



LEAN HUMAN RESOURCE INITIATIVES AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF SELECTED SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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¹ Omosigho, A. A., ² Egbuta, O. U., & ³ Ajike, E. O.

^{1,2,3} Department of Business Administration and Marketing, School of Management Sciences, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The death of SMEs in Nigeria, within a short period of commencing operations, calls for concern. Customer patronage for products have been low as some of the products rolled out by these SMEs are defective, expensive and fail to have a long shelf life. In addition, it is observed that employees are not properly mentored and there is no cohesion among existing teams in some Nigerian SMEs. This thus has become a huge challenge for their growth as employee performance is not adequate, no clear-cut competitive advantage and it is observed that customer patronage is on a decline, product quality is poor, firm size is shrinking and the level of skills acquisition and development is not encouraging at all. Therefore, this study examined the effect of lean human resource initiatives on employee performance of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research design. The population comprised 8,396 SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Sample size of 481 was determined using the Research Advisory Table. The study adopted simple random sampling technique in selecting the respondents. Adapted and validated questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged from 0.74 to 0.89. The response rate was 85%. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential (multiple regression) statistics. The study findings revealed that lean human resource initiatives had significant effect on customer patronage of SMEs in Lagos Nigeria. Specifically, lean human resource initiatives had significant effect on customer patronage ($Adj.R^2 = 0.090$; $F(5,401) = 9.041$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that lean human resource initiatives had significant effect on customer patronage of SMEs in Lagos Nigeria. The study recommended that small and medium scale enterprise owner/managers should

Keywords: Continuous improvement, Customer Patronage, Lean human resource initiative, Mentoring, Selective hiring.

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INTRODUCTION

Small and medium scale enterprises have a great potential for promoting economic growth and competitiveness (Haq, Khan, Parkash & Jabeen, 2016). Lean Human Resource has appeared as a model contributing to improved firm performance (Shah & Ward, 2007), where people deployment can differ. Along an ideal continuum, managers can use lean HR to pursue cost-reduction or people-centred strategies (Bamber, Stanton, Bartram & Ballardie, 2014; Janoski & Lepadatu, 2019). 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. According to Minh, Nguyen and Cuong (2018) Lean is one of the systematic approaches to achieving higher value for organisations through eliminating non-value-added activities. The study of Chaudhari and Raut (2017) details the use of Lean Human Resource initiative techniques in reducing waste in Nut Bolt Manufacturing Company. The study shows the reduction in Through-Put Time is achieved to increase productivity. Provision of waste skips for specific materials and maximization of on-site reuse of materials are also found to be among the key factors for engendering waste minimization.

The concept of Lean Human Resources initiative is quite new and has been implemented successfully in different business organisations worldwide. The idea of Lean Human Resources Management has become a panacea for all types of manufacturing and operational issues and has brought about dramatic improvements in achieving organisational operational excellence. However, primarily, some organisations have not succeeded because of the non-judicious use of different lean human resources initiatives and the absence of a proper measurement system in place. According to the recent research undertaken, manufacturing

leanness was feasible in the Finnish SME environment, leanness was achieved using lean practices of continuous improvements and reduction of all kinds of waste in the system (Johnstone, 2020). Many SMEs, however, have failed in their lean journeys due to insufficient specialized lean deployment methodologies, particularly in the area of human resources (Tiwari & Tiwari, 2018). The early identification of potential weaknesses and flaws in the human resources system of SMEs has made them more aware of their competencies and weaknesses. Findings suggested, having an adequate customized lean deployment methodology could make SMEs more rational in their voyage of lean implementation and chances of failure can be minimized (Majava & Ojanperä, 2017).

Several studies have examined the relationship between Lean Human Resource initiatives and customer patronage in different organisations as well as geographical contexts (Karunakaran, 2016; Shokri, Waring & Nabhan, 2016; Tortorella, Giglio & Dun, 2019). However, the implementation of these practices and customer patronage is not well established in Nigerian organisations particularly among small and medium scale enterprises (Laureani & Antony, 2012; Nwanya, & Oko 2019). Due to this shift, a gap is observed which requires the attention of empirical studies of this nature. Despite the importance of SMEs to the national economy, the ability to thrive in this ever-changing environment has been a problem. Poor process management, improper evaluation of the steps and sequences in production has been a huge challenge inhibiting proper hiring of employees, continuous improvement, mentorship and the formation of cross-functional teams among some of these SMEs in Nigeria (Laureani & Antony, 2012; Ufuua *et al.*, 2020). Besides, poor infrastructure, low patronage, a high rate of tax, the rising cost of material have also been attributed as part of the problems that SMEs face in the country (Wolugbom & Samuel, 2020). Due to the issues observed above, customer patronage for products have been low as some of

the products rolled out by these SMEs are defective, expensive and fail to have a long shelf life (Cardona-Mora, 2014). Therefore, this study examines the effect of Lean Human Resource initiatives on customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lean Human Resources Initiatives

