

A Qualitative Appraisal of Job Exits Pervasiveness among Small and Medium Businesses in South West Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper primarily examines the degree of Employee Turnover occurrence in the manufacturing and service SMEs in Southwestern Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative methodology, using interview technique to collect primary data from employees, owners and managers of the businesses. Forty-five in-depth interviews were conducted in the businesses in four of six southwestern states. The collected data was analysed using NVIVO Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS). Research results revealed multiple exits of employees within a short period; exits also appeared common among professionals (e.g. accountants) and casual workers. Generally, high and frequent exits are rife amongst employees. Some of the complex reasons for leaving include inadequate remuneration, job casualisation, inability to provide for family members, poor condition of service, stress, victimisation and fear of the unknown. In conclusion, some owners and managers are still indifferent to the high level of employee turnover, creating the potential for further crises, including business collapse.*

Key words: qualitative, job exits, businesses, employees, owner/managers, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Extant Employee Turnover (E-T) literature recognises the phenomenon as an established issue in sizable number of business organisations, to the extent that some sectors of the economy like hospitality (Dogru, McGinley, Sharma, Isik, and Hanks, 2023; Dwesini, 2019; Nadiri and Tanova, 2010) and banking (Saleh, 2022, Falahat et al., 2019; Keltner and Finegold, 2012), both in services are identified as typically experiencing high exit intentions, and turnover rates. Anitha and Begum (2016) carried out a study on automobile manufacturing industry in India and reveals that, despite employees being the most valuable assets to an organisation, retaining them poses significant threat to most Indian organisations; similar studies have also shown that, not

only is low employee retention a problem in India car businesses, it could also be the single most significant issue that aggravate other problems within the firms.

Sometimes used interchangeably as 'labour turnover', 'wastage' or 'attrition', Employee Turnover is contextually defined in several ways; first as *the rate at which people leave an organisation* (Armstrong, 2009) and have to either be replaced, or the position they left be merged with the jobs of some of those left in the organisation, or be scrapped altogether in certain circumstances. It has also been recently defined as "...as the departure of a high-performing employee..." (Lazzari, Alvarez, and Ruggieri, 2022), and "...as a rotation of individuals around the labour market..." in the study by Ali and Anwar (2021)

The research carried out by Basnyat and Lao (2020) suggests that E-T problem has become alarming for the past few years, and Knapp and Missiakoulis (1983) study among trainee social workers in the UK's English and Welsh local authorities also shows that labour turnover is constant and problematic. The authors suggest that the problem may be particularly acute in organisations where employees' experience, skills and knowledge are essential prerequisites, since replacement is costly and the disruption may affect the remaining workforce. By interpretation, an organisation where skill is essential will be affected more by turnover compared to others. Knapp and Missiakoulis (1983) conclude that turnover rates vary for workers in different locations, even within the department of social services in the United Kingdom. Associating turnover with *gender*, the latter authors find that female employees have a higher turnover rate compared to male. Employees' *age and educational qualification* are also connected to turnover rate (e.g. employees under 35 years of age have higher turnover rates). However, those who hold higher educational qualifications have lower turnover rates.

In addition, a study of selected SMEs in Northern Ireland by Harney and Dundon (2006) finds that turnover is high among the businesses they studied; the authors link the high turnover level to human relation issues. One key point to note about this information is that frequent employee turnover that is linked to employment relations may suggest that turnover is not necessarily voluntary at all times; rather, it may have also been indirectly forced on employees by the actions/inactions of business owner/managers. In similar studies, first a review of turnover studies in the African context (Dwesini, 2019), high level of the phenomenon was detected; secondly, a study of American employees of a medium-sized luxury hotel reported that 50% of the employees sampled intend to leave their jobs (Hartman and Yrle, 1996). This level of intent to leave is significant because intent has been found to be a good indicator of actual exit (Asumadu, 2019; McCarthy et al., 2007). Therefore, significantly high intent level may suggest potentially high level of turnover in such organisations with its attendant problems like associated costs.

Despite this knowledge about the E-T phenomenon, particularly in the developed and emerging nations, the degree of its occurrence in developing nations like Nigeria is unclear. In the UK for instance, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2008) survey of E-Turnover and related concepts such as recruitment and retention report that an average turnover rate is 17.3 per cent. Although studies like Ugoani's (2016, p. 1063) study of E-T in small businesses in Nigeria contends that "... *employee turnover adversely affects productivity in small business entities in Nigeria*", the author did not cover E-T rate and extent. Even many studies on E-T in Small and Medium-sized businesses in advanced and emerging countries are not necessarily focused on the rate of employee turnover. This is because, measuring the extent of E-T or retention in organisations usually require that the information on the phenomenon be garnered from organisational records (Price, 1997); unfortunately record keeping in most Nigerian organisations/businesses are recognised as often lacking, inconsistent or inadequate (Okpara and Wynn, 2008). Poor recording keeping in SMEs is neither uncommon nor peculiar to Nigerian SMEs; Esselaar, Stork, Ndiwalana and Deen-Swarray (2006) find that many of the SMEs sampled across 14 African countries (of which Nigeria was one) kept little or no records; the problem is also noted among some UK SMEs (Woodcock, Mosey & Wood, 2000). Similarly, Cai et. al. (2020) note that the reporting or predicting of employee turnover is difficult due to lack of some important information.

