project.

Table 1: Validity Result

S/N	Variables	No. of Items	KMO	Bartlett's test of sphericity	Sig	AVE	Remark
1	Selective Hiring	5	0.817	648.714	0.000	0.785	Accepted
2	Continuous Improvement	5	0.732	671.098	0.000	0.713	Accepted
3	Mentoring	5	0.746	693.726	0.000	0.696	Accepted
4	Cross-Functional Teams	5	0.801	132.798	0.000	0.781	Accepted
5	Flexible Information System	5	0.837	191.977	0.000	0.726	Accepted
6	Employee Performance	5	0.826	254.968	0.000	0.765	Accepted

Source: Researcher's Pilot Study (2021)

The findings showed that for all the variables, Bartlett's sphericity tests were all significant at 0.000. Besides, the KMO values are above the 0.5 benchmarks (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014). This indicates that the sampling adequacy for the study was attained. This, therefore, means that the questionnaire for further data collection is valid. The extracted average variance shows that the coefficients are above 0.5. This provides further proof of the fitness of the data collection questionnaire. The average variance extracted (AVE) was >0.5. From the results, it can be concluded that the factors were valid and suitable as there would be a highly significant correlation between the variables in the study.

Table 2: Reliability Result

S/N	Variables	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	Composite Reliability	Remark
1	Selective Hiring	5	0.891	0.846	Reliable
2	Continuous Improvement	5	0.753	0.793	Reliable
3	Mentoring	5	0.820	0.817	Reliable
4	Cross-Functional Teams	5	0.809	0.918	Reliable
5	Flexible Information System	5	0.748	0.926	Reliable
6	Employee Performance	5	0.753	0.875	Reliable

Source: Researcher's Pilot Study (2021)

This test was carried out to find out if the questionnaire will be able to remain consistent across different studies and contexts. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to test this internal consistency as well as the reliability. The values obtained were higher than 0.70 alpha

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benchmark. This confirms that the questionnaire and its variables passed the internal consistency test.

4.0 Data Analysis and Results

The data gathered were subjected to some pre-diagnostic tests in order to ensure that all basic assumptions guiding regression were met. The diagnostic tests carried out were normality test, linearity test, homoscedasticity test, and multicollinearity test. Four hundred and eighty-one (481) copies of questionnaire were dispatched to the companies but only 407 owners and managers duly filled and submitted the completed questionnaires. This translates to a response rate of 84.61% which the researcher considered adequate for analysis.

Restatement of Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant effect of Lean Human Resources initiatives on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria

Table 3: Effect of Lean Human Resources Initiatives on Employee Performance

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	p-value
(Constant)	1.260	.608		2.072	.039
Selective Hiring	-.023	.143	-.010	-.160	.873
Continuous Improvement	.427	.168	.201	2.544	.011
Mentoring	-.012	.127	-.007	-.096	.924
Cross-Functional Teams	-.010	.162	-.005	-.061	.951
Flexible Information System	.342	.151	.170	2.259	.024
R square	0.106				
Adjusted R square	0.095				
F (5,401)	9.509				

Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 3 shows the result of the multiple regression analysis which assessed the effect of lean human resources initiatives on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Analysis of regression results revealed that continuous improvement ($\beta = 0.427$, $t = 2.544$, $p = .011$) and flexible information system ($\beta = 0.342$, $t = 4.378$, $p = .024$) have positive and significant effect on employee performance of selected SMEs while selective hiring ($\beta = -0.055$, $t = -0.023$, $p = .873$), mentoring ($\beta = -0.012$, $t = -0.096$, $p = .924$), and cross-functional teams ($\beta = -0.010$, $t = -.061$, $p = .951$) have negative and insignificant effect on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results of the analysis revealed that two of the five lean human resources initiatives (continuous improvement and flexible information system) have significant effect on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. It can be identified that both continuous improvement and flexible information system significantly predict employee performance of selected SMEs.

The multiple coefficients of determination adjusted R Square indicates the percentages or extent of the independent variables can explain the variations in the dependent variable. According to Table 4.13, the value of adjusted R Square ($Adj.R^2$) was 0.095 which indicates that lean human resources initiatives explain about 9.5% of the corresponding changes that occur in employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria while the remaining 90.5% could be attributed to other factors that are not in the model. Also, the F-statistics ($df = 5, 401$) = 9.509 at $p < 0.05$ meaning the model is significant in the prediction of employee performance. This implies that lean human resources initiatives have a significant effect on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. From the regression results in Table 4.13, the following regression equation was specified:

$$EMP = 1.260 - .023SH + 0.427CI - .012ME - 0.010CFT + 0.342FIS \dots\dots\dots eq. 4.1$$

Where:

EMP = Employee Performance

SH = Selective Hiring

CI = Continuous Improvement

ME = Mentoring

CFT = Cross-Functional Teams

CIS = Flexible Information System

From the above regression equation, the regression constant is 1.260, indicating that if each of the lean human resources initiatives had a score zero, employee performance of selected SMEs would be 1.260. This implies that without selective hiring, continuous improvement, mentoring, cross-functional teams and flexible information system, employee performance would be positive at 1.260. Further, the results of regression analysis reveal that a unit change in selective hiring would leads to 0.023 decrease in employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Also, a unit change in continuous improvement would leads to 0.427 improvement in employee performance of selected SMEs.