Lean Human Resource refers to a technique developed to minimize the process waste and maximize the value creation of a human resource, without compromising the quality of work standard (Jekiel, 2011). Lean Human Resource Initiatives is defined as a process of starting the methodology for improving skills and capability to contribute to work quality and task completion while focusing on cutting down all manner of waste. The foundation of Lean Human Resource brings to light the gifts and talents of each employee to a great extent. Traditional workplaces fail to ignite employee's passion. Lean Human Resource principles focus on employee's abilities with customers, improvement, involvement, processes, problem-solving, evaluation, and leadership.

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. Yet many of the Lean Human Resource efforts have had limited success, in the past because they lack the reinforcement of highly developed Human Resource departments. Several forces have led to a great opportunity being ignored by the majority of the organisation (Bamber et al., 2014; Martínez-Jurado & Moyano-Fuentes, 2014; Signoretti & Sacchetti, 2020). Lean Human Resource (LHR) has appeared as a model contributing to improved firm performance (Shah & Ward, 2007), where people deployment can differ. Along an ideal continuum, managers can use lean Human Resource to pursue cost-reduction or people-centred strategies (Bamber et al., 2014; Janoski & Lepadatu, 2019). Within the first

approach, stressful employment conditions limiting employee involvement are realized. In contrast, within people-centered strategies, a specific bundle of complementary human resource management practices qualifying, and empowering workers is implemented.

Given the reviewed scholarly perspectives to this concept, the researcher defines Lean Human Resource initiatives as a process of starting the methodology for improving skills and capability to contribute to work quality and task completion while focusing on cutting down all manner of waste.

Selective Hiring

Selective hiring is the act of recruiting candidates from a specific group, such as those with a specific skill set or those from an under-represented ethnicity (Stokes, 2019). Selective or targeted hiring involves developing recruitment strategies that are more proactive in their approach to attract well-qualified candidates with specific skill sets. Recruiting selectively requires more work to be done upfront before meeting with any potential candidates. In selective hiring, organisations begin by conducting a thorough job analysis of the positions they are trying to fill. The recruiter usually 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 the right people, with the right characteristics and knowledge and who can fit in the culture and climate of the organisation are in the right place (Huselid, 2010). Stokes (2019) opined that selective hiring yields profits boost employee productivity, increases organisational performance and reduces 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).

In recruiting, it is beneficial to attract not only a large number of applicants but a group of individuals with the necessary skills and

requirements for the position. After obtaining a large, qualified applicant base manager need to identify those applicants with the highest potential for success at the organisation (Seo, Lee, & Moon, 2016). Selective hiring helps prevent the costly turnover of staff and increases the likeliness of high employee morale and productivity.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvements are defined as a systematic effort to find and implement new ways of doing work (Berrahal & Marghoubi, 2016). Caroly, Coutarel, Landry and Mary-Cheray (2010) defined continuous improvement as a process that aims to optimize information, physical flows and products to control production costs and quality. Cardona-Mora (2014) further viewed continuous improvement as a process used by companies around the world as a strategy to satisfy the highly demanding market. Yuen, Thai and Wong (2016) defined continuous improvement as a process that describes the essence of quality and pretends to reflect what the companies need to do if they desire to be more competitive and productive over time. Continuous improvement is a concept of improving processes, innovations, new ideas, and investment in technology (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 organisation.