Therefore, based on the significance of SMEs to nations and the rife nature of E-T in such businesses, a focus on understanding the degree of E-Turnover in those firms is necessary as organisational performance can be significantly impacted by persistent and unwanted employee exits. The associated costs of turnover occurrence are some of its adverse effects (Coats, 2024; De Winne et al., 2019), and its impact on the organisation in this regard can be huge. Given these high costs, efficiently managed E-Turnover is essential to achieve long term sustainability of businesses (Hinkin and Tracey, 2000). However, as indicated in earlier paragraphs, this is difficult without an adequate knowledge concerning the extent and nature of turnover; this paper attempts to bridge the gap in literature on such aspect of E-T study. Based on the foregoing, efforts are made in this paper to contribute to existing knowledge of employees' exits from organisations by providing in-depth analysis of the phenomenon's pervasiveness in small and medium-sized businesses in southwestern Nigeria, while also highlighting the general nature of E-Turnover. Additionally, some of the key reasons the exits occur are explained from employees', owners' and managers' perspectives. The statement of research problem is discussed in the next section.

Statement of Research Problem

Businesses in Nigeria, an integral part of the West African sub-region and Africa as a continent are associated with long term inadequacy in detailed empirical literature and

data, particularly with reference to small businesses (Ikem, Chidi and Titus, 2021; Onyeiwu, 1993). Similarly, HR-linked research in entrepreneurial firms are generally in short supply (Zahra, 2021; Heneman, Tansky and Camp, 2000). It can be argued that the shortage in studies of such nature in Africa appear to mirror the reported dearth of E-Turnover studies on businesses in Asia [e.g. Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan] (Chiat and Panatik, 2019; Khatri, Fern and Budhwar, 2006).

However, given the problematic nature of employee turnover, especially when the rate is high in SMEs that are fundamental to the growth and development of an economy, inadequate focus on studying them may be problematic to the businesses themselves and the economy at large. Cloutier, Felusiak, Prairie and Pemberton-Jones report that employee turnover “...increases cost in resources, recruiting, and time when replacing open positions (2015, p. 119). Significantly too, the expenses that accrue from an organisation recruiting replacement employees in place of those who exited is estimated at about half to 200% of the salary of the former employee (Hebenstreit, 2008). This, no doubt, could have serious implications for any organisation as other associated costs also mount.

Primary Objective of the Research

The main goal of this paper is to examine the extent to which Employee Turnover (E-T) incidents occur in manufacturing and service SMEs in Southwestern Nigeria, adopting the qualitative approach.

Philosophical foundation for the study

This paper’s methodology transcends the tradition of applying the quantitative methodology to studying employee turnover phenomenon (Kiessling and Harvey, 2005) by employing the qualitative approach, adopting semi-structured interviews, as espoused by Stamolampros, Korfiatis, and Chalvatzis (2019) in their research. Advocates of the need to adopt qualitative methodologies in Human Resource, Industrial Relations and Management researches (e.g. Kiessling and Harvey) identify that the odds of methods of research for data collection and analysis had favoured the quantitative for a long time (Price, 2001). Essentially, recognition is provided for qualitative methods to enhance an in-depth understanding of any phenomenon understudy. Many other scholars (e.g. Williams, 1999; Mingers and Brocklesby, 1997) advocated its adoption in the three types of studies previously identified; the scholars also support *mixed methodologies* for the same sets of studies. Kiessling and Harvey (2005) reiterate that adopting the positivists’ quantitative methods for the studies could be tantamount to failure to recognise the complex nature of E-T, and as such it qualifies for a methodology like the qualitative that could dig beneath figures for data and knowledge enrichment.

As part of the efforts to explain the significance of qualitative methodologies, Cornelissen argue that qualitative research bears the hallmark of a capability to produce “...rich and detailed explanatory accounts of management and organisational phenomena...” (2017, p. 369). The author emphasised the rich tradition that defines qualitative research as it assists the researcher to delve deeper into a study, creating understanding and knowledge acquisition of managerial and organisational phenomena in such a way that enriches study data, processes and research outcomes. Cornelissen (2017, p. 368) advocate that the “...explanatory potential of qualitative research should be harnessed rather than suppressed...” in order to preserve the theoretical divergence qualitative methods present alongside quantitative ones given the growth that qualitative research studies have enjoyed in recent decades.

From the foregoing, the obvious shortage of qualitative and mixed methods in HR, Industrial Relations and Management research makes it another gap in literature that this study bridges.

METHODOLOGY

As previously indicated, this study adopted the qualitative methodology for both data collection and analysis. Primary data was collected from the trio of employees, managers and owners of randomly selected manufacturing and service SMEs in southwestern Nigeria with the aid of semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview was of two types, the first was developed for the employees, while the second was developed for owners/managers. However, despite separating the interviews into two types, the interview items were very similar and addressing the same issues for *instrument's validity and reliability's sake*; the only key difference was that the questions were framed differently to allow each type of respondent answer them in their own ways while still discussing the same issues. The idea was that asking the three respondent types to discuss the same issues would allow for access to varied perspectives on the subject matter. It was also expected that the data to be generated would be enriched while also allowing for either the confirmation or rebuttal of claims from the other respondent type. A total of **45** in-depth interviews were conducted in four out of six states in Southwestern Nigeria; the states namely are: Lagos, Ogun, Osun and Oyo with the following breakdown: 22 employees, 16 managers and seven (7) owners. Altogether, 21 interviews were carried out in manufacturing SMEs while the remaining 24 were carried out in services SMEs.

