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# Employee Retention Strategies in Selected Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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Abstract

The lack of employee retention strategies in Nigeria’s small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can have adverse business outcomes. Business leaders are concerned about employee retention strategies since they can help reduce turnover and retain experienced employees. Grounded in Herzberg’s two-factor theory of motivation, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to retain their experienced employees. The participants were four business leaders of four SMEs in Nigeria who successfully implemented strategies that helped retain their experienced employees. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and a review of organization policy documents. Through thematic analysis, four themes were identified: (a) training and development, (b) management and leadership style, (c) organizational culture, and (d) financial and non-financial benefits. A key recommendation is for business leaders to invest in talent management and capacity-building courses to keep employees informed about new technologies in their areas of expertise. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to reduce unemployment and increase tax revenue for community development.

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# Dedication

I dedicate this study to God, who answered my prayers and made this dream possible. I dedicate this work to my loving husband, Dr. Chukwuemeka Omeoga, who encouraged me in every way, stood by me, and supported my dream to get this level of education. I also dedicate this work to my lovely children, Nnaemeka, Oluomachi and Ugochukwu, whose love, patience, and understanding pushed me to finish this work. My family is the best gift of all; thank you!

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# Section 1: Foundation of the Study

One of the main reasons why organizations find it challenging to perform maximally and achieve their organizational goals is the frequent turnover of employees. Employees make up an essential capital of the organization; human capital and organizational success have been linked to employee retention (Bilan et al., 2020; Kurdi et al., 2020; Siddiqui, 2014). The performance and continued success of an organization can be traced to its committed employees, which make up the executors of organizational goals and, in some cases, are custodians of organizational trade secrets (Cherif, 2020; Klasa et al., 2018). Organizations must work toward reducing the rate at which their employees leave. The purpose of this study was to identify strategies that some managers have successfully implemented to retain their experienced employees. The findings from this study provide beneficial information for other small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to plan their strategies for employee retention.

## Background of the Problem

SMEs make up a significant part of economic growth. In Nigeria, 90 to 95% of all enterprises are nano, micro, small, and medium enterprises (NMSME), and SMEs contribute about 84% of the labor force in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021). The employee is an essential resource that ensures that SMEs execute their goals and maintain a competitive advantage, and retaining employees, especially the skilled ones, should be one of the focuses of every organization (Bilan et al., 2020; Iqbal et al., 2019). Chiat and Panatik (2019) noted that it would cost about 6 to 9 months of an employee's salary to replace a skilled employee. SMEs must work toward retaining their employees because of the associated costs incurred when employees leave the organization.

Employee retention involves keeping employees and their services in an organization over a period. Employee retention strategy therefore is a plan an organization has put in place to create a conducive environment that meets the needs of the employee to hold onto their top talents in the organization (Elsafty & Oraby, 2022). The problem is that business leaders in SMEs in Nigeria lack strategies to retain their experienced employees. Research has shown that organizations that lack employee retention strategies tend to perform more poorly than organizations with a planned employee retention strategy (Joyce & Ahmad, 2019). Lack of employee retention strategies could lead organizations to carry out activities that will discourage their employees from staying with the organization. This can negatively affect the overall performance of an organization by increasing the cost of operation and reducing profits.

SMEs in Nigeria face the challenge of attracting and keeping their best talents due to the competition from more prominent organizations who may offer better incentives to employees. Kurniawaty et al. (2019) noted that organizations in the same industry or that need similar human resource talents, compete for the best talents. High employee turnover may cause an organization not to be the top choice for talented employees. High employee turnover may also cause the organization to lose trade secrets to their competition (Klasa et al., 2018; Levallet & Chan, 2019). There is no current research focused on employee retention strategies from the business leader’s experience in Nigeria, as some business leaders do not check in with their employees to ensure that they are satisfied with their work. Business leaders could develop retention strategies with feedback from such engagements (Auh et al., 2019; Siddiqui, 2014). It is important to understand from the experiences of the business leaders in Nigeria, what successful strategies have helped in retaining their experienced employees. The background to the problem has been provided; the researcher's focus will now shift to the problem and purpose statement.

## Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem was that some business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria lack strategies to retain their experienced employees. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria have successfully implemented to retain their experienced employees.

## Population and Sampling

Data were collected from four SME business leaders in Nigeria using purposive sampling and semistructured interviews to elicit their lived experience of successful strategies they have implemented to retain their experienced employees. I reviewed internal documents, including training manuals and employee policy documents for relevant information.

## Nature of the Study

The three main research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). I chose the qualitative method for this study to ask open-ended questions during semistructured interviews of business leaders. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to discover lived experiences and perceptions of people

(Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016). In contrast, quantitative researchers use closed-ended questions to test hypotheses (Mohajan, 2020). Mixed methods research includes qualitative and quantitative elements (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).  I did not use quantitative methods in this study.

Any of these four research designs may be used for a qualitative study: (a) ethnography, (b) focus group, (c) narrative, and (d) case study. (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Ethnography involves studying the culture of groups of people, which may include observations to describe how the culture works (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Ethnography was not appropriate for my study as I did not observe the culture of the people but just interviewed the participants and relied on their feedback. A focus group involves a group discussion process through which qualitative data is collected as the participants interact (Keemink et al., 2022). I did not use the focus group design as I did not interview a group of business leaders in a group discussion; rather, I conducted a one-on-one interview with the business managers. A narrative design entails storytelling, where the participant is expected to narrate an event, talking about their lived experience (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Narrative design is not optimal as it involves both the storytelling and observation of the participants during the storytelling. A case study is used to explore a phenomenon in its natural context in depth and must be within a bounded system (Keemink et al., 2022). Keemink et al. (2022) noted that a case study is used mainly for researching interventions. I used a case study to explore employee retention strategies in SMEs in Nigeria.

I conducted a multiple case study. Multiple case study design involves an in-depth examination of data from various sources to understand a particular phenomenon in its natural setting (Coplan & Evans, 2021). When multiple cases are analyzed, there is a basis for cross-case comparison of findings and makes transferability to other settings justifiable (Coplan & Evans, 2021). Rashid et al. (2019) noted that using a multiple case study allows the researcher to gather data until saturation of themes is reached. To address the research question, I conducted a multiple case study because the findings from a single case study may not provide enough assurance to generalize or transfer the results to other settings. I gathered data until saturation of themes was reached.

## Research Question

What strategies do business leaders in SMEs in Nigeria implement to retain their experienced employees?

## Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to retain your experienced employees?
2. How do you measure the success of the employee retention strategies you used?
3. What challenges did you experience in achieving success in implementing your employee retention strategies?
4. How did you overcome these challenges in implementing your employee retention strategies?
5. Which of the strategies have you implemented that has worked best for employee retention?

6. What additional information can you share about strategies your organization uses for implementing a change management process to successfully increase revenues from business operations?

## Conceptual Framework

Fredrick Herzberg developed the two-factor theory of motivation (Herzberg, 1965). The author conducted a study to discover the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance and to discover factors that satisfied employees. The investigation was conducted with a group of engineers to find out how various factors in the workplace affected their attitude toward work and their performance in general. The result of the study showed that people are influenced by two sets of factors in the workplace; motivators and hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1965; Herzberg et al., 1993). Hygiene factors are extrinsic factors that do not necessarily motivate employees, but their absence will result in employee dissatisfaction. The hygiene factors identified include salary, policies, interpersonal relations, salary, policies, administration, supervision, working conditions. On the other hand, motivators are intrinsic factors like advancement, the work itself, the possibility of growth, responsibility, recognition, and achievement. Thant and Chang (2021) linked employees job satisfaction to both motivators and hygiene factors. In research conducted in the public sector to determine the source of employee satisfaction, Thant and Chang identified interpersonal relationships, factors in personal life, work itself, and recognition as factors that influenced employee motivation. Prasad Kotni and Karumuri (2018) also identified work-life balance, autonomy at selling, financial stability of the organization, and recognition as factors that motivate employees in a study conducted to explore strategies that motivate the sales force in an SME. I used Herzberg's two-factor theory as a lens for me to explore successful strategies that business leaders in SMEs use to retain their experienced employees.

## Operational Definitions

*Employee Retention:* Employee retention is defined as an organization keeping back great and talented employees in a work environment that the employees are comfortable with, which ensures that their needs are met. (Lee, S., et al., 2018; Upadhyay et al., 2020)

*Employee Retention Strategies:* Employee retention strategies are mutually beneficial to both the employee and the organization because they have been developed with the purpose of encouraging employees to remain in the organization. (Alhmoud & Rjoub, 2019; Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Lee, T., et al., 2018).

*Job Embeddedness:* Job embeddedness is defined as the summation of the many factors in an employee's life that makes him feel suitable for their job, connected with other employees and activities in the workplace, and value them so much that they are unwilling to leave the organization (Ali et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022; Saeed & Jun, 2022).

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

### Assumptions

Assumptions are unverified statements made and believed to be true without proof or evidence and can either be social or technical (Schröter et al., 2021; Specht et al., 2022). Social assumptions are based on human interactions while technical assumptions are based on non-human systems (Specht et al., 2022). In conducting any research, the researcher makes certain unproven but widely acceptable assumptions to allow for the success of the study, (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). My first assumption was that the study's participants have a complete understanding of the retention strategies of their organization. My second assumption was that the organization's retention strategies are instrumental to retaining their experienced employees. Finally, I assumed the business leaders were best positioned to express the organization's effective retention strategies.

### Limitations

Certain aspects of research are clearly out of a researcher's control and are a limitation to the study (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). One limitation is that I depended on the sincerity of the participants, in this case, the managers. Second, the participants' experience may not be an exclusive representation of all the SMEs in Nigeria and so may not be generalizable.

### Delimitations

Delimitations are limitations set by the researcher to ensure that they achieve the aim of the study (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). One delimitation of this study was that the participants were drawn from business leaders in SMEs. My focus in this research was to understand effective employee retention strategies from the business leader's viewpoint. I did not seek the perspective of the employees.

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that the findings may provide successful strategies that managers can implement to motivate their employees and increase employee retention.

When employees leave an organization frequently, the organization incurs financial costs which affects their overhead and profit (Khalid & Nawab, 2018). The employee retention strategies that SMEs have successfully applied can be used by managers in existing and new SMEs to form their employee retention policies.

## Contribution to Business Practice

The findings from the study may contribute to business practice by providing information that managers can use in human resource planning. Every organization has objectives, and organizations can use adequate planning to achieve their goals. An important aspect of human resource planning is putting in place strategies to retain the right employees. The findings from this study may indicate the strategies for employee retention that are best used in SMEs and how managers can apply them to save cost and improve organizational performance.

## Implications for Social Change

The findings from this study may have implications for positive social change that include a stable organization and the ability of small businesses to consistently pay their tax which helps stabilize the economy. SMEs contribute to the growth and development of the economy by payment of their taxes and taking on social responsibilities such as employing members of the community, contributions to charities, youth development centers, etc. (Opute et al., 2021). When SMEs become successful, they can support families and local communities by providing job security. Socially impactful activities require financial resources, so when the cost of operation is reduced, because of implementing employee retention strategies, more resources are made available for community impact.

## A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to explore recent and previous research on employee retention. My focus for the study was on successful strategies that leaders of SMEs have implemented to retain their experienced employees in Nigeria. An essential part of this literature review was linking recent and previous literature on employee retention strategies to the conceptual framework, which provided a basis for the study. I reviewed literature that related to employee retention, retention strategies, the necessity of employee retention strategies, employee attrition, causes of employee attrition, employee turnover, types of turnover, cost of employee turnover, cost and dangers of employee turnover, SMEs in Nigeria. I accessed the following databases for my research: Walden Library, ProQuest, EBSCO host, Google Scholar, Emerald Publishing Company, and SAGE journals. Additionally, search words included *motivation, job satisfaction, Herzberg's two-factor theory,* and *Maslow's hierarchy of needs.*

To organize the literature review, I captioned the topics in subheadings, beginning with the conceptual framework, Herzberg's two-factor theory. I reviewed the literature on a supporting theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Afterward, I reviewed the literature on the following subheadings: employee retention, employee turnover, employee attrition, causes of employee turnover/attrition in SMEs, employee retention, employee retention strategies, and SMEs in Nigeria. Ninety percent of the documents reviewed are within 5 years of anticipated graduation, 64% are from peer-reviewed journals.

## Conceptual Framework

### *Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory*

In this study, I used Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation as the conceptual framework of this study. Based on the concept of Herzberg's two-factor theory, I identified the factors that motivate employees and bring about job satisfaction or de-satisfaction. The knowledge acquired from this study may enable managers to make decisions that will encourage employee retention.

Based on Herzberg's two-factor theory, the key constructs/propositions underlying the theory are (a) motivators, and (b) hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1993). Motivators include intrinsic factors like, (a) possibility of growth and advancement, in terms of acquiring new knowledge or skill from the assignment; (b) work itself, in terms of the motivation that comes from completing a job; (c) taking responsibility, in terms of receiving both an assignment and the authority to execute on the assignment; (d) recognition for achievement, in terms of getting feedback; and (e) achievement, in terms of quality performance are all factors that may motivate employees (Herzberg, 2003; Herzberg et al., 1993). Hygiene factors on the other hand include extrinsic factors like, (a) interpersonal relationships, (b) salary, (c) policies and administration, (d) supervision, (e)working conditions, (f) job security (g) status (Alshmemri et al., 2017; Herzberg et al., 1993). A combination of motivators and hygiene factors may contribute to encouraging employees' willingness to stay with the organization.