Given the reviewed scholarly perspectives to this concept, the research defines continuous improvement as an organizational concept that seek to improve every process in the organization by focusing on enhancing the activities that generate the most value for customers while removing as many waste activities as possible. To increase the level of competitiveness in increasingly globalized markets, organisations need to consider strategies that promote the continuous improvement of their product or service processes. The need for innovation and continuous improvement has directed the discussion of organisations as learning factory (Gonzalez &

Martins, 2016). Continuous improvement is an organisational effort designed to inculcate a culture of continuous improvement and change, which fosters continual learning and innovation within the organisation. Based on lean management, continuous improvement can be seen as an organisational capacity that involves a behaviour change that establishes an innovative routine in the business (McLean et al., 2017). Additionally, continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to improve products, services or processes. These efforts can seek incremental improvement over time or breakthrough improvement all at once. Continuous improvement under lean is a method for identifying opportunities for streamlining work and reducing waste (Kumar, Dhingra, & Singh, 2018).

Mentoring

Ofobruku and Nwakoby (2015) defined 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 personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps less experienced ones. Mullen and Klimaitis (2021) viewed mentoring as a process by which persons of superior rank and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and /or career development of persons identified as 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 endeavour (Garvey, Garvey, Stokes, & Megginson, 2017).

Mentoring leverages strategic knowledge and skill throughout the organization by sharing and spreading acquired learning and know-how. It allows the learner to acquire new skills, abilities and knowledge that enhance his competences and help in career development. Career development is the opportunities for promotion and development within the organization or field of work (McKinsey,

2016). It is a lifelong process of managing progression in learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move towards a determined future (Pennanen, Bristol, Wilkinson, & Heikkinen, 2016).

Cross-Functional Team

A cross-functional team is a group of people with different functional expertise working toward a common goal. It may include people from finance, marketing, operations, and human resources departments (Daspit, Tillman, Boyd, & Mckee, 2013). Typically, it includes employees from all levels of an organisation. A cross-functional team is a team in which the members have different skill sets, but are all working towards a common goal. It often includes people from different departments and all levels of the organisation, though it can also include participants from outside the organisation (De Oliveira et al., 2016). The use of cross-functional teams (CFTs) is a common practice as managers find ways to create a more responsive firm (Parker, 2003). CFTs consist of individuals from various functional areas in the firm that work together to obtain a specific goal (Laurent & Leicht, 2019; Webber, 2002). CFTs are used to develop new products (Bunduchi, 2009), transform organizations (Hsieh, 2010), increase speed to market (Griffin, 1997), and a variety of other tasks. Members from diverse functional areas contribute unique perspectives to CFTs, which can create innovative teams well-adept at problem solving (Stipp et al., 2018).

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. Information system can be defined technically as a set of interrelated components that collect, process, store, and distribute information to support decision making and control in an organisation (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 organisational or social contexts (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). The efficient operation of an organisation requires the diffusion of information to an organisational level with the purpose to deliver timely and useful information down to the employees.

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 involves the use of technology as a tool for implementing communication processes and communication mediums across multiple situations across 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 organisation to achieve the organisational goal.

Customer Patronage

According to Gremler and Brown (1996), patronage is defined as the level to which a customer displays repeat purchase behaviour from a service provider, possesses an affirmative, enduring outlook and temperament concerning a service provider. From the observation of Oliver (1999), customer patronage is defined as a profoundly held

dedication to repurchase a firm's products at the cost of a competitor's offering. Burnett (1996) opined that patronage behaviour deals with the process of identifying factors and attributes that consumer's use in selecting product/service alternatives. While Oliver (1997) upholds that improving customer satisfaction is a key to gaining customer patronage, Darmayanti and Cahyono (2014) claims that attitudinal loyalty is the very important factor to make customer patronized and that dimension must have given much importance to others. In the opinion of Adiele et al. (2013), the importance or essence of repeat customer patronage is that an increase in sales volume will ultimately and significantly impact the company's profitability level. Consumer patronage is the approval or support provided by customers concerning a particular brand (Nwulu, & Asiegbu 2015). Bolton and Drew (1991) find that behavioural intention is the key to patronize and it can be developed by increasing more satisfied customers by adding value to the services delivered.

In any organisation, patronage is essential as it shows the degree to which a customer exhibits repeated purchasing behaviour from a service provider, has a positive, long-lasting attitude and disposition towards a service provider (Garga & Bambale, 2016). Customer patronage is seen from the perspective of Sari et al. (2017) as a deep commitment to repurchase the products of a company at the expense of the offering of a competitor. Ifeanyichukwu and Peter (2018) argued that patronage is the repetitive purchasing behaviour for either the same products or any other products at a specific store. It shows, from the opinions of the aforementioned authors, that the survival of any organisation is a function of the rate of patronage. This reflects Lim, Jee, Loh and Chai (2020)'s view that creating clients is the main reason for setting up a business.

