HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Effect of Human Resource Management Practices on the Growth of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Abia State

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of human resource management practices on the growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Abia state. The study employed descriptive survey design while primary data was used through the administration of structured questionnaire as the source and method of data collection for the study respectively. The population of the study comprises of one hundred and fifty (150) staff from the various SMEs in Abia state. The adjusted sample size of the study was computed to be 120 participants using Taro Yamane formula for sample size computation through the use of census as the sampling technique of the study. The data obtained from the respondents were presented using frequency tables, percentages and linear regression (Pearson Correlation). The findings from the study revealed that the independent variables proxied by recruitment and selection, training and development, motivation and remuneration jointly have significant effects on the growth of SMEs. It is therefore, concluded that human resource management practices is a good driver of SMEs growth. Therefore, it is recommended that employees who offer the same level of inputs with respect to skills, efforts, qualifications, experience, should be entitled to equitable outcomes in terms of pay, promotion, job security, and opportunity for advancement. This study underscores the need for government at all levels as well as the Non-Governmental Organizations to come up with a blue-prints designed at empowering the Small and Medium Scale Business Enterprises in terms of survival funds, recruitment, training, remuneration, and overall human resource management practices with a view to drastically unemployment among youths in Abia State, and Nigeria at large.

Keywords: financial performance; human resources; recruitment & selection; SMEs

1 Introduction

The role of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in the globalization process requires that SMEs should have the potentials of addressing global challenges, such as increasing product and service innovation, developing human resources and technology, and expanding the marketing area (Khuram, 2021). It is needed to increase the selling value of SME products, especially to compete with foreign products that are increasingly expanded with industrial and manufacturing centers. Taking into account SMEs are business activities that are able to expand employment opportunities and provide broad economic services to the community (Shaoheng et al., 2019). Hence, SMEs play a role in the process of equal distribution and increase people's income, and encourage economic growth. The availability of human resources for small and medium industries is an advantage allowing them to operate efficiently. On the other hand, the human capital required is relatively small, thus, providing an opportunity for people who have an entrepreneurial spirit to establish business units with available standard of production techniques (Rathnaweera, 2019).

Every organization intends to have an edge over its competitors in order to sustain and gain competitive advantage. Organizations, nowadays, are gradually moving fast bringing along several changes in their strategies and culture. To sustain in the market, management ponder upon different aspects like technology, finance, marketing or human resources (Saima & Samreen, 2015). Although organizations may pursue many paths, one that is frequently not recognized is investing in human resources. Human resources are the source of achieving competitive advantage because of its capability to convert the other resources (money, machine, methods and material) into output (product/service). The other things can be imitated by the competitors like technology and capital but the human resources are unique assets of an organization (Anjum, 2020).

Human resource management (HRM) practices should be used in an effective way in order to enhance organizational growth. Even though, some companies recognize the growing importance of human resources, but few conceptualize them in strategic terms. As a result, many companies forego the opportunity to seize competitive advantage through the initiative of strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices. Strategic human resource management practices refers to organizational activities aimed at managing the pool of human resources and ensuring that the resources are employed towards the fulfillment of organizational goals (Khuram et al. 2021). Strategic Human resource management practices are those activities of management which are directed towards ensuring employee commitment and productivity to achieve sustainable competitive advantage for the firm (Ofelia & Alina-Georgiana, 2016). Khuram et al. (2021) perceived HRM practices as a set of internally consistent policies and practices designed and implemented to ensure that a firm's human capital contributes to the achievement of its business objectives (Khuram et al., 2021). SHRM practices include recruitment and selection procedures, training and development activities, compensation and reward systems and performance appraisal processes. Traditional HRM emphasized only specific activity or task but modern HRM emphasizes (Ukil, 2016) on their total contribution in the firm, concerning for overall effectiveness and synergy of these practices. HRM practices of an SME have a significant influence in making employees committed to exhibit the kind of attitudes and behaviors that are needed to develop good image of the SME (Willard & Crispen, 2019). These practices together play an important role in the development of relations within or outside of the SME and are based on high level of trust. The outcomes of effective HRM practices are generation and sustenance of a committed workforce towards the SME, job and service attitude (Hoang & Hiep, 2021). No matter how well constructed is SME's plans, even then employee attitude and attitudes can determine the success or failure of an SME. The HRM practices play an important role in fostering service delivery and subsequently organizational growth. Thus, an effective HR management in SMEs is a prerequisite for quality service.