In trying to discover why employees choose to stay with an organization, it is important to know what really motivates them. To get to the root of what satisfies an employee, it is important to answer the question, “how do you motivate employees?” Herzberg (2003) noted that intrinsic factors motivate employees, however the absence of extrinsic factors can cause job dissatisfaction. To answer the question of what made people continue to stay motivated, Herzberg (2003) found out that people were motivated at work for a different reason than they were dissatisfied. The absence of extrinsic factors made employees unhappy, not necessarily demotivated, while intrinsic factors clearly made them enthusiastic and motivated with their work. When employees were asked about what made them happy at work, they mentioned things like good salaries, a good boss, good working environment, good relationship with coworkers, policies and even building a powerful sense of community (Herzberg, 2003; Li, 2018; Ruiz & Davis, 2017). When hygiene factors are absent in an organization the workers are not happy; however, the availability of these factors does not really keep them motivated. People stayed motivated when the work they do is interesting to them and the reasons identified that interested employees include things like, whether the work challenged them, the responsibilities they had, the growth possibilities in the workplace, their accomplishments. (Li, 2018). While not every researcher agrees with the theory, other scholars identified links between motivated employees and their desire to stay with an organization.

Job satisfaction motivates employees to stay with an organization. When employees are satisfied with the work, they do, introducing or removing certain factors tend to affect the motivation of the employees either positively or negatively (Mehrad, 2020). Depending on the industry, certain factors that may motivate individuals include training and development, opportunities to gain experience. Employees would not want to be in the same position and will desire to advance. When organizations provide opportunities for training, it improves employee performance at work and, as a result, employees will want to stay in a place that offers opportunities for personal improvement.

Employees have a personal sense of accomplishment, especially when they receive recognition for a task, they executed from start to finish. This sense of accomplishment brings job satisfaction and in turn motivates them. Employees who are put in charge of tasks and given responsibility and authority to execute, may be motivated by the sense of wanting to prove themselves and the ability they have (Piniel & Albert, 2019). When the employees have successfully overcome the challenge and achieved their goals, it brings a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction.

People excel better when they perform tasks they are interested in, and have adequate skill for, and their continued success in those areas can be a source of motivation (Locke & Schattke, 2019). Liu et al. (2022) noted that when employees excel in the jobs they perform, they experience some psychological satisfaction which can result in motivation. It is therefore important to note that a motivated employee will more likely be committed to an organization’s goals and may be willing to stay with the organization than an unmotivated employee.

***Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs***

Herzberg’s two-factor theory leverages on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to distinguish the motivators and the hygiene factors. Maslow posited that human needs are the basis of the actions employee’s display. Maslow groups the needs into five tiers, starting from the base: psychological needs, the need for safety, social needs, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Acquah et al., 2021; Fallatah & Syed, 2018; Maslow, 1943). Depending on the level of need of an individual, Maslow posited that meeting the need of an individual at their level of need will motivate them to make certain decisions or take certain courses of action (Acquah et al., 2021). From Maslow's position, meeting the needs of individual employees is a source of motivation for them.

Motivation is the reason that makes people take a certain course of action. Employees can decide just to satisfy a certain need or take a particular course of action (Acquah et al., 2021; Ștefan et al., 2020). Herzberg classified psychological needs, safety needs and social needs, as hygiene factors. If a person's job can help them meet these needs, Herzberg says, there will be no dissatisfaction. However, meeting the hygiene factors does not result in motivated employees.

Maslow's first three levels of needs, even if met, cannot completely satisfy an individual because they are basic needs. An employee becomes satisfied and motivated when the work they do meets their self-esteem and self-actualization needs (Acquah et al., 2021; Ștefan et al., 2020). Maslow's esteem and self-actualization needs are the factors that Herzberg considers as satisfiers or motivators (Acquah et al., 2021; Mehrad, 2020). If an organization can meet the basic needs of an employee, they may stay with an organization for a period until the desire to grow makes them seek out better opportunities. Creating headroom and growth opportunities can be a motivation for the employee to stay with their current organization, to grow into those opportunities, encouraging retention (Ghani et al., 2022). The need for esteem and self-actualization can make an employee seek more challenging opportunities (Kurdi et al., 2020).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs focused on the hierarchy of needs and how meeting the basic level of need is the most important aspect. When a person is unable to meet their basic needs, then meeting their next level of need will not be a motivation for them. I did not choose Maslow's hierarchy because this theory is not particularly work related but can apply to life in general. The Herzberg theory on the other hand focused on job satisfaction in a work environment and so relates to factors that can impact on motivation and employee retention.

**Employee Retention**

Human resources are one of the essential resources needed for an organization to thrive. The organization's performance is traceable to the quality of employees it can attract and retain, making the employee one of the principal factors in achieving organizational goals (Kurdi et al., 2020; Sawaneh & Kamara, 2019). Hiring and retaining the best-performing employees is at the core of an organization's performance (Ikram et al., 2021). Employee retention refers to employees staying with an organization for an extended period because of measures that the organization has put in place. Singh (2019) noted that employee retention refers to keeping the employees of an organization working willingly with their employer for a longer time because of different measures being implemented by the employer. Vui-Yee and Paggy (2020) noted that losing high-performing employees to employee turnover would cost the organization knowledge, skill, and profit. Retaining experienced and high-performing employees can give an organization a competitive advantage (Kumar & Reddy, 2019). Employee retention is preferred to hiring new employees, especially when the employees are experienced, innovative, and highly productive.

Employee retention strategies are targeted at having employees who will enhance the organization's competitive advantage. While working with employees, business leaders tend to discover factors that will drive employee retention or strategies that can be adopted to motivate employees to retain them (Kurdi et al., 2020). Kurdi et al. (2020) also noted that retaining employees who will strengthen the organization's attractiveness will reduce the cost associated with managing new employees. Because employee retention is challenging for organizations, human resources activities should include developing strategies to retain talented employees (Hussein et al., 2021; Kurdi et al., 2020). Organizations find it challenging to keep their employees for reasons like: (a) poaching, where rival organizations seek talents with the employer organization, promising them sometimes better benefits, and (b) talented employees migrating to other countries seeking better opportunities. Mass migration or relocation of talented staff for economic reasons will severely impact the organization's progress, increasing cost and causing brain drain, creating an inability of the organization to plan to replace aged talents early enough. Retirement can also pose a challenge, especially when most experienced and talented employees are at the same level/cohort. (Hussein et al., 2021; Singh, 2019). Human capital will move toward organizations that present the best package for their benefit; as a result, organizations are saddled with a responsibility to develop strategies to ensure they retain their experienced and best-performing employees.

## Employee Turnover

The rate at which employees leave organizations has increased and organizations with retention policies are able to reduce employee turnover. Employee turnover is one of the most challenging problems organizations face (Chiat & Panatik, 2019). The rate at which employees leave an organization (employee turnover) has increased in recent times is alarming (Amah & Oyetuunde, 2020; Park et al., 2019). Customers who are familiar with an employee who suddenly leaves an organization may refuse to receive the service of others and so the organization may lose customers, causing low performance. Organizations facing high employee turnover may cease to be attractive to talented and potential employees. Employee turnover results in negative consequences like increased running costs, reduced productivity, lowered morale, reduced attraction to choose potential employees and even customers (Chiat & Panatik, 2019; Park et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2018). Organizations spend time and resources recruiting and training employees. Trained employees who leave an organization may share their previous employer's mode of operation with rival organizations. Especially in SMEs, employees leave for reasons that may include lack of trust in their leaders, interpersonal conflict with bosses and colleagues, dissatisfaction with work conditions, in search of better opportunities (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021; Park et al., 2019). An organization may not be able to entirely stop employees from leaving, however, to reduce employee turnover, the organization should have plans to reduce employee turnover to the barest minimum.

### *Types of Employee Turnover*

Though employee turnover impacts organizational performance, not all types of employee turnover affect the organization similarly. Generally, organizations will want to retain their best employees because it will benefit them and they will maintain good performance with their best employees (Rombaut & Guerry, 2020). Not all employee turnover is detrimental to the organization. There are two main categories of employee turnover are voluntary and involuntary turnover. Voluntary turnover could come in the form of transfers, quits, or retirement, while involuntary turnovers could come from termination of employment (Lee, 2018; Lee, S., et al., 2018). The distinguishing factor between voluntary and involuntary turnover is the person that initiates the turnover, either the employer, or the employee. These various categories of turnover affect the organization in diverse ways. Turnover could result from employees seeking to move to other job categories that suit their skills within the same organization. An employee in human resources may seek to transfer to a more technical department because they may have added to their skill and may want to expand their experiential knowledge. The desire to move may also result from moving to another location. The movement of a spouse to another area may demand an employee to seek a transfer, especially if the desired location has opportunities for the employee. These two are examples of transfers that can increase voluntary turnovers. Another type of voluntary turnover is quitting. Quitting means the employee outrightly leaves the organization for reasons best known to them or an employee chooses to retire having served the stipulated length of time. The type of voluntary turnover that may have a positive impact on the organization's performance is when an employee seeks a transfer to another department or location within the same organization. If the performance or the input of the employee to the organization is better in the new department, then their transfer has positively impacted on the organization. In that case, the effect on the organization will not negatively impact the organization because the employee is still within the organization and is performing better in their new department. However, it should be of great concern to an organization if its talented employees begin to leave the organization.

Involuntary turnover occurs when employers lay off employees. An (2019) noted that when employees are laid off, it could be because they are no longer adding value to the organization, or their continuous stay could be detrimental to organizational performance. Stritch et al. (2020) noted that setting difficult goals may cause the low performance of employees which could lead to their jobs being terminated. In the case of involuntary turnover, the employer initiates the turnover process. Lee (2018) noted another reason for involuntary turnover could be an employer downsizing their employees. Sometimes, an organization may not be able to meet its financial obligations and as a result, they may choose to downsize their employees. When two organizations merge into one or an organization acquires the other, it may result in involuntary turnover, because some people will lose their jobs. All these reasons could result in involuntary employee turnover. For involuntary turnover, in whichever case, the organization gains by removing unproductive employees, giving room for employees with better skills. Studying and understanding the variations of employee turnover helps the organization create workable employee retention strategies.

**Employee Attrition**

While employee turnover looks at the number of employees that leave an organization within a specific period, employee attrition refers to the natural ways that employees leave the organization. Employees may decide to leave an organization for reasons like the management skills of the leader (Hoffman & Tadelis, 2021) A leader who has good people skills is most likely to have the employees committed and willing to stay. People want an environment where they can grow and thrive and express themselves freely. A leader will either provide such an enabling environment through their people skills or create an environment that makes the employee unable to grow or thrive, which can make them quit.

An employee may leave an organization voluntarily i.e., based on personal choice or for personal reasons, or involuntarily when the management removes the employee or se of reasons beyond their control e.g., retirement, dismissal, or death. Olubiyi et al. (2019) noted that an employee may decide to leave their organizations because their values do not align with the organization's values. An employee may discover that, in conducting their roles, their values do not align with that of the organization and may decide to leave or the organization may ask them to leave. If they decide to leave, then the attrition is voluntary, but if the organization asks them to leave, then the attrition is involuntary. So, in this case this attrition follows the concept of person-organization P-O fit, which means that the said employee is not fitting for the role. To measure employee attrition, organizations must maintain consistent and detailed employee information (Frye et al., 2018). Maintaining consistent and detailed employee information will help the organization to prevent the negative effect of attrition by planning the employee recruitment, accordingly, based on available information.

### *Causes of Employee Attrition in SMEs*

Every employer will want to attract and employ the best talent and intends to keep them if they are contributing to the growth of the organization. SMEs are severely affected by attrition because of the limited resources available to hire and replace employees that leave. There are various causes of attrition in SMEs, including a lack of strong retention policies, and a lack of job rotation policies. They lack policies that will motivate the employees and improve job satisfaction. Lack of career growth, lack of compensation and recognition, and lack of communication are the identified reasons that cause attrition in SMEs (Srivastava & Tiwari, 2020). No one wants to be stagnant in their roles, though some are ok with a monotonous role people who are not, will seek change to do something else. An employee can leave organizations in search of a new and more challenging role. People equally want to progress in their careers for self-actualization reasons. When organizations create headroom for career growth, it may discourage attrition, especially of great talents, because they could either become promoted or switch roles and both cases can lead to increased job satisfaction. Attrition can occur because of retirement.

A group of people employed at the same time may retire at the same time and this can cause mass attrition. The organization will usually plan for this type of involuntary attrition by employing newer staff to understudy the older ones, the newer ones take over the jobs of the retired employees. With proper human resources management, the organization can minimize the negative effect of involuntary employee attrition related to retirement. (Hoffman & Tadelis, 2021). The organization may not be able to plan when an employee dies suddenly or when there has been a merger or an acquisition of the company, and employees may be put aside without their choice. Employees may also leave their roles and move to other roles in search of newer and challenging experiences.

## Employee Retention Strategies

Skilled employees are more confident of their value, and they seek the best opportunities in the best work environment to practice their skills. Employers on the other hand, need to retain the best skills if they will remain relevant in their industries (Naz et al., 2020). Employers doing whatever they can to keep, the best skills, tend to attract the best skills and lead in their respective industries. Employee retention strategies include all the measures an employer applies to managing their human resources, with the aim of retaining the best skills for a longer time.

To retain talented employees, it is important that employers provide a work environment that will encourage the employees to stay. Naz et al. (2020) noted that employee turnover affects the organizations negatively because turnover may involve losing talented employees. Providing a conducive environment that will encourage the employees to stay should be one of the focuses of employers. Business leaders need to retain the best talents to achieve their goal, some of them develop and apply different strategies to achieve their goal of employee retention. Some strategies are discussed below.