Repeat patronage is advantageous to an organisation because it arises when an individual displays conscious effort to choose a solution towards his or her need(s) through the process of

analyzing situations which would be rewarding and relatively satisfying amidst some challenges faced while fulfilling his/her own desires (Adiele & Grend, 2016). This explains why individuals can exhibit unconditional attachment and affection towards objects or persons (Adiele & Etuk, 2017). Ahmed, Ghazali and Othman (2013) opined that the factors that may likely influence patronage include the physical surrounding, service quality and food quality. Furthermore, Setian, et al (2013) included product quality, service quality, atmospheric quality, perceived value as factors influencing consumer's patronage intentions. Repeat patronage enables organisation to increase sales, market share and growth (Nwokah, & Adiele, 2018).

Customer patronage is a combination of psychological factors that affect purchasing behaviour (Fofie, 2016); and customers consider these factors important; and they are used as standards in deciding which business to patronize (Ogbuji *et al.*, 2016). Various authors have measured customer patronage in various dimensions, including store traffic flow; willingness, word-of-mouth repeat purchase, retention of customers, customer referrals and customer satisfaction (Awah, 2019; Baker *et al.*, 2002; Ogbuji *et al.*, 2016)

By creating value in product offerings to fulfil the desires of consumers and meet their needs, organisations may increase consumer buying behaviour. Patrick et al. (2019) see the intention of the customer to buy as an important predictor for consumer behaviour prediction. The purpose of patronage explains the possibility that in the future the customer will be able to purchase a particular product. Kosiba, Acheampong, Adeola and Hinson (2020) note that expectations of merchandise value influence purchasing intentions and organisational buying actions. The intent of the buyer to buy can also be seen as a correlation between their attitude toward a product and their actual purchase. There are three notable measurement elements for measuring purchasing intentions, according to

Nadube and Akahome (2017), likely to buy, expected to buy and consider buying.

It is important to remember that a customer's buying behaviour requires psychological concepts that have been developed to harness awareness of the needs of consumers so that goods can be designed and communicated in a legitimate way that can represent the relevant and significant needs of customers (Mhlanga, 2018). Consumer decision-making is a process consisting of five phases that people go through when deciding about what goods or services to buy or patronize a business. Practitioners have historically defined consumer decision-making as a series of five progressive phases, namely: need identification, knowledge quest, alternative assessment, purchasing decision and post-purchase processes (Grewal & Levy, 2010).

Repeat purchase can be defined as the placement of the order by a customer from the same organisation after order, it can also be seen as the purchase by a consumer of a product or services of the same brand, repeat buying clients are clients who are mentally, intellectually, physically fulfilled by a company offering that may be in the form of a product that exceeds their expectations. According to Wirtz and Lwin (2009), repeat transactions in another sense may be referred to as "re-patronage intentions," which is the desire of a person to re-patronize a service organisation. In a trust-based relationship, engagement is created and then becomes a major predictor of future purchases. Customers visit a specific business regularly based on their sense of trust-that is, they assume that by delivering a service, the company has its best interest at heart. Individuals choose to initiate and conclude a purchase action depending on the perceived value of the products. (Caudill & Murphy 2000).

Given the reviewed scholarly perspectives on this concept, the researcher defines customer patronage as the level to which a customer displays purchase intention towards a product or service as a result of experienced or perceived value delivery.

Empirical Review

Consumer behaviour and service point are drivers of customer patronage, according to scholars such as Nyakweba *et al.* (2015) and Onuoha and Nnenaya (2017). In their research, scholars such as Njite *et al.* (2015); Nkpurukwe, Amangala, and Wali (2020) discovered that food quality is the only attribute that has a positive relationship with both consumer patronage and willingness-to-pay in both high-end and limited-service restaurants. Furthermore, the data demonstrated a favourable and significant association between the dimensions of mobile marketing tactics and client patronage indicators. Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015; Onuoha & Nnenaya, 2017 discovered a strong and beneficial association between client patronage and advancement tendency behaviours.