There were also two other interviews from two Directors in one of the two Lagos clusters. The two Directors' interviews were meant to serve as checks and balances on some of the information garnered from the SMEs respondents. However, they did not form part of the final analysis. As part of the methodology for data collection, some SME clusters established by the Federal government of Nigeria were targeted for ease

of data collection and sense making; the clusters were two in Lagos state (Matori and Oshodi) and one in Ibadan, Oyo state (Oluyole Industrial Estate).

Prior to the interviews, clarifications were given to the respondents about the purposes of the interview, as mainly research; in addition, permission was sought from the same group of respondents about the need to record the interviews for analysis purposes post interviews. Except for a few of the employees from the original group, who were uncomfortable with the idea of recording their voices, almost all of those approached were happy to go along with the interviews. All the 45 collected qualitative interviews were individually transcribed before they were loaded into NVIVO in preparation for analysis. Both NVIVO 10 and 12 Pro were used for the analysis because each of the two NVIVO versions has uniqueness in terms of the visual models they can produce, and such uniqueness was useful in the context of this research as NVIVO 10 has particular features that make certain minutiae of details visible from the output models, while the 12 Pro also provides its own special features. NVIVO is a computer aided qualitative data analysis software made available by QSR International.

It provides the dynamic lens to view qualitative data set(s) needing in-depth analysis; but, in research where it is used in conjunction with quantitative methodologies, it could provide further understanding to quantitative data and vice versa. Once uploaded into NVIVO, the data was cleaned and coded from the various files/sources into thematic nodes within the software; the themes had been previously developed based on the research objectives. The NVIVO output produced varied visualisations including models, word cloud and tree maps, among others, to allow interpretations and meanings into the results from the data loaded into the software. The results that are from three key perspectives (SMEs' employees, managers and owners) are discussed in some latter sections that follow the philosophical foundation for the study.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results from the NVIVO analysis qualitatively evaluated employees' job exits pervasiveness from a number of angles. The initial sub-sections explain the degree of employee exits from managers' stance, followed by owners' stance, and employees' angle afterwards. Within the sub-section in which employees' perspective is described, employees' responses to whether or not they intend to leave the employment they were in at the time of data collection is also presented. In addition, the responses from all three perspectives were combined and presented in NVIVO Word Cloud in order to visualise the most common themes from the blend of responses. Other areas qualitatively explored in the findings relative to the degree of employee exits are employees' service length, gender, educational level, marital status, dependants, and employing sector. Lastly, the issue of employment casualisation and its connection to the rate at which people leave the SMEs studied are presented.

Managers' Outlook on the Degree of Employees' Exits from the SMEs

This section explicates the degree of employee exits from the businesses sampled from the perspective of the business managers. Some of the areas adopted to explain the rate of employees exit from the businesses are: exits of multiple employees at the same time, presentation of a model indicating the degree of employee exits, and a word cloud that is capable of highlighting *themes* that are most talked about by the owners/managers during the interviews. Each of these areas are presented in turn in the sections that follow.

Exit of multiple employees from the SMEs within a short period

In the course of the interviews, managers and owners were asked to describe the frequency with which their employees leave organisations based on their own personal experiences with past exits. As can be seen in the paragraph that follows, manager 5 reported losing 20 of their 70 employees within a specified period. The manager belongs to an organisation in the Food and Beverages sector and it was learnt that the majority of those who were in the packaging department of the organisation were higher institution graduates and their main task was to pack food products. Based on the information gathered, most of these graduates only took the job, which they were over-qualified for, simply because they were unemployed and couldn't get alternative jobs. It was reported that the 20 out of 70 (approximately 29%) of employees who left that organisation did so within a month. Unfortunately, losing such a sizable percentage of employees in an organisation within such short period can be quite alarming for the organisation while also being disruptive.

Similarly, manager 7, who was running an office cleaning services company had similar experience in employee exits from losing six employees around Christmas period, a probably tumultuous experience for the organisation, particular at the period of the year (festive period). Manager 7 actually commented on the potential implications of having to search for replacement for multiple exits within a short time; the experience could be traumatic. Furthermore, Owner 7 owned a supermarket and butchery and from her experience, frequent employees' exit had become so common a phenomenon that she reported "*...getting used to it already...*". The owner also categorised the level of exits as "*...very high...*" to the extent that she labelled employees' movement as 'zigzagging'. From this result, one can simply report a substantially high rate of employees' exits from the businesses.

"...I will say that by January this year, we lost up to 20...out of the 70 casual staff. All the 20 employees left within a month...They all left in January...They all went for the Christmas break and did not return" (Manager 5, Interview).

"...Take for...example...the Christmas period when we lost about 6 employees at the same time. It can be very disturbing, and when decision on employee

replacement has to be made in such circumstances, one is prone to making mistakes” (Manager 7, Interview).

“Employees going and coming is such a common phenomenon that we are getting used to it already...the rate is actually very high...But people move from jobs to jobs for so many reasons, for instance there is what some people will call zigzag” (Owner 7, Interview).

In line with the discussion in the immediate past paragraphs, figures 1 and 2 reiterate the previous reports from managers 5 and 7, and owner 7 about the high rate of employee exits from the sampled businesses. Figure 1 is a model from NVIVO 10 that present paraphrased sentences from several managers corroborating the experiences shared by the previously discussed group. For example, manager 4, a hotel manager, reported losing 10 employees within a year, manager 16 of a table water firm indicated that 20 employees were lost in three years; manager 7 lost 10 out of only 23 (43%) members of staff within three months, and was able to replace only three of those, and so on. The story line appears the similar for all the managers with high level employee turnover experience.