### *Training and Development*

Employees who have stayed long in a particular position may lose their drive and the excitement associated with their work. Employees may begin to look for opportunities to increase their skills. If there are no opportunities for training and development, they may start looking for more challenging opportunities outside. Training and development opportunities have a positive effect on young employees and may influence their willingness to be loyal to an organization (Akther & Tariq, 2020). It is important to note that training and development should not stand alone. Organizations need to have an employee support system like an employee retention strategy or policy together with training and development to encourage employee loyalty to the organization (Nguyen, 2020). Alrazehi et al. (2021) and Manzoor et al. (2021) noted that though training and development encourage employee performance and productivity, a lack of employee support in an organization may make the employees leave the organization. It is important that organizational leaders set up employee retention strategies which may include creating training opportunities for their employees. Training and development may increase employee drive and improve performance when in an employee-supported environment. A support system may include opportunities for advancement after an employee is trained. When there are opportunities for growth with an improved skill or qualification, this can motivate employees to stay with the organization. Improved skill should come with an opportunity to apply what has been learned to an advanced responsibility. Without a supportive environment, training and development may equip employees with skills to seek other opportunities in other organizations that offer better employee support.

***Management and Leadership Style***

Every organization needs a sense of direction and leadership provides the needed direction for the organization to advance. An employee in a toxic environment may just be looking for the slightest opportunity to leave the organization. Bossy leaders lack empathy, and do not provide an enabling environment for employees to, express themselves, grow and thrive. Other leaders may not have what it takes to stir people in the direction of achieving organizational goals. To retain employees, it is important that business leaders exhibit the right leadership skills, to ensure they harness the talent of their employees while ensuring their personal growth (Mwita & Tefurukwa, 2018; Ohunakin et al., 2019). An employee may decide to stay or leave a firm because of the leadership style of their leader, this is important to note.

Certain leadership styles may work best in employee retention. Leaders who are genuinely interested in their employee's well-being and seek that they are satisfied with their jobs are most likely to influence their stay. Leaders who are interested in the development of individual employees and give support to ensure that those they lead are engaged and motivated to deliver on their jobs, influence their decision to stay (Ohunakin et al., 2019; Yamin, 2020;). A leader is also in a best position to enhance the interpersonal relationship between themselves and their subordinates. Leaders who operate an open-door policy, encourage feedback from their subordinates and provides a cordial inter-personal relationship at work. This sort of atmosphere at work can encourage employees to stay with an organization. Business leaders need to ensure that they have the required skills to understand their employees and be able to stir them toward achieving the organizational goal while paying special attention to their leadership styles.

***Employee Engagement***

Employers, in a bid to retain their employees should develop strategies to ensure their employees are actively engaged and invested in the organization. Lee et al. (2020) noted that an engaged workforce influences the performance of an organization. Some strategies include ensuring that proper orientation is given to employees as they come on board, the employee’s tasks/roles in the organization match their areas of strength and talents, they participate in some form of shared leadership, and their contributions are valued, etc. (Bhasin et al., 2019; Quek et al., 2021; Sergio & Rylova, 2018). Employee engagement is an important strategy for employee retention because employees who love are engaged with their work will stay with the organization.

When employees are engaged in the business of the organization, they are likely to be committed to their roles and enjoy the work they do. Employees could be engaged with their work and or engaged with the organization. When organizations can match an employee’s talent to their role, they can perform better and be more involved and enthusiastic about their roles (Bhasin et al., 2019; Sergio & Rylova, 2018). Engaged employees may be more willing to work toward achieving organizational goals (Bhasin et al., 2019). When employees are engaged in their jobs, they are committed; on the other hand, when they are engaged with the organization, as stakeholders, they will likely stay with the organization.  In any or both cases, engaged employees may opt to stay with the organization.

### *Work Flexibility*

The performance of the employee will reflect on the organization's performance, this makes the employee an essential resource for organizational performance. In recent times, work flexibility is one notable factor affecting employee satisfaction (Arrighetti et al., 2021; Davidescu et al., 2020). Employees would rather have better control of their time while delivering on the expectations of their employer. Work flexibility entails employees being able to choose their working hours and location (Ma, 2018). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, during the lock-down, people had to stay home to minimize individual contact with others; organizations opted for their employees to work online. This allowed the employees to connect with their families and engage in other social activities. Workers are beginning to see how long working hours affect their family relationships and extracurricular activities. Work-life balance is starting to play a role in the choice of employment for most employees. Employers that adopt work flexibility as their human resource management (HRM) strategy will improve their employer brand and encourage great talents to seek job opportunities (Austin-Egole et al., 2020; Singh, 2019). HRM or the employees themselves can introduce work flexibility (Austin-Egole et al., 2020). Employers should incorporate work flexibility as their HRM strategy because it will improve their employer brand and may attract the best talents. However, employees are beginning to agitate for flexibility, which does not exist, and are ready to quit their jobs and look for alternatives.

### *Job Embeddedness*

The importance of the right human resources in conducting the day-to-day running of an SME cannot be over-emphasized. In addition, the quality of employees an organization has will play an essential role in their performance. Individual commitment to their work community may influence their decisions to stay with the organization or leave. Job embeddedness as a strategy of employee retention describes how connected an employee is with their work community in terms of fits, links, and sacrifice (Coetzer et al., 2019; Safavi & Karatepe, 2019). An experienced and talented employee who loves what they do in the organization, has a fantastic relationship with fellow workers, boss, and others in their work community, and has worked their way up through the corporate ladder may not want to lose their years of sacrifice, and so will most like choose to stay with an organization.

Employees' attachment to their jobs may play a significant role in their decision to stay or quit. In trying to retain their employees, business leaders may need to ensure they employ enthusiastic workers who have their values and goals aligned with the organization's (Khairunisa & Muafi, 2022). The right employee who is not integrated into the workplace may still not be comfortable, so the organization may need to pay attention to the onboarding activities and ensure the employee is well integrated into the work community. An employee who has other factors that connect them to the organization, or their work environment is highly embedded and may decide to stay with the organization. Conversely, an employee who is less connected to the organization in the ways mentioned is less embedded and may have nothing to motivate them to stay when the opportunity arises (Ghani, et al., 2022). So, job embeddedness is an important strategy that business leaders can use to retain their employees by ensuring on their part, an enabling environment for this strategy to thrive.

***Organizational Culture and Commitment***

The culture of an organization indicates how the members behave in terms of what is acceptable and what is not and how everyday activities are carried out within the organization. The consistency of culture within an organization can provide stability, making the employees know what to expect. Akpa et al. (2021) noted that a solid organizational culture clarifies to employees the happenings within the organization. So, they can commit and be an ambassador of the organization. Consistency of the organizational culture will help the employee determine whether the corporate values align with their personal values. If an organization's culture aligns with the employees' values, they will be willing to stay committed to the organization. Akpa et al. (2021) and Erik (2021) noted that the organization's culture can be a factor that determines the organization's performance. The organizational culture helps the employees make decisions on what drives them. Whether the culture is strong or weak, effective, or ineffective, the findings of the members of the organization will either improve performance or reduce it (Kawiana et al., 2018; Tahir et al., 2019). The owners may shape organizational cultures based on their experiences and beliefs. Employees' experiences may also shape corporate cultures as they continue to evolve (Erik, 2021; Tahir et al., 2019). Solid and effective organizational cultures have the potential to guide the advancement of the organization as they work toward achieving their goals and performing maximally. It is equally essential that the organizational culture encourages the members. No employee puts in their best efforts in a toxic environment, so in addition to a solid corporate culture, the culture must equally be positive to make performance effective. The stability that an organization's culture presents, with its consistency, can increase the trust an employee has in an organization. Employees will be more committed to staying in a culture that they trust.

***Work-Life Balance***

The balance between an employee's work and life outside of work may have a link to whether they decide to stay or leave an organization. Pasamar (2020) noted that the presence of a work-life balance improves job satisfaction, performance, and commitment to work. The policy of the organization in creating opportunities for leisure prevents burnout and this is beneficial to both the employee and the employer, (Slowiak & DeLongchamp, 2022; Yu et al., 2022). While people need time apart from work for social activities, to recoup, and get refreshed to perform maximally, others may need time apart from work to be with their families. Some organizations have policies that encourage the organization to create activities that will build team spirit and these activities are not related to work. Increasing workload which may result in a decrease in time for leisure, demotivates employees, thereby affecting performance (Vinberg & Danielsson, 2021). An increase in workload could be a result of employees leaving the organization and manpower reduction. Eliminating or decreasing leisure time will have a detrimental effect on employee performance. When employees become demotivated and burnt out, it may affect their health and may increase employee turnover.

***Recognition and Rewards***

When people are recognized for their contribution to an organization, it can boost their morale and encourage them to perform better. An organization that recognizes the contributions of its employees and rewards them accordingly may have loyal employees that will last for some time. Rombaut and Guerry (2020) noted that rewarding the outstanding performance of an employee motivates them to perform better, in addition, team recognition as well, can encourage employees or groups of employees to perform better and can encourage them to stay with the organization. Employee motivation has been linked to the recognition of employee performance and the reward of performance. Rai et al. (2018) noted that when the efforts of employees are recognized through adequate engagement and duly rewarded, the employees are motivated to perform better. According to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene factor theory, one of the factors that result in employee job satisfaction is recognition of achievement (Herzberg, 1965). Performance recognition of employees for achievements attained could result in employees choosing to stay because they are satisfied with their work. Younies (2020) noted that when there is a planned system of performance recognition and reward, employees are likely to be attracted and may be motivated to stay. A well-structured system of employee recognition and reward system in an organization can be a motivating factor that will attract qualified and experienced workers and where these policies are applied may result in employee retention.

***Employer Branding***

To improve performance and visibility, organizations develop themselves and focus on building an image that is attractive to both employees and customers. This status or image that the organization acquires is called employer branding. An employer's brand may attract and retain employees or repel and cause increased employee turnover (Monteiro et al., 2020). This image or brand, which the organization is building, could be tied to the organization's structure or values and standards, etc. Organizations seek to attract talents to achieve organizational goals (Monteiro et al., 2020). In trying to ensure that the right employees are attracted to the organization, organizations must build their brands to achieve the right employees. Organizations with a reputation for negative feedback responses or employers failing to meet their agreement for employee welfare may lose the right people. Internet job seekers will look at the profile of the company of the organization they are applying to, to find out what people are saying about the organization, which could inform their decision to apply for the job on not (Saini, 2020). Some organizations may decide to put their policies on employees right on their social media sites which will show potential employees exactly what to expect should they choose to work with them (Saini, 2020). Organizations need to be conscious of the reputation they build online because people are watching, and seekers may make decisions based on an organization's reputation. Potential employees may want to be associated with certain organizations because of their welfare package or corporate social responsibility (CSR). For some organizations, where the employee is the major resource, an organization may need to put forward their CSR package for their employee as a brand to attract job seekers (Zainee & Puteh, 2020). In such organizations, the competition is high because similar organizations will seek the best talents to attract. The organization with the best package and reputation is most likely to attract and retain choice employees.

Apart from employee-based CSR initiatives, some employees are interested in community-based CSR initiatives. Such potential employees may be attracted to apply to an organization that is involved in community-based CSR. They may even seek to get involved in CSR and become more embedded in the system.

***Employee Participation and Engagement***

Being part of the decision-making process can give an individual a sense of ownership and may likely encourage commitment and retention. Business leaders will find it easier to work with employees who are engaged with the process in the organization because highly engaged employees will be those who will likely stay with the organization (Aktar & Pangil, 2018; Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Sahni, 2021). One way organizations can get their employees interested in their work and keep them engaged is to make them a part of the decision making process.

Making an employee a part of the decision-making process will give a sense of ownership to the employee and may motivate them to stay with the organization. Employee participation involves organizations involving employees in making decisions regarding their work (Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Sahni, 2021). It helps them to set personal goals to achieve their targets and take responsibility when they do not achieve their work goals (Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Sahni, 2021). When the employees are well involved in the decision-making process regarding their work, it helps them build capacity and may fuel their commitment to the assignment and to the organization.

Inviting employees to participate in the organization may be through direct participation. consultations, delegations, representation, and shared ownership schemes.

Business managers involve employees in the organization; they may allow them to influence a change in a process, thereby allowing them to express their talents. The business manager may also consult subordinates for input before serious decisions are made in the workplace. Employees also have unions with representatives to represent them in decision-making within the organization. Sahni (2021) noted that millennial workers are more committed and engaged with their work, when they are consulted in the decision-making process. People are more committed to their work when they feel that they are meaningfully contributing to achieving their goals and the organization's growth. When people sense that their opinions are not required or regarded, they may lose motivation and may want to seek other meaningful opportunities.

***Talent Management and Capacity Building***

Managing the key talents in the organization may be critical to the advancement of the organization. It is also important that organizations engage in capacity building to train employees in other areas they may not be so good at, which will contribute to the achievement of the organizational goals (Kwon & Jang, 2021; Wassem et al., 2019). Some organizations have a strategy to attract, employ and retain highly skilled persons with the required ability and capacity to function in key areas of the organization. Talent management is about strategies the organization has put in place to ensure talented employees are employed and maintained in the enterprise including having a succession plan (King & Vaiman, 2019; Kwon & Jang, 2021). Capacity building is one strategy that business leaders cannot overemphasize because of improving employees' performance and the importance of continuity in the organization. When new products or machines are introduced, building capacity becomes necessary to enable the employees to adapt to organizational improvement. Talent management and capacity building can be strategies that organizations can adopt for employee retention because when employees' capacity is advanced, their performance is improved, and the sense of personal growth and development may encourage them to stay with the organization (Wassem et al., 2019). To manage talented employees and encourage employee commitment, organizations' policies may include policies and agreements about training and capacity building. Policies and agreements about training and capacity building may improve the employee's performance, encourage commitment, and so result in employee retention.