The findings of Nyakweba *et al.*, 2015; Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015; Onuoha & Nnenaya, 2017 also demonstrated that the customer service have a significant impact on consumer patronage. The findings correspond with those of Uchea and Otika (2021), who discovered that advertising has a significant influence on customer patronage of telecommunication services, and that sales promotion has a significant effect on consumer patronage of telecommunication services. Personal selling also has a significant impact on client use of telecommunication services. This corroborated with Nkpurukwe *et al.* (2020) who discovered that the dimensions of mobile marketing techniques and measurements of client patronage were found to have a significant association. The findings are consistent with Ellen (2012), who revealed that advertisements on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram had a significant impact on client patronage of cosmetics in Detroit. Physical evidence and consumer patronage have a significant association, according to Adiele *et al.* (2015), furthermore, the results demonstrated a significant and favourable association between the dimensions of mobile marketing techniques and client patronage measures.

Consequently, the study of Jurburg *et al.* (2016) indicated that there is a significant relationship between structural empowerment and continuous improvement CI implementation, but that this effect occurs with a time lag. Similarly, the study of Ann-Kathrin, Michael and Jürgen (2017) revealed that employee empowerment affects the level of continuous improvement. Correspondingly, Michael, Marek and Sweeney (2018) established that continuous improvement of operational performance such as, plant safety, quality, productivity and delivery should be considered as a Key Performance Indicator for improved organisational performance. The study further disclosed that the design and management of the reward and recognition system had a significant impact on the motivation of shop floor employees to actively engage in continuous improvement activities. Findings from the study of Galeazzo *et al.* (2016) suggest that strategic alignment and teamwork for problem-solving affect continuous improvement capability. However, the study of Rodrigo and Manoel (2015) highlighted that the companies researched in the automotive sector have a higher level of employee engagement in relation to continuous improvement programs compared to the companies in the capital goods sector, which is justified by the strategy adopted by the organisations.

In light of the preceding, it was hypothesized that:

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

Theoretical Review

Resource-Based View

Barney (1991) has been cited as a founding father of this theory. His work 'Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive advantage' is widely cited as a pivotal work in the emergence of the theory. However, some scholars argue that there was evidence for a fragmentary resource-based theory from the 1930s. This theory focuses managerial attention on the firm's internal resources to identify

those assets, capabilities and competencies with the potential to deliver superior competitive advantage. The resource-based view (RBV) is a managerial framework used to determine the strategic resources a firm can exploit to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. While the primary focus of the institutional theory is on organisational homogeneity, the main research question of resource-based theory is performance heterogeneity among organisations (Barney & Clark, 2007). This perspective views organisations as consisting of a variety of resources, generally including four categories: physical capital, financial capital, human capital, and corporate capital resources (Barney & Clark, 2007).

Since resources can either facilitate or inhibit firms from efficiently conceiving and implementing business strategies, the attributes of resources held by firms determine firm performance heterogeneity. Resources that allow a firm to conceive and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness are viewed as valuable and can be a source of competitive parity (Barney, 1989). Resources that are valuable and rare, or valuable and are possessed only by a small number of firms can be a source of competitive advantage. Resources that are valuable, rare, and inimitable, can be a source of sustained competitive advantage (Barney & Clark, 2007). Moreover, to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, a firm needs to have the ability to exploit the full competitive potential of its valuable, rare, and inimitable resources (Barney & Clark, 2007). Such ability often resides in the firm's structures, procedures, and practices.

Several criticisms of RBV have been widely cited. Collis (1994) and Priem and Butler (2001) argued that the RBV is tautological. Wills-Johnson (2008) believes that different resource configurations can generate the same value for firms and thus would not be a competitive advantage. The role of product markets is underdeveloped in the argument (Priem & Butler, 2001). The theory has limited prescriptive implications. The failure to consider factors

surrounding resources; that is, an assumption that they simply exist, rather than a critical investigation of how key capabilities are acquired or developed (Stinchcombe, 2000). It is perhaps difficult (if not impossible) to find a resource that satisfies all of Barney's VRIN criteria (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). An assumption that a firm can be profitable in a highly competitive market if it can exploit advantageous resources does not always hold. It ignores external factors concerning the industry as a whole; Porter's Industry Structure Analysis ought also to be considered (Rumelt, 1991).