In order to delve further into the findings, the responses from the managers were pooled and analysed using NVIVO 12 Pro ‘Word Cloud’ shown in figure 2 to explore and thematise the most common words used by the managers during the discussion on employee exits. Some of the concepts that stand out in figure 2 are: *high* (high exit), *leave* (people exiting), *suddenly* (perhaps without notice), *months* (some leaving within months of employment), *replaced* (having to be replaced), *frequent*, *rampant and voluntary* (some employees regularly leaving voluntarily) among other words. All of these expressions are pointers to quite a high level of employee exits in the organisations. Other words common within the respondents’ answers appear to refer to some of the reasons managers point to as causing employees’ exit. They include: *salaries/pay*, *supervisor issues*, *job substitutes*, *misbehaviour*, *fear*, etc. Additionally, figure 2 appears to indicate the type of employees likely to exit, including, but not limited to, *accountants*, *casual employees*, and *trainees* among others. The overall implication of these results is that managers were of the opinion that high exits of employees is rife in the businesses sampled. In the next section, the SMEs owners’ responses are discussed in detail.

Owners' Outlook on the Degree of Employees' Exits from the SMEs

As described in the previous section on managers' responses, the SMEs' owners were also asked to comment on the pervasiveness, or otherwise, of employee exit from their organisations. Figure 3 is a model derived from NVIVO 10 and it shows a selection of answers to the related questions on the extent of employee exits. Results show owner 7 of a butchery business reporting that between 6 and 7 of 13 employees (about 50%) in the company were lost within 6 months. The same source explained that on the whole, the firm always had to replace about 9 (69.2%) of the 13 employees year in, year out. In a similar manner, owner 2 of an engineering company hinted that he lost and just replaced 3 (23%) of the 13 employees shortly before the interviews were conducted. In addition, it was obvious that owner 5 of another engineering company reckoned that their firm has an annual exit rate of about 40% of those employed; and even not all those who exited are replaced, potentially creating instability within the firms.

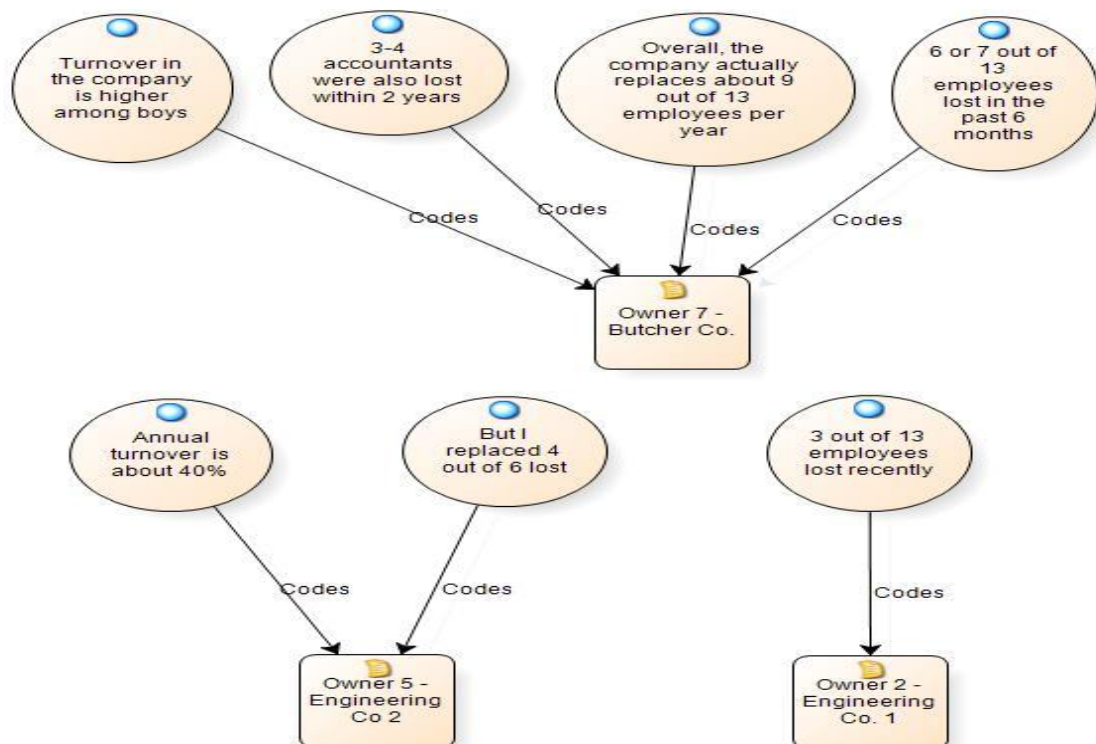


Figure 3: Model showing Owners' Outlook on the Degree of Employee Exit from the SMEs

Source: Model developed by researcher from owners' interviews using NVIVO 10

Employees' Outlook on the Degree of Employees' Exits from the SMEs

Figure 5 is the word cloud reflecting the viewpoints and experiences of employees regarding the pervasiveness of exits among their peers. When asked during the interview to describe the level of employee turnover in their various organisations, the word cloud shows the most common words used. Among these are *common* (exits are rife), *months* (some employees leave within months of being employed), *immediate* (employees spending very short period before exiting), *frequently* (employees leaving with high frequency), *female* (exits are common among female employees) etc. With reference to the key reasons for leaving, the following words were frequently adopted by the employees to express this: *pay, salary and wages* (inadequate remuneration), *family, dependants and siblings* (inability to provide for family members), *livelihood, hungry, and feeding* (comfortable living stifled), *condition* (poor condition of service), *stressful and victimisation* (toxic work environment).