**SMEs**

SMEs play an essential role in the growth and development of every economy. SMEs contribute to creating employment for the unemployed or underemployed and even the distribution of economic resources (Ajibola et al., 2021). Various parameters to describe SMEs depend on the country, e.g., the number of employees, the amount of paid-up capital, the annual turnover. The private sector arm of the world bank describes SMEs as enterprises with less than three hundred employees or depending on the country's Gross National Index (GNI). An enterprise with a GNI of 1000 dollars and a turnover of between 10,000 and 1,000,000 dollars is classified as an SME (Small & Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria, 2019). In Nigeria, enterprises with employees between 10 and 199 and assets of between 1000 Naira and 100,000,000 Naira are described as SMEs. To promote economic growth, most countries encourage private sector investment in small and medium businesses (Small & Medium Enterprises

Development Agency of Nigeria, 2019). Small businesses provide employment opportunities for the citizens, reducing the unemployment rate in the economy. SMEs account for 97% of firms in the United States and 99.8% in the European Union (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021; Huang et al., 2022). In Nigeria, as in other world economies, SMEs are essential in growing the GDP. The government of Nigeria is particular about working toward developing the economy by creating avenues for a fund designed to support the growth of small businesses (Adewole, 2018; Msimango-Galawe & Majaja, 2022). The measurement of growth is based on revenue, public image maintenance, skill acquisition and application, employee satisfaction and retention, and product marketing and development (Adewole, 2018; Rozsa et al., 2019). Employees are essential to SMEs because they are the organization’s performers, and their productivity lies with them. The economy could be positively impacted if the SMEs succeed in performing maximally, hence the reason for studying the need for employee retention strategies in SMEs.

**The Impact of Employee Retention Policies on SMEs**

Employee retention is an important human resources management challenge, and it is necessary that every organization including SMEs develop retention policies that will work for their specific industries. SMEs play a significant role in the development of any economy. In Nigeria, high employee turnover in SMEs has been identified as one of the causes of poor performance and this negatively impacts on the contributions of SMEs to the GDP (Bikefe & Daniel, 2022). Not all organizations may experience turnover because their leaders may have some strategies that help them reduce employee turnover. Other struggling SMEs may adopt these strategies to enable them to retain their experienced employees.

SMEs with high employee turnover incur repeated avoidable costs in human resources management. The cost incurred by SMEs linked to employee turnover includes cost of hiring new employees, training costs, reduced morale of the remaining staff, reduced production etc. (Bikefe & Daniel, 2022; Khan, et al., 2020). Applying employee retentions strategies or implementing employee retention policies will help some SMEs to save the cost that results from high employee turnover. The cost reduction in human resources management will increase profit and improve the contributions to the economy's GDP.

Having policies and strategies to reduce turnover and increase employee retention has a positive impact on employee performance. Employees may be more encouraged and motivated to perform better when they see that the organization is interested in their well-being (Al-Ali et al., 2019). Bikefe and Daniel (2022) observed that employee retention strategies and policies impact employee performance when the employees are motivated. Motivation is an important factor in employee performance. Motivated people tend to put in more effort, not necessarily for the extra pay but for other internal reasons hence leaders of SMEs may need to keep studying about employee retention strategies in SMEs to keep their employees motivated.

## Transition

In section 1, I included the foundation of the study, the background of the problem, the problem and purpose, population and sampling, nature of the study, research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, and operational definitions. Also included were the assumptions, limitations, and delimitation of the study; the significance of the study; and the review of the professional and academic literature. I included a description and analysis of several sources about employee retention, employee turnover, attrition, and strategies that may aid SMEs in retaining their talented employees. The two-factor theory provided the conceptual framework to explore strategies small and medium business managers in SMEs use to retain employees.

In section 2, I include the restatement of the purpose statement, the role of the researcher and the participants, the research method and design, the population and sampling, and the ethical research. Additionally, in Section 2, I add details regarding the data collection instruments, the data collection technique, the data organization technique, the data analysis, the reliability and validity, and the transition and summary. In Section 3, I provide the presentation of findings, recommendations for employee retention strategies, suggestions for future actions, reflections on the process, and results from my research.

# Section 2: The Project

My focus in this qualitative study was to explore the different strategies business leaders in SMEs adopt to retain their best-performing employees. Organizations adopt different strategies to ensure they retain their employees, even though not all the strategies are effective. In this study, I explored successful strategies that business leaders in SMEs have adopted so far to retain their employees. In this project section, I include the purpose statement, the role I played as the researcher, information about the participants for the study, the research method and design I adopted, and information about the population and sampling. I include in this section mechanisms I adopted to ensure compliance with guidelines for ethical research. I also included the instruments I used in collecting data, techniques I adopted in data collection, and techniques I used to organize and analyze data. I explained the process I adopted to ensure the reliability and validity of the study results.

## Purpose Statement

The specific business problem was that some business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria lack strategies to retain their experienced employees. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria have successfully implemented to retain their experienced employees.

## Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher and the participants are the keys to shaping and influencing the interviews. The role of the researcher in investigating the research questions is to engage with the participants to answer the research questions and summarize the participants' experiences; hence the researcher is the primary data collection tool (Karagiozis, 2018; Mikuska & Lyndon, 2021). I was the primary data collection instrument in this research. As a researcher, I actively participated because I engaged directly with the interview participants. In addition, I analyzed and interpreted the data. To conduct this research, I selected my participants through a pre-interview session to ascertain eligibility and gain the consent of my participants.

With my knowledge of the research topic and the relationship I had with my potential participants, I identified a potential bias in the research. I run a personal business and I interface with SMEs carrying out contracts for them. I have known and interacted with business managers, and some have complained about their staff leaving them when they needed them most. I live on an island, and it is difficult to get employees because of the location. Employee turnover is a challenge for business owners in my location and this informed my curiosity to research what successful strategies business owners implement to retain their employees. I knew some of the participants personally because we live in the same community, and I do business with some of them.

*The Belmont Report* is a guide to ensure that the participant's rights are protected during the research process and in the final report. A researcher should protect the rights of the participants by following the three guiding principles of *The Belmont Report*: (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I respected the participants' autonomy and confidentiality by obtaining the participant's consent before carrying out the research and their confidentiality is preserved in the research report. To ensure beneficence is achieved, a researcher should ensure that no potential harm comes to the participants because of partaking in the research. I ensured beneficence by preserving the participant's confidentiality and not sharing the information provided, ensuring that both the written and audio information was kept safe. To ensure justice is achieved, the researcher should consider an equitable distribution of participants. I selected participants from different SME industries. I asked the same questions during all the interviews.

To mitigate the identified bias, I worked with an interview protocol as a guide. One role of the researcher is to ensure that they adhere to the ethical commitment to the protection of the participant's identity (Tolchin et al., 2020). I used semistructured interviews to ensure that the interview was directed toward answering the research question. Yeong et al. (2018) noted that creating an interview protocol will present a guide for the interview session in qualitative research. I put in detail the interview questions which is clearly stated in the interview protocol. I designed the research questions to exclude my personal opinions, beliefs, and previous knowledge about the topic. I recorded the interview with the consent of the participants, and I did not interrupt their responses so that my opinion was not reflected during the interview.

## Participants

The population of this study was made up of business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria. The criteria for selection of eligible participants for the study was business leaders in SMEs in Nigeria who have successful employee retention strategies they implement to retain their employees. The eligibility of the participant hinged on ensuring that the participant answered the overarching research question. To qualify as an eligible participant in this research, the manager should have implemented successful employee retention strategies with documented evidence to validate the strategies they have implemented. To minimize bias, a researcher needs to pay careful attention to the process of selecting participants (Jia et al., 2021). I used purposive sampling. The researcher uses purposive sampling method to select participants intentionally to ensure that the source of information will qualify to answer the research question (Johnson et al., 2020). Tarar (2021) noted that the SME regulatory entity in Pakistan, SMEDA, has information about the active SMEs in Pakistan. To understand the category of participants to engage, I contacted SMEDAN, the entity in the Ministry of commerce and industry, that ensures the registration and regulation of SMEs in Nigeria to identify active SMEs. I purposefully selected the SMEs focusing on organizations with employees between 10 and 250 who successfully implemented employee retention strategies.

To gain access to the participants, I reached out to the selection through telephone calls and visits to their offices. In my first contact with them, I ascertained their willingness to participate and in the process of establishing a working relationship, I found out the organizations that have had loyal employees who have been with the organization for no less than 2 years. To ascertain the eligibility of the participants, I conducted a pre interview session to find out if the business leaders have documented strategies, they implement to retain their employees. Then I presented the business managers with the site agreement document. The site agreement was the partner Organization Agreement for the DBA case study. It contained my introduction as the researcher, the name and contact information of the participant and examples of the optional internal records they were willing to share with me. The site agreement also included my responsibility as the researcher and a space where the participant will append their signature, indicating their willingness to be a participant in the study. I used their responses to determine if the participants met the study criteria before inviting them for participation. To access the required information from the participants, the researcher needs to select eligible participants, collect data, analyze the data, and interpret the data (McHugh et al., 2019). I chose participants from different industries to see if their experiences are comparable.

After I gained access to the participants, I presented them with the consent form, to get their consent authorized by their signatures, and pre-informing them of a later interview based on the interview protocol. Johnson et al. (2020) noted that one way to maintain a good working relationship is by promising to share the transcribed interview to ensure that all the information the researcher provided is captured in the interview. To encourage participation, I communicated to the participants my willingness to be open to sharing the transcribed interview summaries and the results of the research with them. Sharing the transcribed interview summaries let the participants confirm the meaning the I provided in the summaries was consistent with the intention of the interviewee.

## Research Method and Design

Having an overall plan for conducting any research was essential in arriving at the research result. This plan involved both the design, which was essential in answering the research question, and the research method, that clarified the mode I intended to adopt in collecting data. It is important to have a clear understanding of where the plan leads, which essentially is answering the research question.

**Research Method**

The method for carrying out the research is determined by the intention of the researcher, the type of research to be conducted and form the responses are expected to take. The three main research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative research method when their intent is to collect and analyze the lived experiences of the participants (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016). Data may be collected by interviewing the participants, observing the participants, or using other unstructured or semistructured means (Clark-Kazak, 2022). Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to discover lived experiences and perceptions of the participants (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016). The interview questions in a qualitative study are semistructured, that way the questions posed to the different participants are the same, but their answers will be based on the various experiences of the participants. These experiences are analyzed without using statistics (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). I chose the qualitative method for this study to ask open-ended questions during a semistructured interview of business leaders, to understand from the perspective of the business leaders the successful strategies they have implemented to retain their employees.

When the intent is to collect and examine a phenomenon using numeric data, then the quantitative research method can be adopted. Data is collected in an organized manner in a quantitative research method and is typically used to explore the correlations between variables. (Basias & Pollalis, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016). Quantitative researchers examine numeric data collected using questionnaires. Data acquired in quantitative research are numerical in nature and are analyzed using statistics and mathematics (Mohajan, 2020). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because I did not intend to use structured interviews to collect data and I did not examine any variables.

Sometimes, a researcher may want to conduct qualitative research and still want to back up their findings by examining some numeric information in relation to the study. Mixed method research includes qualitative and quantitative elements (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). Studies that require the researcher to collect data through observation and interview of participants and then analyze the data using statistics are best carried out using the mixed method. To explore employee retention strategies in SMEs, I did not collect data using questionnaires or analyzing data using mathematics and statistics which is part of a quantitative study or the quantitative portion of a mixed-methods study.

## Research Design

The research design is the route the researcher wishes to follow in carrying out the research. In a qualitative study, the researcher may choose any of the designs based on the mode of data collection and getting the appropriate answers to the research question, namely: (a) ethnography, (b) focus group, (c) narrative, and (d) case study (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). I carried out a multiple case study. Looking at other qualitative designs, a multiple case study was most appropriate for my study.

In a qualitative study, the researcher aims to understand the meaning of the phenomenon being studied from the participants' experiences, and all the people involved in the research have a role to play. Ethnography involves studying the culture of groups of people, which may include observations to describe how the culture works (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Ploder and Hamann (2021) also noted that there is more than one stage in conducting ethnographic research, and all the stages are essential for complete ethnographic research. Ethnography was not appropriate for my study as I did not observe the culture of the people but just interviewed the participants and relied on their feedback. I did not go through all the stages of ethnographic research.

A focus group involves bringing together a group of people and moderating them to answer the research questions. The group answers the questions in a discussion through which qualitative data is collected as the participants interact (Keemink et al., 2022). Even though the method is also used to understand the lived experiences of the participants, I did not use the focus group design as I did not engage a group of business leaders in a group discussion. Instead, I conducted a one-on-one interview with the business managers.

A narrative design entails storytelling. With the narrative design, the participant is expected to narrate an event, talking about their lived experience (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The narrative design may not necessarily involve an interview, but data can the collected from participants' letters, journals, or other sources that show the view of the participants (Nasheeda et al., 2019). The method is used to engage with storied data, and the view of the participants and the interpretation given by the researcher are both essential in a narrative design (Smith & Monforte, 2020). Narrative design was not optimal as it involves both the storytelling or narrative of the participants and the researcher's interpretation.

To gain deep insight into a particular phenomenon, researchers may study individual scenarios or cases. In a case study, a phenomenon is explored in depth in its natural context and within a bounded system (Chong et al., 2021; Keemink et al., 2022). Gioia (2021) noted that in a case study research, two scenarios are assumed, first, in the social world or, in this case, an organization, people give meaning to things through their interactions with others. Secondly, the people know what they are saying and can explain to the researcher in clear terms their lived experiences (Gioia, 2021). A case study is used mainly for researching interventions (Keemink et al., 2022). A multiple case study design, on the other hand, involves an in-depth examination of data from various sources to understand a particular phenomenon in its natural setting (Chong et al., 2021; Coplan & Evans, 2021). Analyzing multiple cases is also a method of triangulating and provides a basis for validating the findings (Coplan & Evans, 2021). Rashid et al. (2019) noted that in a multiple case study, the researcher can gather data until saturation of themes is reached. I explored successful employee retention strategies in SMEs in Nigeria using a multiple case study.