These SMEs play a significant role in economic growth process by providing a large portion of production in the rapidly changing world due to their adaptability features (Singh et al., 2020). SMEs show major contribution in the development of a county's economy, its political stability as well as social uplifting and this make SMEs to be flexible in nature. They can be established for all kind of activities of every business and are considered as a back bone of country's economy. The government has given much attention on the development of SMEs because of their significant role in the economic development (Khalique et al., 2011). On the other hand, SMEs growth is one of the key problems and crucial factor in the field of management studies and of interest to practitioners and academicians. Therefore, understanding the background, process and determinant of SMEs growth has long been a major goal of scholars and other relevant stakeholders. In other spectrum, business growth of the SMEs is also argued as being induced by external factors and internal organization

(Juzaimi et al., 2016). In view of the aforementioned, this study seeks to examine the effect of human resource management practices on the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Abia state.

Despite efforts being made by the Nigerian Government over the years to improve the quality of SMEs through the capacity development of human resource for effective management and growth potentials, the level of growth in the small and medium scale business enterprises (SMEs) is still poor and quiet challenging. This situation of human resource management has become a matter of concern to stakeholders in all sectors of the economy and the society at large. The dwindling efficiency and productivity to achieve its desired level of profit could be attributed to the following challenges: unrealistic recruitment and selection procedures, motivational and remuneration systems, training and development criteria, inadequate supervision, job security, job rotation and job satisfaction strategies among others. SMEs were considered as one of the most important driving forces behind economies of both developed and emerging economies due to their numerous contributions. The growth of SMEs is determined by various factors such as management process, marketing, strategies, networks, technology, HRM practices, and so on (Ukil, 2016). Adoption of such practices and the extent to which those are put in place, depend upon the management and human resources of a particular SME. Thus, without having positive support from the human resources, it is difficult to obtain desired results even though other practices such as marketing strategies, management process and network are apparent in the SMEs (Ndungu & Kwasira, 2016). In most of the developing countries, growth of SMEs is one of the key issues since they are less productive and faces many constrains of technological backwardness, lack of human resource skills, weak management systems, and entrepreneurial capabilities, unavailability of appropriate and timely information, insufficient use of information technology and poor product quality (Sedyastuti et al., 2020). As a result, there exists a low level of growth among SMEs. Statistical evidence has shown that there is declining level of growth among SMEs in Nigeria in which Abia state was not an exception Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2021).

Research on HRM is generic and predominantly focused on large corporate entities (Hameed et al., 2014). Little research has been conducted on SMEs and more specifically in developing countries. The findings of HRM for a large organization or in developed countries cannot be generalized for SMEs in emerging market economies, as they face numerous obstacles specific to them. Though, magnitude of studies examining the effect of HRM practices on growth of SMEs can be found in large western corporate entities such as (Saima & Samreen, 2015) among others. Therefore, it is highly imperative to examine the effect of human resource management practices on the growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Abia State. Based on the practical and theoretical problems, it was formulated thus, what are the effects of HRM practices on the growth of SMEs in Abia State? Other specific research questions are as follows:

1. What is the effect of recruitment and selection on growth of SMEs in Abia State?
2. What is the effect of training and development on the growth of SMEs in Abia State?
3. What is the effect of motivation and remuneration on the growth of SMEs in Abia state?

1.1 Research objectives

The primary aim of this study is to examine the effect of human resource management practices on the growth of SMEs in Abia State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of recruitment and selection on the growth of SMEs in Abia state.
2. Evaluate the effect of training and development on the growth of SMEs in Abia.