Given the research, objectives to be addressed in this study, and despite the sufficiency critics of RBV, this present study is in support of the RBV given that achieving a sustainable competitive advantage and improves organisational performance lies at the heart of much of the literature in both human resources and strategic management. The resource-

based view offers strategists a means of evaluating potential factors that can be deployed to confer a competitive edge. 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 (Barney & Clark, 2007; Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). Thus, the RBV explains the relationship between the independent variable (selective hiring, continuous improvement, mentoring, cross-functional and flexible information system) and the dependent (employee performance, customer patronage, product quality and competitive advantage) variables as hypothesized in this study.

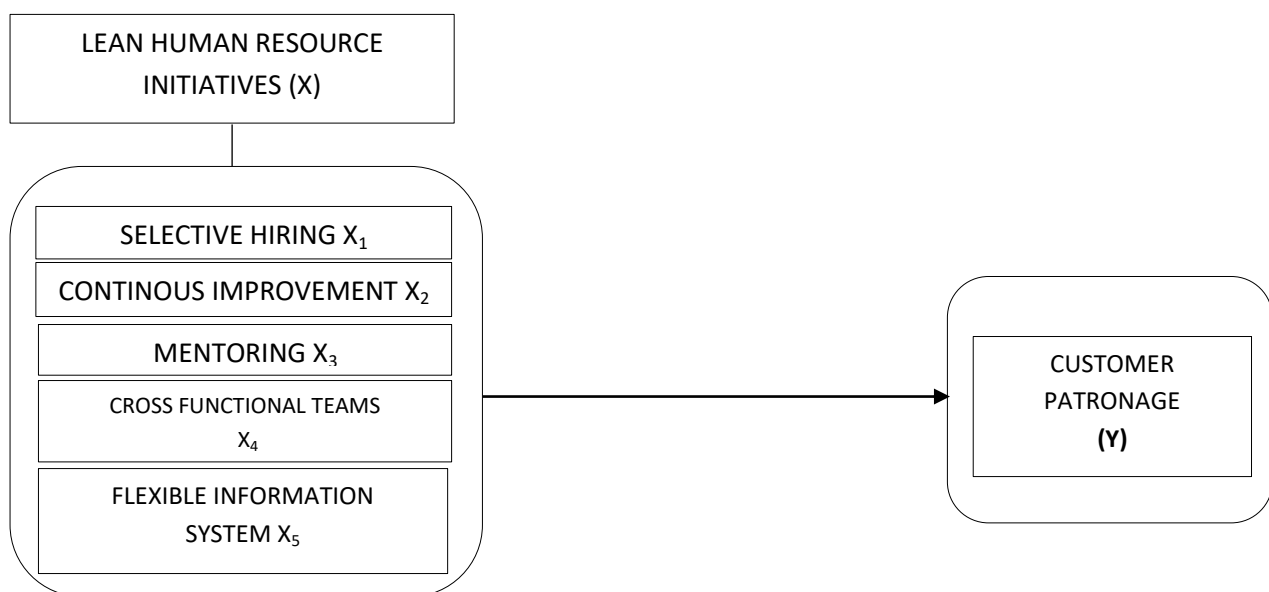


Figure 1: Research Model

Source: Researcher's Model (2021)

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	Customer Patronage	5	0.746	821.313	0.000	0.763	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 indicated 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 Coefficient	Alpha	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	Customer Patronage	5	0.837		0.942	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 benchmark. This confirms that the questionnaire and its variables passed the internal consistency test.

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

H₀: Lean Human Resources initiatives have no significant effect on customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesis using customer patronage as the dependent variable, and Lean Human Resources initiatives as the independent variable. The data for Lean Human Resources initiatives were generated by adding all the responses of selective hiring,

continuous improvement, mentoring, cross-functional teams and flexible information system, while that of customer patronage was generated by adding scores of responses of all items for the variable. The results of the multiple regression analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Regression Results for the Effect of Lean Human Resources initiatives on customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria

Variables	B	SE	Beta	T	p-value
(Constant)	1.326	.633		2.094	.037
Selective Hiring	-.055	.149	-.023	-.367	.714
Continuous Improvement	.408	.175	.185	2.330	.020
Mentoring	.178	.132	.100	1.343	.180
Cross-Functional Teams	-.095	.169	-.043	-.561	.575
Flexible Information System	.260	.158	.124	1.648	.100
R square	0.101				
Adjusted R square	0.090				
F (5,401)	9.041				