In a qualitative study, choosing a suitable sample size is one hurdle a researcher must cross. Hennink et al. (2019) noted that for a purposive sampling method, saturation is the most appropriate method of determining the right sample size. Janis (2022) noted that data saturation is greatly determined by the consistency of the data collected and thematic analysis, and determining saturation is dependent on the view of the researcher. To address the research question, I opted to conduct a multiple case study because the findings from a single case study may not have provided enough saturation of themes. I continued to interview participants until no new themes emerged from the interviews and summaries. I used the interview protocol in the Appendix, to ensure consistency in the process, and I adopted member checking to ensure my recaps of the interview themes aligned with the participants' views. This design enabled me to gather data until I reached the saturation of themes.

## Population and Sampling

### Population and Sampling

The population for this multiple case study comprised business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria who have successfully implemented strategies to retain their employees. The main aim of qualitative research is to understand meaning based on the experiences of participants in the study. The adequate method for population sampling was based on the research design. The research design for this study was a multiple case study and as such, I chose to use a purposive sampling method to choose my participants. The purposive sampling method is best suited for a study where the researcher needs to purposefully identify participants who can answer the overarching research question (Campbell et al., 2020; Gill, 2020). The convenience sampling method allows for participants to volunteer for the research, but they may not have adequate information to answer the research questions (Gill, 2020). Another sampling method, snowballing, which is sampling based on referrals may also present the same challenges as convenience sampling (Gill, 2020).

In my study, I identified organizational leaders who were well-versed in the information required to answer the research question on employee retention strategies, hence my decision to use the purposive sampling method.

**Sample Size**

Every eligible participant may be difficult to reach as such, it is important to select an adequate number of samples to interview to establish that there is no reoccurrence of new themes. An adequate sample size is a criterion that cannot be overlooked in ensuring the rigor input in arriving at the study result (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Young & Casey, 2019). Gill (2020) noted that no specific rules apply to determining the sample size, the qualitative researcher needs to have collected enough data from the selected sample to answer the research question. The sample size must be sufficient to provide enough information required to understand the phenomenon being studied.

Predetermining the right sample and size guides the qualitative researcher in ensuring that the research question is answered. Gill (2020) noted that the qualitative researcher should pre-determine a sample size adequate to answer the research question. Two or three cases might be appropriate to replicate results; however, between four and six samples will provide more compelling evidence for the results and take care of new patterns (Yin, 2017; Young & Casey, 2019). The rationale for choosing four managers is that the information gathered from at least four participants provided more compelling evidence to reach saturation and provided rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, incorporating all the variations in the different cases without new themes.

For a case study design, the interview questions guide the quest for data saturation. The researcher reaches data saturation when there is enough information to replicate the study, and there is no longer added information with no other theme available for coding (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). To ensure data saturation, I continued to interview the participants and group the information gathered from the interviews into themes until there was no further information that resulted in a new theme.

The quality of a sample size is more important than the quantity in qualitative research. The right sampling method must be applied to get the quality of participants required. Shaheen et al. (2019) and Ames et al. (2019) noted that to identify participants with rich information, who can answer the interview questions, the researcher can use the purposive sampling method. I used the purposive sampling method to select participants that provided sufficient information that answered the interview question. Solarino and Aguinis (2020) noted that to access knowledgeable participants effectively, the researcher may need to carry out broad conversations to spark the interest of the elite participant and garner general information for the study. I ascertained the participant’s eligibility by asking general questions about the organization and its rate of employee retention. I also inquired if they have strategies, they implement to retain their employees. In selecting participants for the study, I approached different SMEs in Nigeria to request an opportunity to interact with their business leaders. For every organization I get access to, I visited or contacted the leaders through the telephone. I requested to set up an appointment with the business leader with the intent to organize a pre-interview with them to ascertain their eligibility as a participant in the study.

To achieve a seamless interview session, I requested an interview time and location that was be convenient for the participants. To achieve the purpose of the study, the location was free from distractions to avoid interruptions. Then I presented the participant form and requested their consent to be a participant in the study. The first four business leaders, who have successfully applied employee retention strategies, and who consented in writing by filling out the participant's form, were selected as participants in the study.

## Ethical Research

To carry out research work ethically, the researcher needs to ensure that the participant fully understands their rights to protection. Pietrzykowski and Smilowska (2021) noted that to ensure research work is worthwhile, a participant needs to be fully involved in providing the required data for the study. A researcher needs to clearly explain the process of the interview, the requirements from the participants and other facts which may not be clearly understood without detailed explanation as found in the consent form. This enables the participants to give their informed consent. It is equally important to let the participant understand the purpose of the study. A clear understanding of the purpose and the required information helped to validate the responses the participants gave (Dankar et al., 2019; Millum & Bromwich, 2021). I collected data after I received the IRB's approval # 02-24-23-1058446. I also adopted *The Belmont Report* to ensure that my participant's information is duly protected. *The Belmont Report* provides three principles that, when adopted ensured an ethical protection of the participant as follows: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Apart from ensuring that there is no infringement on the participant's rights, the responses are more valid because informed consent was given. I have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program course to ensure I have full understanding of the rights of the participants. I applied the knowledge I have acquired in this course in carrying out this research.

I set up a meeting with my participants to explain the purpose of my research and the details in the consent form. In obtaining their consent, I clearly let them understand their rights to privacy and that the information they share with me will be well preserved in a folder on my computer and an external drive and will not be shared over social media. To ensure confidentiality, I did not mention the name of the organization in my study, but I gave each participant a code to represent the information I got from them. The data collected for the research in electronic form were stored away in an external drive, passworded, and will be preserved for at least 5 years. The hard copy documents collected were stored in a safe. All documents collected for this research, both soft and hardcopies records will be destroyed after 5 years.

Participants were not penalized, and their work and social statuses were not affected negatively if they chose to withdraw their consent. I made it clear to them that they are not under any restriction to withdraw their consent from the research if they so wish. Dankar et al. (2019) noted that the same ease with which consent is obtained should be the same ease with which withdrawal from participation should be granted. I let the participants understand their right to withdraw from their participation if they so wish. I also let them know that they can communicate to me their decision to withdraw either by a call or through email.

Participants, especially business leaders, may not want to give out certain information about their organization except their organization benefitted from the information given out. Vellinga et al. (2020) noted that with incentives, a researcher can easily get more participants’ consent. l did not give any monetary incentive to participants to receive their consent. However, I offered to share with them my findings from the study, and this encouraged them to accept to participate knowing that my findings may be beneficial to them.

## Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher, I am the primary data collection instrument. De Loyola et al. (2022) noted that the qualitative researcher is the data collection instrument and the data analyst. McGrath et al. (2019) further noted that as the primary instrument for data collection, the researcher should be aware that their role is critical in ensuring the quality of the data collected. The researcher must not be biased; however, with the right interviewing skills, they should be a co-creator of data with the interviewee. To corroborate the interviewee’s responses, I requested additional documents to further validate the interviewee’s claims, like company training documents, records, etc.

As the primary data collection instrument, I used semistructured interviews to determine what retention strategies managers in SMEs use to retain their employees. The purpose of interviews is to understand the interviewees' point of view in line with the subject under study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Semistructured interviews are used to create a flexible interview, such that the interview is structured enough to be guided by a set of interview questions and flexible enough for the researcher to ask probing questions where clarity is required (McGrath et al., 2019; Mselle et al., 2018). Having conceptualized the research problem after a review of relevant literature, I used an interview protocol in the Appendix, to conduct semistructured interviews. The essence of the interview protocol is to allow for consistency when analyzing the information retrieved from the interview. Roberts et al. (2021) noted that the research question and interview protocols must align with the study's purpose and design. The interview questions I prepared aligned with the research question to address the problem statement and achieve the purpose of the study. These questions were used as a guide during the interviews and for all the participants during the research process.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process, I adopted member checking to ensure that the participants corroborate my analysis of their responses. De Loyola et al. (2022) noted that to validate the information gathered from the interview, it is important that in analyzing the data from the participants, the right interpretation is given by the researcher using member checking. Member checking involves reaching out to the participants to get them to either confirm the identified themes or refute them (Hamilton, 2020). Getting the participants to confirm that my interpretation of their responses aligns with what they implied improves the reliability and validity of the data collected.

## Data Collection Technique

In qualitative research, the technique used should be such that it will allow a better understanding of the participants' experiences. Qualitative researchers may use interviews to collect data from their participants (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). My data collection technique was conducting a semistructured interview with open-ended questions to help me thoroughly explore the interviewee's experiences. The interview was guided by an already prepared interview protocol, as seen in the Appendix. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) noted that to carry out a successful semistructured interview, the researcher needs to establish rapport with the interviewee. Establishing rapport with the interviewee encouraged the flow of conversation, removed the awkward feeling that goes with the transactional question-answer approach and set the interviewee at ease.

Some of the advantages of semistructured interview is that the interview is guided by a set of interview questions, which are asked in an open-ended format. This method allows the interviewee to fully express their views based on their lived experience, rather than providing a list of responses and expecting the participants to align with any of them. McIntosh and Morse (2015) noted that with unstructured interviews, the interviewer has no control over the responses of the participants. On the other hand, with a structured interview, the participant's lived experiences may not be freely shared. Hence the use of a set of interview questions that guided the participants in conversations with the interviewer. One disadvantage is that even with semistructured interviews, certain important questions may not be asked in the interview questions. Some of the responses may not fully express the views of the participants.

I informed the participant that I recorded the interview with an audio recorder and simultaneously took notes. I also requested that the interviewees share relevant documents to corroborate the information supplied during the interview. The additional company documents helped authenticate the information the interviewee gives. Brown et al. (2020) noted that to carry out an ethical interview, it is important for the researcher to obtain informed consent from the participants in every study, especially the vulnerable. I assured the interviewee of my willingness to preserve the confidentiality of the recordings as well as the relevant organizational documents they shared with me. Comparing my notes with the transcription helped me analyze my collected data. I conducted member checking with each participant to ensure that my analysis captured the interviewee's thoughts and to further strengthen the reliability of the data. This ensured that the themes I identified as strategies for employee retention align with the interviewee's shared meaning.

## Data Organization Technique

I conducted a semistructured interview to explore how business leaders in SMEs retain their experienced employees. Qualitative interviews generate a large amount of data, and organizing the data collected is a critical step in data analysis. Lester, et al. (2020) noted that considering the number of hours expended during the data collection, the amount of information gathered is significant, and it is essential to properly organize the data in format that will aid analysis and produce meaning. The interview was recorded with an audio recorder, and I took notes. I labelled each participant from P1 to P5 in my notes. I transcribed the audio recording using a computer-assisted tool, labeling each participant's interview session as P1A - P5A, with P1 A representing participant 1 audio and P5A representing participant 5 audio. This helped me know how to compare and summarize the data from my note taking with Participant's audio transcription. Using Microsoft Excel, I grouped the data into themes. In addition to the information gathered from the interview, I requested additional documents from the organization to corroborate the information obtained during the interview. The electronic data were stored in an external drive, and hard copy data documents, which include the company documents, were preserved in a safe. The audio recording and the company documents will be preserved for 5 years and then destroyed afterward.

## Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the data collected during an interview of participants, including the supporting documents gathered, are still in their raw state, and they need to be processed to get the information required to determine the research findings. Data analysis is the process of working with unstructured data for the purpose of conducting research on a phenomenon (Hammersley, 2021). Lester et al. (2020) and Yin (2017) advised the qualitative researcher to map out a strategy for analyzing the raw data, to be able to make sense of it. To adequately analyze the data, Yin advised a 5-phase process involving data compilation, disassembling the data, reassembling the data, interpreting strategies the data, and drawing a conclusion (Yin, 2017). Triangulation is an essential step in data analysis because it helps enhance the quality and validity of a case study

(Farquhar et al., 2020; Fusch et al., 2018). Methodological triangulation has been noted as the best method for a case study design since it helped mitigate the researcher's bias (Fusch et al., 2018). I adopted methodological triangulation because, in addition to the data generated from the interview, I collected data from training manuals and company policy documents within the cases. The training manual and policy documents are expected to either corroborate the responses of the interviewees or refute it. Where the responses of the interviewees corroborated with the training manual and other policy documents, it further strengthened the validity of the analysis. Where on the other hand the training manual and the policy documents refuted the responses of the interviewee, then I sought clarification.

I adopted a logical and sequential strategy in analyzing the data. In the start, I asked each participant the same interview question as found in the interview protocol in Appendix. The first stage of data analysis is the compilation stage. I transcribed the recorded interview using the office 365 Microsoft word transcribe feature, a computer-assisted tool. Yin (2017) noted that qualitative data analysis could be done using a computer-assisted tool. I edited the transcript to ensure the audio interviews align with the transcription. I used labels to identify each speaker, and I compiled the edited raw interview texts by arranging the responses to each interview question according to the participant's responses. I carried out member checking by sharing my interview summary with each interviewee to identify misrepresented responses; then, I adjusted accordingly, with a few additions by the interviewees which they recollected during the member checking. Then I compared the company documents to ensure that the documents align with the responses of the participants, and where it was different, I clarified with the participants. Fusch et al. (2018) noted that triangulation could be done by using an interview protocol and member checking to mitigate the researcher's bias. The second phase in the analysis is the disassembling process, which involves breaking the compiled data into smaller manageable bits. I arranged the responses to each interview question using the office 356 Microsoft excel sheet. Yin (2017) suggested starting with the interview questions and then linking the responses that answer each research question. I used the transcript for all the participants to identify themes and concepts that answer the overarching research question.