3. Determine the effect of motivation and remuneration on the growth of SMEs in Abia state.

1.2 Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated in null form:

H01: Recruitment and selection have no significant effect on the growth of SMEs.

H02: Training and development have no significant influence on the growth of SMEs.

H03: Motivation and remuneration have no significant impact on the growth of SMEs.

2 Conceptual framework

2.1 Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs)

According to extant literature, the definition varies in different economics but the underlying concept is the same. Orji, (2014); contends that the definition of small and medium scale enterprises varies according to context, author and countries. Small and medium scale enterprises are certainly not transnational company, multinational cooperation, publicly owned enterprises or large facility of any kind. However, they can depend on business and ownership structure to become a large business unit (Osalor, 2010), while it can be argued that eighty percent (80%) of the financing of SMEs come from owners, friends and families, business form can take different form including private ownership, limited partnership, contract and subcontracts, cooperatives or association (Aruni et al. 2014). Small and medium scale enterprises have a narrow context within which its operation is carried out. However, where it is effectively operated it has capacity to sprout the economic growth and national development. In every economics small and medium scale enterprises has been seen has a pivotal instrument of economic growth and development either in developed for developing economics. Several studies have confirmed the foregoing assertion prominent among which were (Pi-Shen, 2016; Orji, 2014, Aruni, 2014). Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) have been long recognized as an instrument of economic growth and development. This growing recognition has led to the commitment of World Bank group on SMEs sector as core element in its strategy to foster economic growth, employment and poverty alleviation.

The importance of small and medium scale enterprises has not been in doubt; unfortunately classifying businesses into large and medium scale is subjective and premised on different value judgment (Odunayo, 2021). Such classification has followed different criteria such as employment, sales or investment for defining small and medium scale enterprises. Several definitions and meanings of SMEs exist. This is due to their global diversity and characteristics (Conrad & Darren, 2009). In his own assertion, Arowomole (2015) affirmed that a single universally accepted definition of SMEs has not been easy as different countries have different criteria for defining SMEs. Adding that many countries have defined it in terms of manpower, management structure and capital investment limit. He further noted that experts in this field have also contributed to the diversity in SMEs definitions.

Baumback (2013) defined SME in terms of employment, asset value and dollar sales. According to Jasra et al. (2011), Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) represent a business and not a public limited company; Jasra, et al. (2011) further posited that SMEs are businesses having not less than two hundred and fifty (250) workers in the case of manufacturing and service industries including trading businesses. The points highlighted earlier bear witness and demonstrate that the common criteria for defining SMEs include: employment, number of employees, size, industry, country, asset

value etc. This is consistent with the findings of Conrad and Darren (2009). They contended that the most valid measures for defining SME are number of employees and size. Generally, SME sector is categorized into three: micro, small and medium enterprises or businesses. The micro-SMEs are the smallest among the three categories. With regard to small businesses, several definitions of small businesses have been advanced over the years. Alorape (2016) defines it as "an enterprise with a labor size of 11-100 employees or a total cost of not less than N50 million, including working capital but excluding cost of land". The Nigerian industrial policy defined SMEs as industries with total investment of between N100, 000 and N2 million, exclusive of land but including working capital. One of the most popular definitions of SMEs is given by the American Small Business Administration (SBA) as that business or firm which is independently owned and operated; it is not dominant in its field and meets the criteria for the SME business administration sponsored loans programme (Aro-womole, 2015). The Medium businesses as the name suggests are bigger than both micro and small businesses in terms of operations,manpower capacity or number of employees, structure, capital investment and size.