Figure 6 is a tree map that clearly shows the most frequently used words by employees to describe the extent of exits among their colleagues. The bigger the box, the more frequently the words were used. Words like *common and months* on the extreme left were used most times, followed by *immediate and female* on the extreme right with lesser use. When requested to state the common reasons for exits, *salary, dependants, hungry, salary, livelihood, wages* etc. were among those mentioned.

By implication, the combination of the reasons given by the employees indicates that the employee exit causes are complex and can be a combination of employee, organisational and external issues. In addition, employee exits are very common and real for organisations impacted, sometimes with negative consequences.

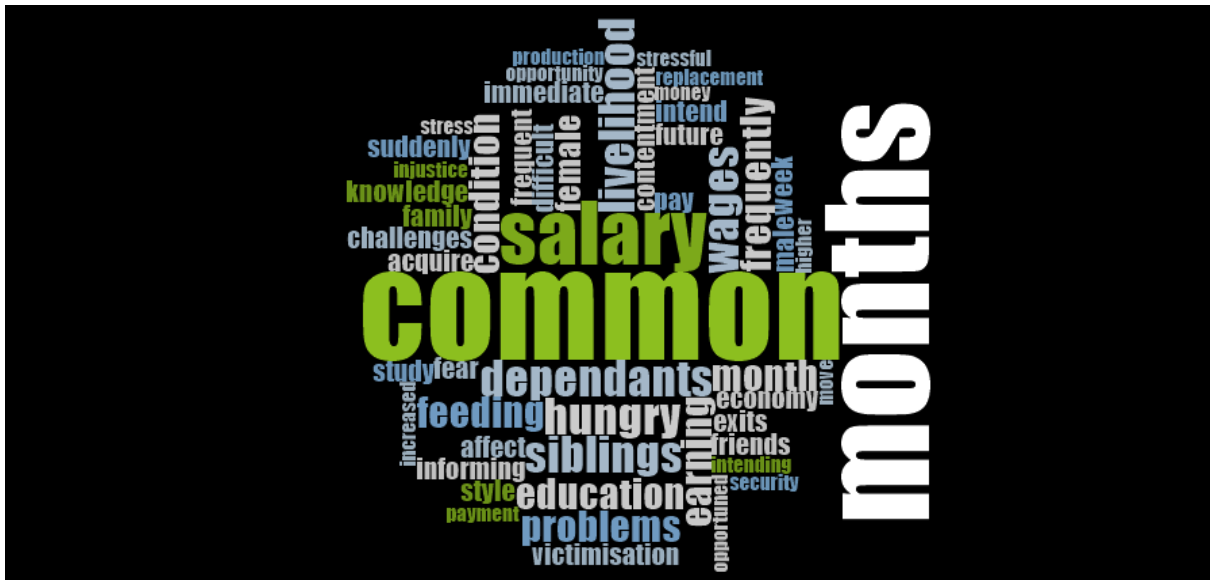


Figure 5: Word Cloud Showing Employees’ Outlook on the Degree of their Exit from the SMEs

Source: Developed by the Researcher from Employees’ interviews using NVIVO PRO 12

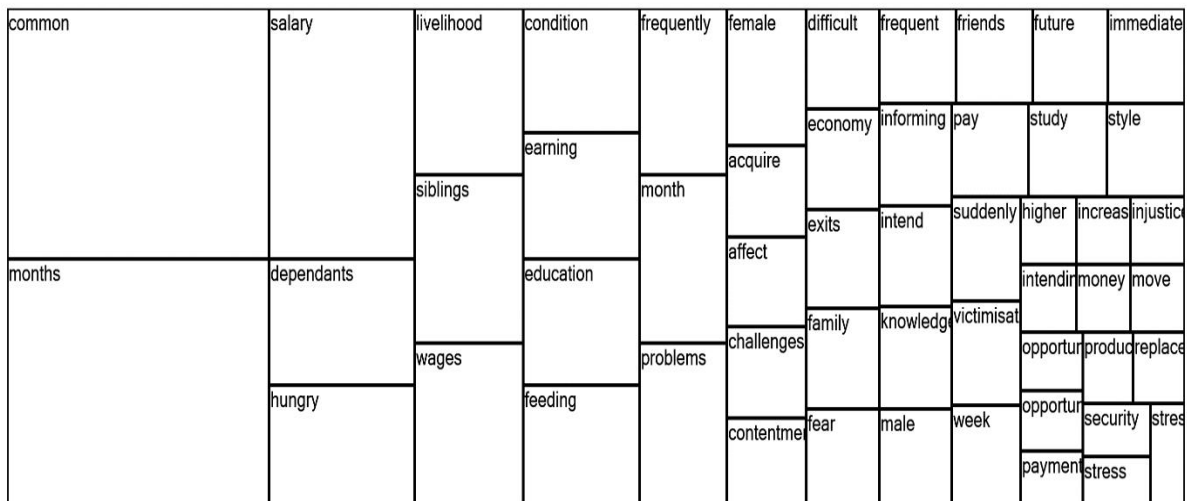


Figure 6: Tree Map on Extent of E-Turnover from Employees’ Outlook

Source: Developed by the Researcher from Employees’ Interviews Using NVIVO PRO 12