The reassembling phase is the third stage, where the coding in the first two phases is further narrowed down. Yin (2017) noted that the reassembling step involves identifying patterns from previous codes. I used commonly identified employee retention strategies as themes and then analyzed the summary of the interviewee's responses based on the pre-determined themes. I made provisions for additional themes that may come up on the spreadsheet even though no additional theme came up. Finally, to interpret and conclude the process, I matched the identified themes with the pre-determined strategies to check for similarities and alignment. I found the relationship between the codes and how they answered the research questions. Then, I compared my results to the conceptual framework and newly published results to establish an alignment or misalignment.

## Reliability and Validity

Ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative research process is critical to maintaining the quality of the results from this design. Rose and Johnson

(2020) noted that the research design needs systematic rigor to achieve trustworthiness, the researcher must be credible, and the findings believable and applicable in similar scenarios. To demonstrate the trustworthiness of the research, the researcher needs to ensure that the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are met.

**Reliability**

Reliability describes how dependable the result of the research is. Roberts et al. (2019) noted that reliability is one of the qualitative research components that helped demonstrate trustworthiness. Reliability is based on the need to ensure that the data presented is adequate and consistent with other participants in similar circumstances (Spiers et al., 2018). To ensure dependability of the research process, I confirmed my summary of the audio recording and my notes using member checking. Ranahan and Keefe (2022) suggested that to eliminate bias and ensure that the result of an interview is reliable, the researcher should confirm results with participants using member checking. Triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources, enhances reliability (Fusch et al., 2018). I also have access to company documents as another source of data to corroborate the information from the interview.

**Validity**

Every stage in qualitative research must be handled reliably and transparently to ascertain validity. Hayashi et al. (2021) noted that the quality of results in a qualitative study would be enhanced if the right process is adopted and data saturation is reached to achieve validity. Data saturation is attained when additional insights or themes can no longer be identified in the data analysis (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). To ensure the validity of this study, I used pre-determined themes based on reviewed literature. I made provisions for new themes or codes that may arise during the data analysis. I carried out the interview using an interview protocol to ensure consistency in the interviews among the participants. To mitigate bias and confirm my interpretations of the interview transcription, I conducted member checking after transcribing the audio recordings from the interviews. Member checking enabled the participants to correct, confirm and include additional information, if necessary. I corroborated the participant's response with other data sources, like the organizational training manuals and policy documents, to ensure validity.

### ***Credibility***

To ensure the validity of a research finding, the process must be credible. Credibility shows the extent to which a research finding is factual (De Loyola et al., 2022). It is the degree of confidence of truth in the research findings (McGinley et al., 2020). In qualitative research, different strategies are adopted to increase rigor and enhance the credibility of the study, including triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, etc. (De Loyola et al., 2022; McGinley et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2020). Credibility should be based on the lived experience of the participant, in this case, the interviewee, and not tainted by the researcher's bias (McGinley et al., 2020). Triangulation involves providing different perspectives on the research finding. To provide triangulation, I collected other company documents, like training manuals and policy documents, to verify the responses given by the participants. I engaged in member checking severally with the participant to enhance rigor and ensure that I captured the position of the participants adequately. To provide consistency in the process, I used the interview protocol, as seen in the Appendix, to conduct the interview.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability is enhanced when others can confirm and support the results of a study. To establish confirmability, the researcher needs to provide a trail that will guide readers and other researchers to follow and evaluate the process to achieve a similar outcome (Nguyen et al., 2021). I recognized the possibility of being biased as a researcher in this study because of my experience in employee retention strategies in a non-profit organization. With this consciousness, I did not bring up my experiences in the non-profit organization during the interview, but I used the interview protocol in the Appendix to guide my interview process. McGinley et al. (2020) noted that biases when stated during research are only preconceptions. McGinley et al. also noted that the neutrality of the researcher helped ensure confirmability of the study. Having mentioned my possible bias on the subject under study, I was neutral during the interview session and in summarizing the transcribed audio. I also conducted member checking to ensure that I align with my participant's perspectives on the results. The interview protocol guided confirmability and ensured any inquirer can follow it to confirm the results.

### *Transferability*

Transferability in qualitative studies ensures that research results can be replicated by other researchers anywhere in the world using similar designs and methods. Stahl and King (2020) noted that an essential aspect of qualitative research is that the results are transferable, and others can pick up from where a researcher stopped to improve on the research. McGinley et al. (2020) described transferability as the applicability of the research findings not just to the researcher or the participants but to others. McGinley et al. also noted that in qualitative research, to ensure transferability, the researcher needed to properly define the context of the study and make recommendations for further research. To further ensure the transferability of the findings of my research, I followed a detailed methodological approach, using a known research design and methodology to conduct the research. I adopted the purposive sampling method to select business leaders who have successfully applied employee retention strategies. I conducted the interview using the interview protocol in the Appendix.

***Data Saturation***

In qualitative research, it is essential to note when enough data has been collected before the researcher can proceed with the data analysis. Saturation is a concept that qualitative researchers use to indicate that the data collected is enough to answer the research question (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). When enough interviews have been conducted that no new themes emerge from further interviews, thematic saturation is achieved. I continued to interview participants and carrying constant member checking until I reached thematic data saturation. Data saturation was reached when the participants cease to give new information, and further questioning did not offer anything new about the phenomenon (McGinley et al., 2020). McGinley et al. further noted that the aim of transferability is to ensure external validity, such that other people other than the researcher or the participants can apply the research findings with similar results.

Considering the measures, I adopted in carrying out the research, other persons can use the conclusions of this research to retain their employees.

## Transition and Summary

In section 2, I restated the purpose statement, my role as the researcher, and that of the participants. I described who the eligible study participants were, explained the research method and design, and provided information on the population, sampling method, and sample size. I included how I intend to conduct ethical research based on the approved requirement. I provided information on my intended data collection instruments, technique, and the data organization technique I used. I explained the data analysis approach I adopted and how I ensured the process's reliability and validity, describing the process's credibility, confirmability, and transferability.

Section 2 provided a basis for a smooth transition into section 3, where I present the study’s results, the conclusion, how this study can be applied to professional practice, its implication for social change, and the recommendations.

# Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

## Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria have successfully implemented to retain their experienced employees. The following themes were identified: (a) training and development; (b) management and leadership style; (c) organizational culture; (d) financial and nonfinancial benefits.

The findings of the study revealed that talent management and capacity building are strategies that, when implemented, resulted in employees seeing their future on the job, driving them toward attaining their career goals. Employees freely participated in the decision making and execution of business goals, which gave them a sense of accomplishment, especially when their contributions were recognized and rewarded. An upbeat organizational culture can create a positive and friendly workplace, where communication is encouraged, conflicts amicably resolved, and mistakes treated as accidents and opportunities to grow. The findings also showed that proper onboarding of new employees results in active involvement of the employees in the day-to-day running of the business gives them a sense of purpose and ownership. The result showed that caring for the employee’s well-being is an essential aspect of employee retention in Nigeria. The employee’s well-being can be catered for emotionally, psychologically, and financially. Finally, considering Nigeria is a developing country, financial and nonfinancial benefits are essential to encourage employee retention.

## Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this qualitative multiple case study was: What strategies do business leaders in SMEs in Nigeria use to retain their experienced employees? Findings showed strategies that business leaders use to retain their employees in Nigeria. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis are displayed in Tables 1 to 4, and they include: training and development, management and leadership style, organizational culture, and financial and nonfinancial benefits.

### Theme 1: Training and Development

Theme 1, as displayed in the table, showed the role that the training and development of employees play in employee retention. Table 1 indicates that based on the participant's responses, talent management, and capacity building are both essentials in training and development; hence, they are subthemes. The training policies of the organizations confirmed this position.

**Table 1**

*The Role of Training and Development*

| Subthemes | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Talent management | 7 | 50 |
| Capacity building | 7 | 50 |
| Total | 14 | 100 |

*Note*. Frequency is the number of times the subtheme was found in the data collected, while the percentage shows the rate at which each subtheme appears expressed as a fraction of 100.

From the view of the participants, ensuring that proper onboarding is carried out and employees are put in roles that align with their skills is essential to retaining them. O1 and O2 provided different types of training for both new employees and experienced employees. O1 is open to students going through industrial training with them, and from the pool of successful trainees, they select some of their employees. The training policies in the human resources (HR) document for O1 stated that the organization provides induction training for all new employees, providing job-specific training, including health and safety information for all new and existing employees who are changing jobs and disciplines within the company. O2 also provides development opportunities for all employees, monitors individual training requirements and objectives, etc. All these provisions in the policy documents corroborated the assertions of the participants. O2 trains students in their organization and retains the outstanding ones if they agree to stay with it. To ensure adequate talent management, O1 and O2 employ skilled staff for specific positions and ensure they are placed in such roles. This makes the staff function maximally in their skill, making them more productive. Employees are encouraged to stay if they are satisfied and achieve results that earned them recognition. To adequately manage talents, P1 adopts the strategy of leaders mentoring junior employees and providing training to them on the job. According to the HR policies of O1 and O2, employees undergo professional training to grow their capacity for new technologies. P2 and P4 handle weekly personnel development training, and to enhance the capacity of experienced employees, P2 invites professionals to train employees on new technologies. P3 organizes onboarding and induction sessions for new ad-hoc staff. P4 hires skilled and unskilled employees. The unskilled employee is put under a skilled employee to understudy them for 6 months and is only certified fit to use the machines if they are successful. O2 encourages their skilled employees to look out for courses that enhanced the quality of their work and sign up for them. The organization supports the training financially up to a certain amount. Alrawahi et al. (2020) noted that opportunities for growth and advancement are satisfiers, and when employees have opportunities to grow and advance their careers, it motivates them. Training and development of employees help in growing and advancing the careers of employees, and so is an essential strategy for employee retention. Based on my finding, growth and advancement can come about because of talent management and capacity building, and it aligns with Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation.

***Correlation With the Conceptual Framework***

One of the motivators in Herzberg's two-factor theory is an opportunity for growth and advancement. Talent management ensures the employee is best positioned to perform maximally (Elsafty & Oraby, 2022). High-performing employees are recognized and rewarded with advancement in their careers. On the other hand, capacity building enables employees to keep increasing production and abreast with industry technology. Employees are prepared to step into higher roles, and this can be motivation to stay with the organization. Opportunity to grow is one of the motivation factors; according to Herzberg two-factor theory (Singh & Bhattacharjee, 2020). Growth and advancement, a satisfier in Herzberg's theory, can lead to employee retention (Herzberg, 2003).

Organizations embark on talent management and capacity building to achieve growth and advancement.

### *Correlation With Literature*

All the participant organizations adopt training and development as a strategy for employee retention, aligning with previous and recent research findings. The findings from this study on training and development align with Kandukuri (2023). Kandukuri identified talent management and capacity building as a strategy showing the organizational interest in recruiting, building, and retaining a thriving workforce. The findings in the study about the importance of proper onboarding activities align with the Ghani et al., 2022). The importance of properly integrating the employees cannot be overemphasized. Development opportunities motivate the employees by encouraging personal growth, and career growth, which resulted in the employee’s career advancement (Khatun et al., 2023). Training and development opportunities align with recent studies that are a strategy for employee retention.

## Theme 2: Management and Leadership Style

Theme 2 shows the role of management and leadership style in encouraging employee retention of experienced employees. The company policies indicate the core values upheld by the participant organizations and support the management and leadership style of the participants. The subthemes that emerged from the responses indicate that the management and leadership style practiced in the participant organizations encouraged employee engagement and employee participation.

**Table 2**

*The Role of Management and Leadership Style*

| Subthemes | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Employee engagement | 8 | 61.5% |
| Employee participation | 5 | 38.5% |
| Total | 13 | 100 |

*Note:* Frequency is the number of times the subtheme was found in the data collected, while the percentage shows the rate at which each subtheme appears expressed as a fraction of 100.

The organization's management and leadership style encourage or discourage employee engagement and participation. The management and leadership style that encourages employee engagement and participation motivates and encourages employee retention. Based on the data collected, the management style indicates that management ensures proper onboarding and induction activities when an employee is newly engaged. This ensures that the employee is aware of the expectations of the company and the roles they are meant to play, and they are adequately schooled on the organization's vision, mission, and values. Management engages with the employee by keeping an open-door policy, where regular communication is encouraged. P2 engages weekly with the employees, and in these meetings, training on personal development is conducted, weekly expectations are communicated, and general feedback is taken as well. The management and leadership style in P2 is transformational and encourages a family-like relationship in the organization, with a clear leadership hierarchy. Cordial relationships are encouraged, especially between colleagues at the same and different levels. P2 is interested in the quality of employee performance and well-being. P1 carries out a well-structured induction and onboarding process that encourages a mentor-mentee relationship in the organization. P3 works directly with employees, so there is constant communication with them. P2 and P3 treat honest mistakes and damages by employees as part of the cost of wear and tear; however, they engage with the employee to ensure that lessons are taken from the incident. Management operates in a democratic style of leadership where employee participation is encouraged in the day-to-day running of the business. People are usually more committed to projects where expectations are clearly defined, and they are part of both the decision-making and execution of the project. P2, in engaging with the employees, discovers the strengths of some of the employees and challenges them in the areas of their strength. P2 does this by challenging the creativity of such employees by providing the enabling environment and tools to function maximally. P4 regularly engages with employees online and offline, and feedback is given and received regularly. P4 also maintains an open-door policy, where employees can relate directly to management. The constant engagement ensures that expectations are spelled out clearly, and corrections can be made instantly. Constant engagement also ensures that conflicts are resolved promptly and not allowed to build up, creating a healthy work environment. P3 constantly assigns responsibility to employees to give them a sense of ownership, which makes them feel valued and included in the day-to-day running of the business. P4 ensures proper induction and onboarding of new employees. Induction and onboarding activities are supported by the HR documents that show that employees are placed under the guidance of a superior for a probationary period and are then absorbed fully into the system afterward. An employee engaged adequately in the organizational activity is more motivated to carry out their duties more effectively than a disengaged employee. A motivated employee will most likely actively participate in the organization's activity (Kwon & Park, 2019). Based on my findings supported by company documents, the management style that creates an enabling work environment to encourage the engagement and participation of employees is instrumental to employee retention.