2.2 Human resource management practices

HR practices mean that it is a set of policies and practices which boost up the firm's human capital to contribute to the achieving of business objectives (Odunayo, 2021). HR Practices are linked with the management of human resources, activities necessary for staffing the organization and sustaining high employee performance (Ukaejiofo, 2013). The most common HR Practices are recruitment, selection, training, and development, compensation, rewards and recognition (Uzma et al., 2017). "Research has shown that the most significant difference between HR practices in SMEs and larger firms is not in what practices are adopted, but in how they are adopted". One important dimension in how HR practices are adopted is the level of formality in HR management. There is not a single universally accepted definition of HRM formalization. Sarwoko et al. (2013) have covered almost all the important aspects of HR formality. According to their definition, formal HRM means that procedures or practices are written down (like a list of skills and qualifications for jobs), regularly applied within an organization (like yearly performance review), assured to take place like employer sponsored training. On the other spectrum, Malaolu, and Ogbuabor (2013) defined HR formality as the extent to which HR practices are documented, systematized, and internalized. Thus, formal practices have identifiable policies, rules, and regulations that are documented and integrated into the firm. An informal mechanism exists when no system is put in place and decisions are made on a personal and case-by-case basis (Mukhtar et al., 2019). Iwere (2013) suggests that business owners face a tension between formality and informality of HR practices in general. The existing literature shows that the majority of the SMEs use informal HR practices. Managers/owners of SMEs often view HR practices as costly, bureaucratic and time-consuming (Gabriel et al., 2015). Therefore, many SMEs are informal in terms of HR practices and are less likely to practice HRM compared to larger organizations (Orji, 2014). Most scholars agree that the owner/manager is the first factor who keeps SME HRM informal (Han, 2016). Owners/managers avoid using formal HR practices as they prefer to keep direct personal control of the firm and hesitate to delegate responsibilities to other mangers. According to Gabriel, et al. (2015) posited that formalized HRM practices required considerable development costs. Owners of SMEs are afraid of adopting formalized HR practices due to lack of resources, such as time and money (Anjum, 2020). Vision and knowledge of the owner/manager and limited time and resources play a role in keeping SMEs informal. Firm size has been identified as the main organizational factor influencing HRM policies and practices of SMEs (Shaoheng, et al., 2019).

2.3 Growth

The term "Growth" as asserted by Odunayo (2021) is described as an action or achievement considered in relation to how successful it is. Growth is differently measured and the perspective are tied together and consistently monitored from the organization context (Jamil & Mohamed, 2011). From the Mukhtar (2019) definition, it can be reasonably deduced that growth is synonymous to performance, improvement or expansion. What connotes growth varies from one organization to another. Prior to 1980s, financial indicators were the sole measurement rod of growth such as: profit, return on investment, sales per employees and productivity. Short after 1980s till date, attentions have been shifted from financial to less tangible and non-financial measure. This includes; Just in-time delivery (JITD), total quality management (TQM), Communication, trust, stakeholder satisfaction, competitive position and quality of product (Khuram et al., 2021).

3 Theoretical framework

In this section, a diagrammatical illustration and description of the various concepts under both independent variables and dependent variable were clearly made for proper demonstration of facts, focus and direction for the study. The independent variables concepts under the nomenclature of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices include; Recruitment and Selection (RS), Training and Development (TD) and Motivation and Remuneration (MR) while Profitability was used as a proxy for Growth of SMEs (GSMEs).

For the purpose of this study, the resource based view theory of competencies (RBV) and the human capital theory were employed. The justification for the adoption of these theories was based on the fact that HRM practices are valuable and intangible resources that lead to the growth of SMEs. Resource Based View (RBV) theory advocates that a business can distinguish itself from its competitors and can create sustainable competitive advantage only if it possesses valuable, rare, and inimitable resources (Shaoheng et al., 2019). The theorists of RBV have observed that entrepreneur's competencies are key a resource of the firms that are valuable as well. Human capital is an intangible asset of firms that enables them to be more successful (Nasurdin et al., 2012). The valuable skills, knowledge and abilities of an entrepreneur may lead to sustainable competitive advantage of firm because entrepreneurial competencies are usually very rare and difficult for rivals to develop all essential competencies. Only the competent entrepreneurs may develop and lead successful strategies towards the success of businesses. For instance, the firm's RBV theory relates its value creation process to the manager's capability in finding or developing resources (Shaoheng et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the human capital theory on the other hand relate to entrepreneurial success in a similar way as personality structure; sufficient knowledge and working experience in the relevant fields enable business founders to choose more efficient approaches, for instance in organizing production processes, creating financial strategies, or analyzing markets for the new product (Drucker, 1985). The human capital of the entrepreneur is the second part of the character-based approach after the entrepreneurial personality. Human capital theory is concerned with knowledge and experiences of small-scale business owners. The general assumption is that aside Human capital acting as a resource, the human capital of the founder also improves small firm chances to survive (Odunayo, 2021).