Moreover, a change in Mentoring will bring about 0.012 decrease in employee performance of selected SMEs. In addition, a unit change in cross-functional teams leads to a decrease in employee performance of selected SMEs by 0.010, and a unit change in flexible information system would leads to an improvement in employee performance of selected SMEs. The coefficients of continuous improvement and flexible information system are significant at 95% significance level while those of selective hiring, mentoring, and cross-functional teams are not statistically significant at 5% significance level. It was therefore deduced that continuous improvement and flexible information system positively influenced employee performance of the of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results reveal that continuous improvement has the most significant effect on employee performance of selected SMEs, followed flexible information system.

The finding suggests that selected SMEs in Lagos State should focus on both continuous improvement and flexible information system to increase the level of success of employees, their individuals' mental and psychological abilities in order to improve their performance. Based on the F statistics and adjusted coefficient of determination with p-value less than 0.05, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of lean human resources initiatives on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria was hereby rejected.

The test of hypothesis one revealed that lean human resources initiatives have a significant effect on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. This finding provides implications conceptually, empirically and theoretically. From a conceptual angle, the definitions and clarifications of the concepts of the study provides good conceptual outlook on the study. Conceptually, Lean Human Resource refers to a technique developed to minimise the process waste and maximise the value creation of a human resource, without compromising the quality of work standard (Jekiel, 2011). Lean human resource principles provide a structure that appreciates the types of abilities that are commonly wasted in organisations, while also providing many of the processes that direct these abilities to value-oriented use. According to Bortolotti, et al (2015), and Bouville and Alis (2014), lean HRM system devoted to training, empowering, and motivating workers to boost higher labour productivity. Garcia-Sabater & Marin-Garcia (2011) assert that continuous improvement is an incremental change in production processes or in working practices that permit an improvement in some indicator of performance, that do not require big investments to implement them, and in which all members of the firm are involved. Marin-Garcia, del Val and Martín (2008) remarked that continuous improvement is based on the Deming cycle, consisting of four phases: studying the current situation, gathering the data necessary to propose the suggestions for improvement; setting in motion trials of the proposals selected; checking whether the proposal tested is giving the expected results; implementation and standardising the proposal with the necessary modifications.

Empirically, the findings from this study is in agreement with Nadarajah, et al (2012) who found that that the understanding of lean human resources initiatives in developing the association between human resource practices and job performance outcomes could be helpful to top management in the development of HR practices as to ensure high achievements of academic staffs' performance. Merkl and Van Rens (2019) found that selective hiring crucially affects welfare analysis. The study further revealed that selective hiring enables organisations to hire for value creation for the improvement of effective workforce delivery. It can therefore be inferred that lean human resources initiatives are very useful factor that influences employee performance of selected SMEs.

On the contrary, Detsimas, Coffey, Sadiqi and Li (2016) in their study found that whilst overall participation in workplace training is high, the current workplace training environments do not foster balanced employee performance. Therefore, the study was unable to support this study. Theoretically, findings of this study present credibility to the theoretical assumptions of resource-based view (RBV) that supported this research. The theory emphasized managerial attention on the firm's internal resources to identify those assets, capabilities and competencies with the potential to deliver superior performance. The resource-based view (RBV) is used to determine the strategic resources a firm can exploit to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The resource-based view offers strategists (SMEs) a means of evaluating potential factors that can be deployed to confer a competitive edge through the human resource. A key insight arising from the resource-based view is that not all resources are of equal importance, nor do they possess the potential to become a source of sustainable competitive advantage. However, given the context of this study, the workforce which is a composition of individuals with diversities of capabilities are potential resources for the operations and sustainability of the organisation.

5.0 Conclusion

The study examined the effect of Lean Human Resource initiative on employee performance of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study found that Lean Human Resource initiatives (selective hiring, continuous improvement, mentoring, cross-

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functional team and flexible information system) had effect on employee performance of small and medium scale enterprises SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

6.0 Recommendation

The study recommends that small and medium scale enterprise owner/managers should embrace Lean Human Resource initiatives such as selective hiring, continuous improvement, mentoring, cross-functional team and flexible information system which is geared towards human capital development so as to improve employee performance and boost their contribution to the organization.

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