### *Correlation With the Conceptual Framework*

Managing a successful organization requires good engagement and supervision by business leaders. According to Herzberg's theory of motivation, the absence of good-quality supervision and good interpersonal relationships can result in employee dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 2003). These are essential factors in management and leadership style in an organization. To adequately engage employees, encourage participation, and reduce dissatisfaction in the workplace, the management needs to have an excellent interpersonal relationship with their employees and suitable supervision in place (Zen, 2023). Hossan et al. (2020) noted the link between leadership styles and employee engagement. They supported the idea that an excellent interpersonal relationship, a hygiene factor in Herzberg's theory of motivation, especially between leaders and subordinates, will encourage employee engagement. Employee engagement and participation which results from the appropriate leadership style, can encourage employee retention.

### *Correlation With Literature*

Management and leadership style influence the level of engagement and participation of employees. Based on the data collected from the interviews and company policy documents, all the participants' management and leadership styles support employee engagement and participation. According to a study by Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022), engaged employees are motivated to stay with the organization. This view is also supported by Mgaiwa (2023), who agreed that the leadership style adopted by organizational leaders plays a significant role in employee job satisfaction. A transformational leadership style influences job satisfaction rather than a transactional leadership style (Mgaiwa, 2023). It is also important that to engage an employee, a proper onboarding process should be implemented to ensure that the right fit of individual is tied to jobs where they can function maximally, resulting in reduction in job hopping (Siew et al., 2023). The findings from this research are in line with the results of recent literature on the issue of employee retention.

## **Theme 3: Organizational Culture**

Theme 3 shows the role a favorable organizational culture plays in employee retention. I discovered that the organizational core values drive the culture of the participant organizations, as seen in Table 3. The responses I gathered from the participants show five subthemes that are indicators of a solid organizational culture: community and positive work environment, work-life balance, communication, opportunities for growth, and recognition.

**Table 3**

*The Role of Organizational Culture*

| Subthemes | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Community and positive work environment | 15 | 41.7% |
| Work-life Balance | 5 | 13.9% |
| Communication | 4 | 11.1% |
| Opportunities for growth | 8 | 22.2% |
| Recognition | 4 | 11.1% |
| Total | 36 | 100% |

*Note:* Frequency is the number of times the subtheme was found in the data collected, while the percentage shows the rate at which each subtheme appears expressed as a fraction of 100.

Fifteen responses from the participants indicated a sense of community and a positive work environment. Five responses indicated that the organization maintained a work-life balance, shown mainly by official leave periods approved by the organization, and parties, to appreciate employee contributions and off days. Another indicator of organizational culture is the role of communication. The participant organizations keep an open line of communication between the employees and business leaders. The opportunities for growth and recognition of employees' contributions are all indicators of a robust organizational culture identified from participants' responses.

P1 organizes an annual event where the best-performing teams are recognized. This is consistent with the organization's culture and keeps employees looking forward to the reward they receive at that event. Employee recognition is captured in the organization's monthly team average report, where rewards are given for various categories: excellence in operations, customer relations, teamwork, etc. O2 has an appraisal policy, where superiors appraise the work of their junior colleagues and recommend those who qualify for recognition. P2 recognizes and rewards the best-performing employees. P3 is in the habit of verbally acknowledging excellent performance, which encourages the employees and makes them put in their best efforts. P4 gives instant feedback on employee performance, whether positive or negative. Instant recognition and reprimand help the employee to know they are seen and acknowledged and also to help them know the expectations from leadership.

Regarding community and positive work environment, O1 has continuous improvement as part of its company policies. O1 creates a mentor-mentee relationship between superior and subordinate. In order to grow the capacity of mentees, they are sometimes encouraged to step into their mentor's shoes in their absence, and when their performance is outstanding, they are rewarded. P1 prepares subordinates to take over from them when they leave the office, creating a positive work environment and a sense of hope that they will grow in their career. P2 operates the golden rule principle, aligning with the core values as stated in the policy document. P2 encourages a family-like relationship at work with an operational hierarchy system. P2 introduces teamwork in a positive work environment, where employees are involved in a particular process, they are encouraged to work as a team to deliver on time. They are rewarded when they deliver on time. This also creates a positive work environment with an enabling environment to grow. P3 is innovative and creates an environment that encourages employees always to take things a bit higher than the status quo. This keeps them ahead of their contemporaries, and employees want to work in a community with continuous improvement. P3 operates a no-blame culture where they will instead learn from a mistake, regardless of who may have committed them, rather than blame the employee. They instead treat the cost of such damage as part of the business cost of wear and tear. However, P3 admonishes employees when they misbehave to avoid repetition. This work environment encourages employees to have a learning and growth mindset and makes them more productive. P3 being a home-run business treats its employees professionally and with respect. P4 insists on the teamwork of employees and encourages constant feedback within teams. The employees in O4 are also encouraged to take responsibility and make decisions pertaining to their roles. The work environment in O4 encourages planning, as the day's work priorities are set and followed strictly. This makes the employee more focused on achieving the day's targets.

Work-life balance in O1 to O4 is practiced through approvals of annual leave periods. The leave can be taken at once or in bits; O1 has a schedule for leave so everyone does not go on leave at the same time. O2 and O3 insist that advance information is given to the business leader for proper arrangements for colleagues to stand in for the employee on leave. O1, O2, O3, and O4 organize end-of-year parties to celebrate achievements for the year. The end-of-year party is a strategy to create work-life balance and a sense of community.

Communication is another point practiced by the participants. P1 engages with the employees to ascertain their satisfaction with the job. P1 conducted an anonymous call of supervisors in O1 during the COVID-19 lockdown period to ascertain their job satisfaction. P1 offered them higher remuneration, but they refused because of the benefits they got from their current company. P2 maintains an open door policy, so the employees can approach their superiors to give feedback, seek clarification about their work, and engage in other forms of communication. P2 is also interested in the quality of work of the employees as well as their well-being. P4 communicates their expectations to the employee and ensures they are acknowledged well when performing excellently.

When employees see that an organization provides an environment to encourage growth, they are encouraged to stay with it. P1 provides training and continuous training, especially when new machines and methods are purchased. This kind of training keeps the employee relevant in the industry. Special training is given to experienced employees to keep them abreast of recent technology. P2 invites professionals to train their employees on recent technology. The drive toward excellence and innovation makes P3 invest in new knowledge and impart it to employees so they can learn and grow.

### *Correlation With the Conceptual Framework*

Organizational culture includes beliefs, values, and practices guiding team members' behavior. Organizational culture can affect the employee positively or negatively. According to Herzberg's theory of motivation, the company policy of an organization is a hygiene factor that and embedded in the company policy are the values and expected practices of the organization. Lee and Lee (2022) noted that a positive work environment could influence an employee’s job satisfaction. Organizational culture may contain both motivators and hygiene factors. Based on the findings, some of the themes identified fall under hygiene factors while others are motivator factors. Motivator themes adopted as part of the organizational structure include opportunities for growth and recognition, while the hygiene factor includes community and positive work environment, work-life balance, and communication. The subthemes in the findings justify the use of Herzberg two-factor motivation theory as the study's conceptual framework.

### *Correlation With Literature*

Theme 3 focuses on the influence of organizational culture on employee retention. The subthemes identified under organizational culture include community and positive work environment, work-life balance, communication, creating opportunities for growth, and recognition. Tarar (2021) opined that ensuring a positive work environment is instrumental to employee retention. Activities to boost work-life balance, encourage a sense of community, creating opportunities to grow are elements of an organizational culture that would result in employee retention if managers adopted them. In a recent study, Arena et al. (2023) discovered that cultivating the right organizational culture where positive energy is encouraged by building trust, collaboration, and open communication is instrumental to employee retention. An organization where the leadership supports open communication will encourage employees to stay as it encourages employees to understand expectations from the organization and give them the opportunity to express themselves (Doescher, 2022). The research findings show that cultivating the right organizational culture is vital for encouraging employees' decisions to stay and the subthemes align with these recent studies.

**Theme 4: Financial and Nonfinancial Benefits**

Theme 4 shows the role of financial and nonfinancial benefits on employee retention. The responses I gathered from the participants during the interviews showed four subthemes related to financial and nonfinancial benefits: recognition and rewards, loan scheme, reasonable remuneration, and gifts.

**Table 4**

*The Role of Financial and Nonfinancial Benefits*

| Subthemes | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Recognition and rewards | 4 | 20% |
| Loan scheme | 2 | 10% |
| Reasonable remuneration | 4 | 20% |
| Gifts and fringe benefits | 10 | 50% |
| Total | 20 | 100 |

*Note:* Frequency is the number of times the subtheme was found in the data collected, while the percentage shows the rate at which each subtheme appears expressed as a fraction of 100.

I found that employees are interested in the financial and nonfinancial benefits offered by the organization. From the interviews, the different participants confirmed that the extra benefits they offer their employees stand out as strategies that make their organization one of the ideal organizations to work with in Nigeria. O1, O2, O3, and O4 organize annual best-performing employee awards. O1 has a structured way of identifying the best-performing departments and teams, which narrows down to the best-performing employee. All the participant organizations have a system of rewarding excellent performance. O1 and O2 organize long service awards, where an employee who has stayed with the organization for up to 10 years is especially recognized and given a special gift.

P1 and P2 implement the loan scheme of their organizations, respectively. In O1, confirmed employees are entitled to the organization's zero-interest loan scheme. In O2, employees can ask for loans, up to 20% of their annual net salary. All employees who have worked up to 1 year with no disciplinary case are entitled to the loan. According to the policy document, repayment must be made in 6 months. The loan scheme helps the employees finance some immediate needs which they may not have the means to handle given the bulk sum involved and what they can afford. For O1, the employees can spread out their payback within 1 year. P4 grants salary advances and sometimes soft loans to help employees meet immediate needs.

All the participants agreed that giving reasonable remuneration is an essential strategy for employee retention because employees will compare remunerations and go for jobs that offer higher remuneration. When P4 started, the organization lost three employees because the remuneration was lower than what was obtainable in the industry. P4 conducted benchmarking activities to ascertain what is obtainable in the industry, then increased it. P2 pays reasonable salaries and a little above what is obtainable in the industry; starting salaries before probation are higher than what is obtainable in the industry and increase after a successful probation period. The salaries of experienced employees are higher, and an additional half is paid in the 13th month for all employees.

Gifts and other benefits are themes that emerged as strategies for employee retention. In O1, used cars are auctioned at reduced prices to experienced staff. Some of the employees look forward to these auction sales. O1 also gives medical insurance for all employees covering a spouse and up to four children in the family. P2 sources experienced employees from all over the country to the Island where the business is located and provides accommodation for employees from far places to encourage them to stay. P2 also makes allowance for relocation allowance including transportation. Employees who have worked with O2 for up to a year are entitled to a parting gift if they need to go. Even though they need to give up to 2 months' notice to enable the organization to source for a replacement. The organization sets aside an amount for each employee to pay for their parting gift, and the longer they stay, the bigger the size of their gift. The employees know this because it is included in the organization's policy document. The organization gifts employees who have stayed up to 1-year a training course of their choice, up to N100,000 annually, if it will help them improve their capacity. P3 pays the employees when they put in extra time at work and gifts them Groceries, toiletries, and even cooked food to help alleviate the economic challenges. P4 gifts employees with foodstuff, especially rice, during the festive seasons at the end of the year.

### *Correlation With the Conceptual Framework*

The focus of Theme 4 is disclosing financial and nonfinancial benefits' role in employee retention. Under Theme 4, four subthemes were identified: recognition and rewards, loan scheme, reasonable remuneration, and gifts and other benefits. When salaries are inadequate, it can result in dissatisfaction, and an inadequate employee salary is a hygiene factor that results in employee dissatisfaction. However, Bharath (2023) noted that organizational leaders must go beyond paychecks to encourage employees to stay. Miah and Hasan (2022) opined that to encourage the retention of experienced employees, business leaders should include hygiene and motivator factors as they play specific roles in the employees' decision to stay. Other benefits like recognition and reward and financial and nonfinancial benefits align with the Herzberg two-factor theory as this study's conceptual framework since some subthemes are motivator factors while others are hygiene factors.

### *Correlation With Literature*

Theme 4 focuses on the influence of financial and nonfinancial benefits on employee retention. The subthemes identified under financial and nonfinancial benefits include recognition and rewards, loan scheme, reasonable remuneration, gifts, and other benefits. Tang (2023) noted that nonfinancial benefits are a strategy that encourages employees to stay, while Murtiningsih (2020) opined that compensation has a positive impact on employee retention. Reasonable compensation is a good motivator because compensation is usually given when an employee has done exceptionally well. Based on the recent findings, nonfinancial benefits like managerial recognition and that others and make employees feel appreciated, have a sense of honor, and be motivated to work harder. Nonfinancial benefits were seen to encourage employee performance and improve the employees' positive work attitude. Financial benefits as a strategy for employee retention was also supported by Bharath (2023), who found that even though the financial benefit is not enough to motivate employees and influence decisions to stay, its absence can cause dissatisfaction. In this study, Akpan et al. (2022) noted that reasonable remuneration and other nonfinancial benefits like fringe benefits are responsible for attracting, motivating, and retaining employees. My findings about the roles of financial and nonfinancial benefits in employee retention align with these recent works of literature.