Human capital theory has an important implication: Since the theory is concerned with knowledge and capacities, the theory implies processes as well: human capital can be trained and improved.

Additionally, if human capital acts as a resource it might be interesting to evaluate human capital implications of employees in small scale enterprises as well. In manufacturing settings, it was shown, that a human resource management (HRM) system was related to performance especially when it was combined with a quality manufacturing strategy (Rathnaweera, 2019).

4 Methodology

This study adopted survey design because it provides the opportunity to describe the variables through the collection of primary data with the use of structured questionnaire. The purpose of using survey design is to collect detailed and factual information that describes an existing phenomenon. This is based on the research philosophy and approach of the study being constructivism and qualitative respectively. Specifically, the choice of the philosophy was based on the notion that it seeks to examine "what ought to be" concerning a particular phenomenon while the qualitative approach was selected as it deals with the collection of alphabetic or non-numerical data through the administration of questionnaire and data analysis.

The population of this study comprises of both junior and senior staff of SMEs in Umuahia North, Aba South and Ohafia Local Governments of Abia state. A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents in the three (3) LGAs in the state. Therefore, one hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were distributed to the respondents for the purpose of this study. The study employed mixed sampling techniques comprising of stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Stratified sampling technique was used to select SMEs from the three (3) LGAs in the state and ensured that all SMEs categories in the state were considered regardless of their nature or structure of business operations. Simple random sampling technique was used to select employees of the SMEs comprising of junior and senior management cadre from each SME. Structured questionnaire was employed and used to collect data for this study. Direct administration of this questionnaire was meant to allow for free interaction between the researcher and the respondents. Questionnaire and historical documentations (records) were used as instrument of data collection.

The data collected were arranged and analyzed based on the hypotheses formulated and the research questions. Thus, descriptive analysis of questionnaire administered and simple linear regression and Pearson correlation techniques were suitably employed for the study. The validity of the measuring instrument was reviewed by the experts in human Resources and Business Administration in line with research context. However, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.5 was treated as additional evidence of convergent validity, the construct validity of all variables involved in the study were established through Exploratory Factor Analysis using varimax extraction which confirmed that Human Resource Management Practices and Growth of Small Medium Scale Enterprises Questionnaire (HRMGSMEQ). Questionnaire developed for this study is valid for decision making.

5 Results and discussion

5.1 Summary of regression analysis

In order to test the hypothesis of the study, linear regression analysis was used. In the analysis, growth of SMEs was used as the dependent variable, while human resource recruitment and selection practices were used as the independent variable. The responses of all items for each variable were summed up together to form the score for the variable. Table 1 presents the results of the analysis as follows:

Table 1. Summary of linear regression analysis: human resource recruitment and selection practices and growth of SMEs.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients: Beta values	Unstandardized coefficients: Standard error	Standardized coefficients: Beta values	T-values	P-values (Sig.)
Constant	−0.808	0.287	–	−2.959	0.003
Recruitment and Selection (R & S)	0.701	0.005	0.964	122.241	0.000

Note: R = 0.964; R^2 = 0.921; F(1.1244) = 165740.14.

[a] Dependent Variable: Growth of SMEs (Profitability).