Dependent Variable: Customer Patronage

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Interpretation

Table 3 showed the result of the multiple regression analysis which assessed the effect of lean human resources initiatives on customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Analysis of regression results revealed that continuous improvement ($\beta = 0.408$, $t = 2.330$, $p = .020$) have positive and significant effect on customer patronage of selected SMEs. Mentoring ($\beta = 0.178$, $t = 1,343$, $p = .180$) and flexible information system ($\beta = 0.260$, $t = 1.648$, $p = .100$) have positive but nonsignificant effect on customer patronage of selected SMEs, while selective hiring ($\beta = -0.055$, $t = -0.367$, $p = .714$) and cross-functional teams ($\beta = -0.095$, $t = -.561$, $p = .575$) have negative and nonsignificant effect on customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results of the analysis revealed that only one out of the five lean human resources initiatives (continuous improvement) have significant effect on customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. It can be identified that continuous improvement significantly predict customer patronage 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 3, the value of adjusted R Square ($Adj.R^2$) was 0.090 which indicates that lean human resources initiatives explain about 9% of the corresponding changes that occur in customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria while the remaining 91.0% could be attributed to other factors that are not in the model. Also, the F-statistics ($df = 5,401$) = 9.041 at $p < 0.05$ meaning the model is significant in the prediction of customer patronage. This implies that lean human resources initiatives have a significant effect on customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. From the regression results in Table 4.15, the following regression equation was specified:

$$CP = 1.326 + -.055SH + 0.408CI + 0.178ME - 0.095CFT + 0.260FIS \dots\dots\dots \text{eq. 1}$$

Where:

CP = Customer Patronage

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 1.326, indicating that if each of the lean human resources initiatives had a score zero, customer patronage of selected SMEs would be 1.326. This implies that without selective hiring, continuous improvement, mentoring, cross-functional teams and flexible information system, customer patronage would be positive at 1.326. Further, the results of regression analysis reveal that a unit change in selective hiring would lead to 0.055 decrease in customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Also, a unit change in continuous improvement would lead to 0.408 improvement in customer patronage of selected SMEs. Moreover, a change in mentoring will bring about 0.178 increase in customer patronage of selected SMEs. In addition, a unit change in cross-functional teams leads to a decrease in customer patronage of selected SMEs by 0.095, and a unit change in flexible information system would lead to an improvement in customer patronage of selected SMEs by 0.260. The coefficient of continuous improvement is significant at 90% significance level while those of selective hiring, mentoring, flexible information system and cross-functional teams are not statistically significant at 10% significance level. It was therefore deduced that continuous improvement positively influenced customer patronage of the selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results reveal that continuous improvement has the most significant effect on customer patronage of selected SMEs, followed by flexible information system.

According to the findings, selected SMEs in Lagos State should focus on continuous improvement in order to boost customer patronage as well as business survival. 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 customer patronage of

selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria was hereby rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The test of hypothesis two revealed that lean human resources initiatives have a significant effect on customer patronage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. In accordance with the provision of literature, this finding aligns with other studies conceptually, empirically, and theoretically. From the conceptual perspective, the characterisations and clarifications of the concepts of the study offers good conceptual view on the study. Conceptually, Lean Human Resource Initiatives is a process of improving skills and capability to contribute to work quality and task completion while focusing on cutting down all manner of waste. Lean human resource principles focus on employee's abilities with customers, improvement, involvement, processes, problem-solving, evaluation, and leadership. 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.

Empirically, the findings from this study is in consonance Nadarajah et al. (2012) who found 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. Similarly, Mustapha et al. (2013) in their study 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. The findings from this study agrees with the results of studies conducted in Kenya which revealed that the recruitment and selection process significantly affected the performance of employees (Ombui et al., 2014) and the performance of SMEs (Omolo and Otengah, 2015; Omolo et al., 2012). Makhamara et al. (2016) established that strategic recruitment and selection had an effect on employee performance in the health sector in Kenya.

Theoretically, findings of this study present credibility to the theoretical assumptions of human capital theory that supported this research. 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. 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.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

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

The study recommended that Since the study established that Lean Human Resource initiatives had significant effect on customer patronage of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria, owner/managers of small and medium scale enterprises should extend Lean Human Resource initiatives ideas to their organisations as increased customer patronage can expand their capacity to reach more customers and markets.

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