Employees' Intent to Exit Current Employment

As a follow up to understand how big a problem frequent employees' turnover is in the SMEs, many of them were not quick to answer the question for fear of reprisals, in case their bosses got to know. However, the few who were ready to answer the questions during the interviews indicated they were considering leaving with particular caveats as shown in figure 7. Their exits would be triggered by issues like *better pay elsewhere*, *imposition of a supervisor over the employee*, *incidents of poor treatment by management*, *availability of job alternatives*, *perception of injustice by management*, *potential for self-employment*, *furtherance of education etc.* All of these are realities most employees have to deal with on daily basis.

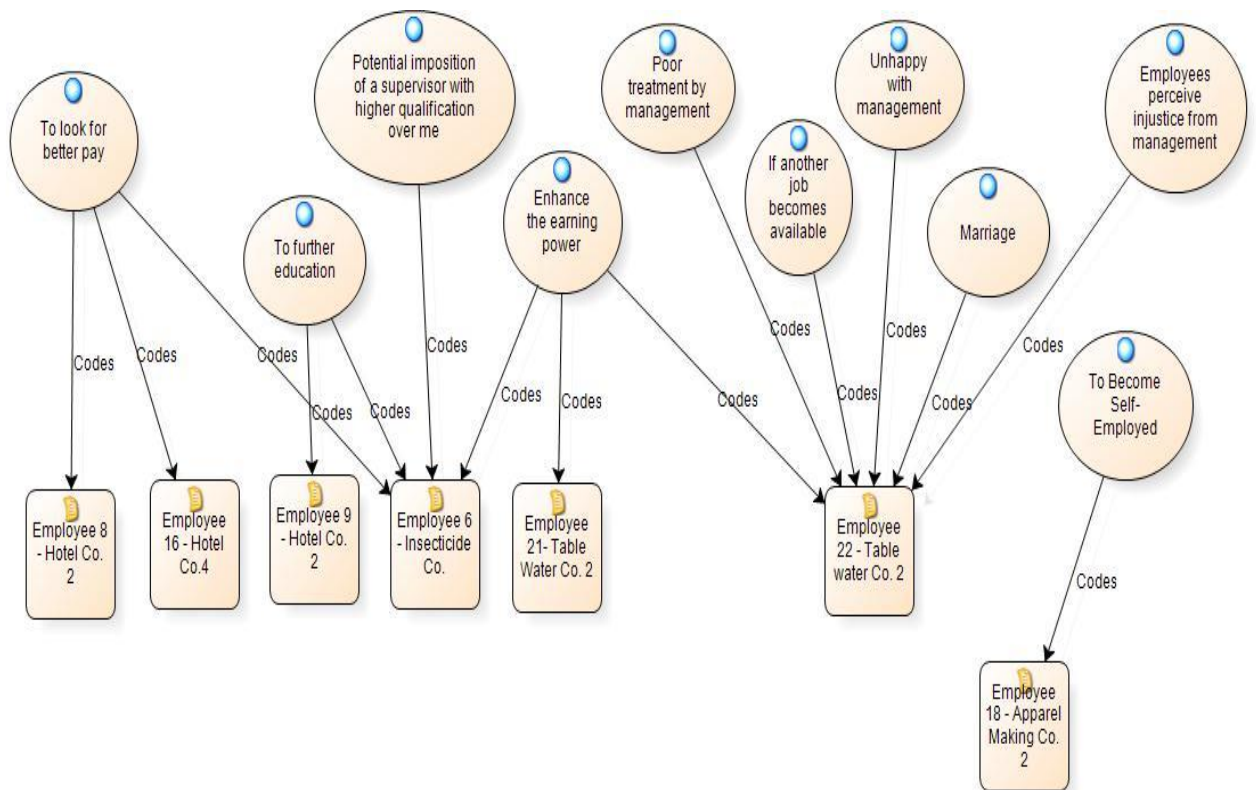


Figure 7: Model showing some of the explanation given by employees for Intent to Leave Current Employment

Source: Model Developed by the Researcher from Employees' Interviews Using NVIVO 10

Employees' Service Length and Exits from the Firms

Generally, the analysis revealed that the length of service for an average employee was <1 year [as the median fell within this category]. Further analysis shows that the length of service of some employees was even a lot lower than the one year average before they switched to other jobs. For example, when asked how long they stayed in their last jobs, the frequency of exits was obvious from the answers given by the following three male employees:

"...4 months. The salary was...low, so I decided to leave" (Employee 12, Interview);

"It was one week...I will not say that I ever worked for a long period..." (Employee 11, Interview)

"...Some did not even stay up to my own duration...6 months, some 9 months, some not even up to 3 months" (Employee 17, Interview).

The answers imply some employees change jobs even more frequently than an average employee in term of months and not years. This extremely high level of exits can have far reaching negative implications by way of, for instance, destabilising the businesses, in addition to the colossal costs that could impact the SMEs bottom line for the foreseeable future. This may potentially cause business failure if measures are not taken to nip it in the bud.