Source: Researcher's Field Survey Results (2025).

From the Table 1, it shows the regression analysis between human resource management (recruitment and selection) practices and growth of SMEs. Table 1 shows the Unstandardized coefficient of human resource recruitment and selection practices to be .701 (p=0.000) signifying that human resource recruitment and selection practices have significant effects on the growth of SMEs in Abia state. This is further confirmed by the value of F = 165740.14 and t = 122.24 with P < 0.05. This implies that human resource recruitment and selection practices of SMEs have statistical significant effects on the growth of SMEs.

Further evidence is the percentage of variance in employees' motivation explained by human resource recruitment and selection practices was 0.921 (R2 = 0.921). This implies that human resource recruitment and selection practices explain 92.1% of the variations in growth of SMEs in Abia state. It also implies that when human resource recruitment and selection practices were used, the growth (profitability) of SMEs in the state changed by 92.1%. The remaining 7.9% of changes in growth (profitability) was caused by other variables not captured in the study. Therefore, the null hypothesis one (H01) which states that recruitment and selection practices have no significant effects on SMEs growth (profitability) in Abia State. Thus, H01 is hereby rejected.

To test hypothesis two, Pearson correlation analysis was used. Data used to test the hypothesis was collected using eleven items measuring the remuneration and motivation, and seven items measuring employees' job commitment. The responses of all items for each variable were summed up together to form score for the variables. Table 2 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 2. Summary of linear regression analysis: human resource training and development (T & D) and growth of SMEs.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients: Beta values	Unstandardized coefficients: Standard error	Standardized coefficients: Beta values	T-values	P-values (Sig.)
Constant	−0.613	0.314	–	−3.863	0.006
Training and Development (T & D)	0.852	0.008	0.832	146.318	0.000

Note: R = 0.832; R^2 = 0.873; F(2.1344) = 113682.62.

From Table 2, it shows the regression analysis between human resource training and development and growth of SMEs in Abia state. Table 2 shows the unstandardized coefficient of human resource training and development to be 0.852 with a corresponding probability value of (p=0.000). This signifies that human resource training and development have significant influence on growth of SMEs

in Abia State. This is further indicated by F = 113682.62 and t = 146.318 with P < 0.000. This implies that human resource training and development have statistical significant influence on growth of SMEs in the three local government areas of the state. Further evidenced is the percentage of variance in growth of SMEs as explained by human resource training and development was 0.921 (R2 = 0.873). This implies that human resource training and development practices explain 87.3% of the total changes in growth (profitability) of SMEs in Abia state. It also means that when human resource training and development practices were used to determine the growth of SMEs in Abia state by 87.3%. Based on the findings therefore, the null hypothesis two (H02) which states that human resource training and development practices have no significant influence on SMEs growth (profitability) in Abia State is hereby rejected.

To test hypothesis three of the study, Pearson correlation analysis was used. This is illustrated in Table 3 which shows the results of the analysis as follows:

Table 3. Pearson correlation analysis: motivation and remuneration and growth of SMEs.

Variables (Parameters)	Correlation Parameters	SMEs Growth (Profitability)	Motivation and Remuneration
SMEs Growth (Profitability)	Pearson Correlation	1	0.119*
	Sig. (2 – tailed)		0.000
	N	120	1346
Motivation and Remuneration	Pearson Correlation	0.119*	1
	Sig. (2 – tailed)	0.000	
	N	120	120

* Correlation is statistically significant @ the 0.05 level (2 – tailed).

[a] Dependent Variable: Growth of SMEs (Profitability). Source: Researcher's Field Survey Results (2025).