## Applications to Professional Practice

The study findings indicated that organizations successfully retain their experienced staff if they pay close attention to the training and development of the employee, the management and leadership style, the culture being cultivated in the organization, and the role that financial and nonfinancial benefits play in employee retention. These strategies comprise the key themes identified from this research, which all play a significant role. They can significantly help business leaders if they apply them strategically to retain their experienced employees. The findings of this study can be applied in an organization by creating capacity-building programs that will enhance the employee's knowledge, making them more relevant in the organization and helping them perform better and improve output. The study results revealed that organizations providing training and capacity-building opportunities retain experienced employees.

Apart from the benefit to the employee, this also directly benefits the organization since the employee's performance will improve the output. This result applies whether the organization is a service organization or not. Meanwhile, capacity building helps the organization retain highly skilled staff abreast of the latest technology in their industry.

A management and leadership style that encourages employee participation and engagement results in experienced employees staying and improving their work contributions and attitude. If business leaders create an environment where employees are free to contribute ideas and make some level of decision pertaining to their jobs, they become more passionate and seek to ensure that their ideas succeed.  In addition, the study showed that proper onboarding of employees helps them engage better with their roles and perform better. All participant organizations recognize excellent performance, which boosts the employees' morale and influences their decision to stay. Experienced employees need to know that they are recognized and appreciated. Business leaders can adopt this deliberate strategy to acknowledge efforts and contributions, boosting their morale and encouraging them to be more engaged. A transformational management/leadership style will be interested in supporting employee growth and advancement. Business leaders can adopt this style as a strategy for employee retention. A business leader may anonymously check with their experienced employee to confirm that their strategies are enough to retain their employee. They may want to discover their expectations from them through these anonymous calls.

Organizational culture is built over time, and when the right culture is built, it can boost motivation and job satisfaction and encourage employees to stay. The result of this study encourages business leaders of SMEs to cultivate a positive work environment that offers a sense of community to the employees. An environment that encourages the free flow of communication, recognizes contributions and efforts, encourages a work-life balance, and creates opportunities for growth is a work environment that encourages employee retention. So, if business leaders wish to retain their experienced employees, they may adopt the results of these findings. Business leaders need to realize that when they are committed to growing the capacity of their experienced employees, their organization benefits from this investment. First, growth opportunities involving capacity building keep employees informed and knowledgeable about new technologies, increasing the organization's profitability. In addition, when employees are aware that the organization takes their growth seriously, they become more motivated and engaged with its business.

The participants in this study are all business leaders in SMEs in Nigeria. As a developing country, all the participants identified financial and nonfinancial incentives as an essential strategy for employee retention. This is another result that can be beneficial for professional practice. Business leaders can deliberately set up a system of employee recognition and reward, loan schemes that can help employees meet immediate needs, offer gifts and other fringe benefits to encourage the employees, and, most importantly, ensure that employees are reasonably remunerated. The participants in this study reiterated the importance of financial benefits because of the economic conditions. They all confirmed that their employees would likely move to where the money flows more because they have needs to meet; however, what keeps them staying with the organization is more than the paycheck, which is hardly enough. Business leaders may offer fringe benefits like insurance schemes, covering the employee or their families. Setting up no or low-interest loan schemes is another strategy. For this recommendation, I advise setting up a proper system for loan repayment.

## Implications for Social Change

The successful application of this study's results could contribute to positive social change in many ways. First, the stability of an organization may result in higher profitability which will increase the company tax—increased tax increases economic revenue, which benefits the community and can be used to fund public infrastructural development. High profitability is tied to how productive the organizations are, and productivity is tied to many factors, including highly skilled and experienced employees. Again, employees, who also are members of society, feel better about themselves when they are readily acknowledged and rewarded and are able to contribute meaningfully to societal development. Career growth results in higher financial capacity and increases economic activities as well. Adopting the strategy of a work-life balance for the employee creates a workforce that is more engaged with the community. Employees may use their recreation time to engage in volunteering activities that will benefit the community. Some of the personal development training the employees acquire will also be used in their immediate environment, benefiting family and other social gatherings.

The result of this study revealed a direct social impact the community could benefit from the business leaders adopting an aspect of training. One of the participant organizations in this study trains young vocational school graduates in technical skills through their industrial training program. When they graduate from the program, they form a pool of employable locals through the organization. The organization is cited in a remote place, and getting experienced hands to work with them is not easy, so they devised a means to train the locals. They contribute to training their potential staff, making them employable, and improving the number of employable people in the community. The employees that came in through this program are loyal to the organization, and their retention rates are high.

## Recommendations for Action

The primary employee retention strategies revealed in this study have been implemented by the participants, who are business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria, to retain their experienced employees. These strategies have been grouped into: (a) training and development, (b) leadership and management style, (c) organizational culture, and (d) financial and nonfinancial incentives. SME business leaders are essential to implementing these recommendations because they are responsible for developing company policies and they have direct interactions with the employees. The results of this study can be helpful for business leaders in SMEs to develop policies that will reduce turnover rates and increase the organization’s productivity by ensuring that the right quality of employees is retained.

It is recommended that the management and leadership style of the business leaders should be such that they are interested in the development and growth of the employee while paying close attention to their wellbeing. This leadership style will create an enabling environment where employees are engaged in their roles and participate in the day-to-day running of the business. Such employees are motivated to do their best to achieve the organizational goals and, indirectly, their personal growth. Business leaders should work on their ability to connect with their employees to understand their intentions and to know if their retention strategies are working. This can be done either anonymously or directly.

It is also recommended that business leaders invest in the training and development of employees. Talent management and capacity building will motivate the employee, enhance output quality, and keep the organization attractive and relevant in the industry. Business leaders are advised to carry out a deliberate onboarding process to place employees into roles that fit their skills to ensure they understand the company policy on different work issues and the organizational culture. The business leader should check in with the new employee after the day, week, month, and after 1 year to ensure that they are fully engaged with the system. New technologies are being discovered every now and then, so it is recommended that business leaders should invest in capacity-building for their employees to keep them informed about their areas of expertise. This will help employees not feel stuck in their capacity when they become engaged with the organization and keep the business relevant.

Another recommendation for business leaders in SMEs is to ensure that they constantly benchmark salaries and other financial and nonfinancial incentives to ensure the organization is at par with similar industries or a little ahead of time. In Nigeria, a developing country, employees tend to move toward jobs where financial benefits are more. I recommend an attractive remuneration package with fringe benefits for experienced and highly skilled employees and ensure they are implemented. This strategy will attract highly skilled and experienced job seekers and retain them with the organization. Other recommendations for benefits include a system of appraisals that will ensure that the input of experienced employees is recognized and duly rewarded. Long service awards give the employee recognition to look forward to. I recommend a long service award with an adequate reward.

Another important recommendation is to develop policies and a culture that encourages open communication, mutual respect, friendliness, and positive team spirit. A happy employee is a good ambassador for the organization (Khairy et al., 2023). When employees are satisfied with their jobs, their focus on carrying out their roles will be evident, and customers will notice. Customers' complaints may boost their morale, and they could decide to stay.

After they are approved and available for public view, I will share my research findings with my participants. I will grant training sessions for business leaders of SMEs on employee retention strategies in Nigeria. I will share my thoughts on some employee retention strategies in business conferences and on social media so SMEs I may not be able to reach physically may gain from the knowledge I have acquired in this study. I will also publish portions of my findings in business journals in Nigeria.

## Recommendations for Further Research

One of the limitations I envisaged was that the differences in the SME industries might make the experience of one participant business leader not precisely the experience of another. The results revealed that although industries differ, the strategies are the same.

For further research, I recommend choosing participants in the same SME sector to see if there would be differences in the different participants' experiences.

For further studies, and with the interest of the DBA program in making a social impact, I recommend that researchers look into employee retention strategies that will directly or indirectly result in community development. Researchers may consider the impact of training indigenous potential employees and recruiting exceptional ones, then continuous training, bearing in mind that they may be instrumental to their community development. Continuous training will grow their capacity, and they may become brand ambassadors for the organization.

This study focused on the business leader's view. The business leader may view the employee retention strategy that worked from the view of the employees that have stayed and what they are deliberately doing to retain them. However, I recommend further research by interviewing the employees to know what strategy worked. This will reveal a balanced view of why employees stayed or left.

## Reflections

Reflecting on my almost 4 years of studies in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program, I have learned and grown in many ways. Initially, I was not conversant with the learning pattern, being an online program, and I looked forward to meeting with my tutors and committee members in any of the residencies. However, when the COVID–19 pandemic struck the world, and we had to have virtual residencies, that made it impossible. I learned during this process that significant learning is possible virtually. I picked up some tremendous technological skills during the process. I became better at preparing and presenting slides using the PowerPoint app; I discovered more features from the Microsoft Word app, which made editing, reviewing, recording, and transcribing raw data easier. Learning the APA 7 referencing style was tasking. However, I have become more confident in correctly citing my references.

I have also grown in my time management skills. The term plan was a strategy that motivated me, helping me look forward to completing it each term, and incorporating stretch goals helped me consistently achieve more than my term plan. Learning the interaction style in the classroom through the discussions exposed me to other people, including my chair, and this improved my communication skills. I interacted with peers and senior colleagues, and everyone was always very courteous and helpful whenever they could. I connected with a few outside the Walden portal. I have also grown in my research skills. I have learned to source scholarly information online and correctly reference the authors using the required method. I have observed a significant improvement in my critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills.

The differences in the time zones initially made me miss some of my essential interactive sessions. I adjusted my sleeping time and did most of my work in the wee hours of the morning, apart from the interviews and data collection stages. The DBA program impacted other aspects of my life, family, business, and other commitments. However, with proper time management and support from my family and friends, I have come this far. I am grateful. I had a fantastic time each week with my chair; I was always looking forward to my time with her. She is a huge encouragement in this journey.

One of my motivations for this study was volunteering in a nongovernmental organization (NGO) and seeing the employee turnover rate in NGOs in Nigeria. I wanted to discover what strategies SMEs, being profit-oriented, use to retain their employees and see if they can be adapted in an NGO scenario, given the limitations of funds. To study employee retention further, I will choose NGO leaders as my participants and may incorporate the employees.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study revealed strategies for employee retention that business leaders of SMEs in Nigeria have implemented to retain their experienced employees. Business owners and leaders are in the position to implement these strategies, being that they interact more with employees and are involved in creating policies. The organization leaders in designing policies must incorporate retention strategies and ensure that the policies align with their core values, including when it is a policy pertaining to employees. Employees must be regarded as essential to the organization’s success and, as such, must be given opportunities to grow in learning and capacity such that they are encouraged to stay. The leadership and management style in SMEs should be such that the business leaders create an enabling environment to influence a positive and friendly work culture. This can be accomplished by encouraging open communication between colleagues, subordinates, and their leaders. This will enhance the giving and taking of feedback. When employees can freely express themselves, it is easy for their concerns to be known and handled; also, employers and business leaders are able to communicate their expectations to the employees. An observant business leader can decipher employees' concerns when they allow for a free flow of communication, and they can easily proffer solutions to their concerns.

As a developing country, financial and nonfinancial benefits and incentives are necessary retention strategies in Nigeria. Leaders of SMEs must consider the remuneration package and ensure they are at par or a little above what is obtainable in their sector of the economy. Business leaders must invest in benefits that will help alleviate the financial burdens of their employees, e.g., health benefits in the form of health insurance, low or no-interest loans, opportunities to repossess the company's depreciated assets through balloting and auctioning, etc. Other benefits include acknowledging and rewarding employee contributions by having employees or the month/year awards and recognizing extended stays by organizing long-service awards. When implemented, the findings from this study will be helpful to business leaders in SMEs who are developing employee retention strategies that will encourage their experienced employees to stay. They should be part of the policy document of the organization and adapted to suit the organization's core values.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

| Meeting preparation. | Meeting Protocol |
|---|---|
| Book an appointment over the telephone, visit the participants at work, or schedule an informal meeting to introduce the interview. | Good day. My name is Ijeoma Omeoga. I am a doctoral student at Walden University, and I am researching employee retention strategies in SMEs in Nigeria. Thank you for agreeing to participate in helping me understand what strategies you have successfully implemented in your organization to retain your employees. I have earlier shared the interview questions with you on the topic. Kindly let me know if you understand the questions. Also, please feel free to ask questions before the interview session starts and even during the interview. |
| Paraphrase the questions if the participant requires clarity and ask probing questions to better understand the participant's responses. | 1. What strategies employee did you use to retain your experienced employees? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 2. How do you measure the success of the employee retention strategies you used?<br>3. What challenges did you experience in achieving success in implementing your employee retention strategies?<br>4. How did you overcome these challenges in implementing your employee retention strategies?<br>5. Which of the strategies have you implemented that has worked best for employee retention? |
| End the interview by verbally thanking the participant. Prepare a thank you note to be sent by e-mail to appreciate their shared information and the time spent. | Thank you for taking the time for this interview. The information you shared with me will be useful in this research process and help me progress in my doctoral study. To end this session, I would like to know if you have any questions(s). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Schedule a follow-up member check interview. This is to confirm that my transcription aligns with the participant's responses. | Good day. Recalling my earlier interview, one of the requirements of the course is to ensure that I correctly captured the meaning you shared as responses to my research questions through member checking. To carry out member checking, I would like to schedule another interview to follow up on the previous interview. Kindly let me know what time and place will be suitable for you. |
| Arrive at the place of the interview on time. Start by describing the process of member checking. | Good day. Sequel to our last conversation, I have a hard copy of the interview questions and the analysis of your responses. Please evaluate it and let me know if I correctly captured your thoughts or misrepresented something you said. Feel free to add other information that might be necessary to clarify the findings of this research. |
| Prepare the analysis for each question and share it with the participants. | Good day: attached is an analysis of the responses to each question I asked you. This analysis includes the interview |

| | |
|---|---|
| | question and the interpretation of your responses to each question. |