Educational level and Employee Exit

The interviews indicates that the level of unemployment in the country force some higher education graduates to become voluntarily underemployed; this means that many would just take whatever job is available in desperation, so they can earn a living.

As one manager observed:

"...most of them [those who exited] are graduates. They only take the job because there is nothing else. They just do it to manage their life and some of them actually get converted to permanent staff; some of them remain here and they get something even better if they are patient enough" (Manager 5, interview)

The comment from another manager supports manager 5's position by suggesting that graduate employees, who are likely to fill the middle level management positions utilise SMEs as stepping stones to get to the job market before changing to what they perceive as more befitting jobs. He explained:

"People who would naturally have been in middle class management always look for employment in the large-scale industries. And if you find them in the small-scale industries, they are only waiting until the opportunity arises for them to move...We need officers who will be responsible on daily basis to take care of supervision...when senior management is not around...those who will man your

finances so that you can take core decisions...however, these sets of people look forward to seeking employment in well-established organisations where the future is more guaranteed..."

Number of employees' dependent relatives and extent of E-Turnover

In this section, analysis results indicate, as previously revealed, that family issues are also pivotal in employees exit decisions. For example, employee 11 appears to signify that one of the causes of leaving his previous job was that what he was earning was inadequate to look after himself and his three dependants. He actually left his previous daily-paid casual job for a more secured one, and succinctly commented thus:

"...most people have more and more people feeding on them and they have to think...that if they don't get proper work, their dependants will be hungry...I myself have 3 junior siblings in school...I have to pay the school fees for my...siblings" (Employee 11, Interview).

This is a pointer to the role that family matters play in employees' exit, or intent-to-exit decisions; implying that employers must necessarily pay attention to this aspect too, in addition to employee-linked, or organisation-connected issues.

Employing Sector and the Degree of Employees Exit

The interview responses confirmed the endemic nature of turnover in the businesses. During the interviews, approximately four-fifths (4/5) of employees interviewed in both sectors revealed that they had changed jobs. In essence, findings from the interview shows a high exit rate, and provide clarification on high employees' mobility. In responding to questions on job change frequency, some of the employees who indicated spending less than a year in their past jobs cited pay related issues as revealed by the following excerpts:

"Yes. I have worked in like three places before...The main reason for my leaving was non-payment of salary..." (Employee 5, Interview).

"This is not my first job and I have changed jobs before.... This is the 3rd organisation I am working...Actually, it was due to the inconsistent way they paid us our wages." (Employee 17, Interview).

"The welfare package that is attached to the job is one; but the second reason is to augment my savings..." (Employee 14, Interview).

Gender-Based Description of Employees' Exits from the SMEs

Owner 7 is a female proprietor of a supermarket and butchery. As can be seen below, she reckoned that the level of E-T in her organisation was as high as 40%, particularly among the male gender, with the female gender exiting mostly due family-related challenges.

"I think our turnover is as high as 40%, especially among men and boys [male employees] ...If girls [female employees] go, it's usually due to family pressure; may be pregnancy. I have cases where people left because they became pregnant and probably they were not married and their parents took them away...Most of those who exit were boys..." (Owner 7, Interview).

Her views on this were echoed by a male manager who also explained that female would not leave often, and that most of them only left for family-related reasons. In his view, *"...females only leave for marriage reasons because the female cannot continue to do this type of work [petrol station attendant] that requires standing all day after getting married..." (Manager 8, Interview).*

While answering a question on issues they would consider in future before changing jobs, the responses from female employees supported the assertion that they were not habitual job changers; they only changed due to necessity. One female employee responded: *"...of course, I would have opted for a job that would not affect my immediate family negatively" (Employee 10, interview).* Another said:

"I don't have problem with any of my Directors. You know there are times when as a secretary, there may be victimisation, and we have 4 Directors, but I don't have problem with any of them. So, I feel more or less at home working with them and whenever I am ill or I need to take some break due to unforeseen circumstances, e.g. attending to family issues, with ordinary phone call, they do understand, so I have that favour" (Employee 5, Interviews).

Casualisation of Employment and the Degree of Employee Exit from their Jobs

In the parlance of table water manufacturing businesses, the daily paid casual employees who go around with the driver to deliver bags or bottles of purified water to retail customers are called 'motor boys'. Some of the reasons given for high exits among that particular group were: the fact that the jobs involved heavy lifting with high risk of injuries, lack of job security and low remuneration. Another manager confirmed that most of the employees lost in his company were those employed on casual basis. The comments by the owner of an engineering company also backed the manager's claims about frequent loss of casual employees; he said:

“...Once you cannot employ full-time staff, you must expect such thing because once you don't have work...they will go somewhere else. Like the work that we are doing now...we have to call all our casual workers, but when that work finishes, they will have to leave; then you call them again when there is another work. The problem with that arrangement is that, when you have a future job...many of them may not be available...because they may have joined another company...” (Owner 2, Interview).

These results echo those from the research carried out by Kimosop (2007) on casual security guards in Kenya; Kimosop found high turnover to be commonplace among them due to lack of job security and career prospects. Despite the long standing problems and costs associated with casualisation of employees, some of the managers sampled still did not view the practice of excessive casualisation as an issue (Simons and Hinkin, 2001). Simons and Hinkin argue that many managers:

“...still view employees as replaceable commodities - especially the hourly employees...The syndrome of hiring unselectively to fill a position remains in place, even though the results of this practice can have devastating effects on both internal and external customers” (Simons and Hinkin, 2001, p.65).