Based on the results illustrated in Table 3, it reveals the results of Pearson correlation analysis on the relationship between motivation & remuneration and growth of SMEs in Abia State. The Pearson Correlation of motivation & remuneration and growth of SMEs was computed and established as 0.119 (p-value = 0.000) showing a weak significant and positive relationship between the two variables. This means that there is a weak positive relationship between motivation, remuneration and growth of SMEs in Abia State. The result shows that an increase in the level of motivation and remuneration leads to a drastic increase in the growth level of SMEs in Abia state. Therefore, the null hypothesis three (H03) which states that motivation and remuneration have no significant impact on the growth of SMEs in Abia State. Hence, it confirms the reason for rejecting hypotheses three (H03) of the study. For hypotheses three, H03 is rejected.

5.2 Discussions of findings and hypotheses testing

The first hypothesis was to assess the effect of human resource recruitment and selection practices on growth of SMEs in Abia State. The findings have revealed that human resource recruitment and selection practices have significant effect on growth of SMEs in the Abia state. The effect of human resource recruitment and selection practices is also statistically significant. The study also provides evidence to infer that human resource recruitment and selection practices play important role in ensuring the growth of SMEs in Abia state. The findings of this study are supported by scholars such

as Aliyu (2017), indicated that the best human resource practice areas are recruitment and selection, socialization, job design, training, communication/participation, career development, performance management, employee reward and job security. It is plausible that when employees judge the SMEs to be fair and supportive in their treatment of workers, particularly with regards to the availability and frequency of promotional opportunities, adequacy of pay and good supervision, positive feelings of well-being was created, which is likely to stimulate their loyalty to the growth of SMEs (Nasurdin et al., 2012).

The second hypothesis (H02) was to ascertain the association between training and development and growth of SMEs in Abia State. The findings however, revealed that training and development has statistical positive and significant association with growth of SMEs in Abia State. Findings agree with those of Odunayo (2021) who documented that training and development as the basic responsibility is likely to enhance employees' productivity and ultimately reflect on the growth level of SMEs. The finding is also in consonance with the study of Shehnaz and Ramayah (2015) which established that working environment in an organization coupled with training and development increases the level of job satisfaction among employees which subsequently reflect on the growth level of organizations.

The third hypothesis (H03) was to ascertain the relationship between motivation/remuneration and growth of SMEs in Abia State. The findings however, revealed that motivation and remuneration have weak positive and significant relationship with growth of SMEs in Abia State. Findings agree with those of Singh et al. (2020), Saima and Samreen (2015) that assert that motivation as the primary task of the manager to create and sustain a fair reward in which employees can work efficiently and understand the objectives of the organization. The finding is also in agreement with the findings of Shehnaz and Ramayah (2015) which established that working environment in an organization increases level of job satisfaction that ultimately leads to achievement of organizational goals.

6 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that human resource management practices have significant effect on the growth of SMEs in Abia state. Based on the analysis, it was concluded that recruitment and selection method have significant effect on the growth of SMEs in Abia state. It was also concluded that training and development is a good driver of SMEs growth in Abia state. It was finally concluded that motivation and remuneration are the two inseparable factors that impact on the growth of SMEs in Abia state.

7 Recommendations

Based on the conclusion drawn on findings, it is recommended as follows:

1. There should be consistency in recruitment and selection activities. It is, therefore, recommended that the process of recruitment and selection should be objective and strictly based on merit system. Thus, job specifications should be developed and strictly adhered to during the process of recruitment and selection while SMEs should have clearly defined recruitment policies which are consistent with the prevailing law.
2. The proprietors of SMEs in Abia State should imbibe the spirit of consistency in training and development activities. Therefore, the owners of SMEs business should ensure that training offered to employees is relevant to their needs. For this reason, appropriate machinery should be put in place to conduct regular skills gap analysis to identify the training needs of their employees in order

to improve on their capacity building. This could be achieved if the employee evaluation process is regularly carried out. The feedback process is bound to expose deficiencies such as training needs wherever they exist and thus, assisting SMEs in state to adequately address the observed deficiency.

3. Adequate provisions should be made within the available and scarce resources of the SMEs budget. This can be done through a periodic allocation of certain amount of money in tandem with regular promotion of employees for greater efficiency and productivity from the part of employees.

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