Simons and Hinkin's study was about twenty three years ago, but the practice of hiring a vast proportion of employees of an organisation as casuals still pervade some companies till date. To buttress this point, Lawan and Razlini (2024) present evidence of ongoing work casualisation in Yobe State public sector in Nigeria. During data collection for this study, some of the owner/managers still exhibited indifference to the turnover problem (particularly in the manufacturing sector). Take, for instance, a manager who explained during the interview that his company lost 20 out of 70 casual employees over a Christmas weekend. When asked how problematic it was for the company, he replied:

“No, it is not an issue...The turnover is not high...”. His defence was “...when you keep employee for too long, the employee builds an empire around himself/herself and become an authority, but a new person will put in the best to impress the owner of the business...” (Manager 5, Interview).

The manager's attitude is reminiscent of Simons and Hinkin's (2001) observation that high level casualisation and the indifference of management about the issue still occur in today's businesses, regardless of the associated levels of turnover. As mentioned before, the turnover level in the manufacturing business managed by Manager 5 could have been partly aggravated by the organisation's policy of employing a significant percentage of its employees as casual workers, given that turnover was found to be high in that category.

The interview results showing high turnover among casuals in some of the businesses provide a key caveat to what happens in some organisations, in which full-timers changed jobs more frequently than the part timers and casuals; this is, however, an outlier as turnover is generally higher amongst casual employees from the study results. Observably, it is difficult to adequately quantify turnover extent among casual employees because some of the companies appeared to deliberately classify them as part-timers to bypass the standard employment legislation. The Nigerian employment act forbids employers to hire people on a temporary basis for more than three months (Fapohunda, 2012; Okafor, 2007).

Adewumi and Ogunnubi (2019) argue in their study that outsourcing and contract employment are the two dominant employment practices. Indications of unclear classification of employees came to light in some employees' interview responses, especially when they were asked to state their employment status. Some could not even identify with a particular category due to lack of clarity in their job titles and roles. Some employees from the financial services sector gave the following answers:

"...Humm, the way the job is designed, we are partly staff and partly contract...Yes [we are] in-between; there are some features that are present in a job that are not found in the permanent staff contract..." (Employee 14, Interview).

"Actually, I can't say for now because I originally got a job here as a contract staff but now I have been promoted; I am however yet to be confirmed" (Employee 13, Interview).

To support this observation about deliberate misclassification of employees, a male manufacturing business owner explained the difficulty in coping with the restrictions in Nigerian employment law. According to him, his company and other similar businesses employ more people on a temporary basis than full time; but he would rather refer to them as "sub-contractors" to avoid trouble with the employment law. He explicated:

*"...some companies cannot afford to hold on to certain calibre of **artisans** [skilled employees] for long period of time. So, most construction companies do not keep construction staff as permanent staff, you pay them based on the nature of the job in hand and once the contract is finished, they are gone...We always call them sub-contractors because the law of the land do not allow us to employ people as casual workers for more than...3 months..." (Owner 5, Interview).*

Implications for Research and Practice

Qualitative and mixed approaches to studying phenomena in Human Resource (HR), Industrial Relations (IR) and Management researches are recent occurrences; they are, however, continued to be espoused by scholars like Stamolampros, Korfiatis, and Chalvatzis (2019). This study contributes positively to the ongoing debate about the appropriateness or otherwise of adopting the aforementioned methods by showing their potentials to allow for in-depth analyses and comprehension of complex concepts such as employee turnover.

Additionally, the issue of seemingly over casualisation of some jobs, particularly in the private sector, needs to be looked into by the Nigerian government. Adewumi and Ogunnubi (2019) made a case for the need by the Nigerian government to review major Nigeria's labour legislation for the incorporation of casual employment work practice into the law, such that that category of workers is rightly protected. This could have positive implications for equity and dignity of labour in favour of the affected employees.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the level of turnover in the SMEs sampled, some managers still exhibit indifferent attitude to turnover occurrence, an attitude which could make managing the phenomenon more challenging.

Arguably, employees are supposed to be assets and important 'listening posts' through which clients and customers' concerns can be discovered on behalf of the organisation so that businesses can thrive (Tax and Brown, 2012). Patterson et al. (1997) suggest that even when business owner/managers recognise that people make the critical difference between success and failure of organisations, they still fail to accept that businesses' ability to sustain itself in the medium to long term could be marred by incessant staff exits (Hinkin and Tracey, 2000).

Moreover, some managers are still not dissuaded from viewing employees (especially the casual or hourly workers) as replaceable commodities in spite the potentially disruptive nature of high levels of E-Turnover (Simons and Hinkin, 2001). Hinkin and Tracey (2000) argue that even when turnover is high in some sectors, some managers still do not view it as a problem that needs particular attention, a factor which was also observed during this research. Nonetheless, and regardless of managers' views, an undesirable level of E-Turnover may inevitably compound existing business challenges, the result of which may be damaging to an organisation's long-term survival.

Suggestion for Future Research

The expediency that qualitative methods in HR, IR and Management studies provides is significant enough for extant literature to advocate for their applications through authors like (Kiessling and Harvey, 2005), and mixed methods research through researchers such as Williams (1999) and Mingers and Brocklesby (1997). Essentially, adopting these two methodologies in the suggested fields has the potentials to improve extant literature contents considerably.

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