



**INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS ON EMPLOYEE
PRODUCTIVITY IN EQUATORIAL NUT PROCESSORS COMPANY LTD,
NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The study focused on the influence of social-cultural factors on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to ascertain the influence of culture on employee productivity of companies in North-Central Nigeria and to investigate the influence education on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. The population of the study is 520 which comprise the management staff of Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd (ENP) in the following departments/units: production, research and development, marketing, sales and public relations respectively. A sample size of 225 (two hundred and twenty-five) was determined using Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. The content validity and reliability tests of the survey instrument were established. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability and the value of 0.66 was got showing that the instrument is reliable. Survey research method was used and 225 copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents through personal contact and 220 copies of questionnaire were returned which formed the basis for data analysis. Data were presented using percentage and frequency distribution tables. Data were analyzed with simple linear regression analysis. The major findings in the study revealed that there is a significant influence of culture on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. Similarly, it was revealed that there is a significant influence of education on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that organizations should implement appropriate strategies for the given socio-cultural environment to aid successful business outcome, among others.

Keywords: *Culture, Education, Employee productivity, Socio-cultural theory, and North-central Nigeria*

Introduction

It is an axiom that people have become the same as the world had become a global village. In his word, Masovic (2018) called global village a global convergence. However, people can never be the same as nuances exist and will continue to subsist as the environment in which one evolves makes such a person unique in a special situation (Willman-Iivarinen, 2017). That is a very fundamental rationale why managers and employees behave differently vis-à-vis different working situations (Bowen & Luy, 2018). No two managers are the same, and even the same manager can be different persons in the same or different working situations. Unequivocally, managers perform differently given the same opportunity to pursue certain organizational goal (Dobre, 2013). Nevertheless, a shrewd and versatile manager strategically strives to outsmart others to earn higher reputation and become highly motivated. Such a manager is a Victor and indeed, the productivity of employees is directly related to many internal and external influences in which wise managers who involve their employees in the day to day running of their businesses and also contribute in making important decision choose to enhance their productivity (Aminu, 2019). Aminu (2019) in his study revealed that management by objective (MBO) adopted by Vodafone in Ghana has a significant influence on employee productivity.

Globally, society and culture had radically influenced every nooks and cranny of modern day businesses and had helped in determining how businesses are conducted (Masovic 2018); starting from what goods and services are produced, for whom they are produced, through which channels they will be sold, and which technical and managerial capabilities determines customer satisfaction (Aktas, Gelfand & Hanges, 2015). Businesses are very interested in going global but they fail to acknowledge the nuances in cultural diversity existing among nations (Ewah & Osang, 2018; Singh, 2014). Successful companies have strategically bifurcated from global standardization to a new paradigm shift; adaptation that focuses on adjusting and adapting to the attitudes, norms, beliefs and values of their host countries. In other words, they believe in the doctrine of “do in Rome as the Romans do,” all in a bid to triumph and survive the tide of global business competition (Okolo et al., 2015). Moreover, in the increasingly competitive global business environment, organizations are compelled to invest in capacity building and development in order to become more cost effective and efficient, innovative and generally more competitive than other industry actors. Some of the sources of competitive advantage for these organizations include financial strength, tangible resources such as production facilities, location advantages, and intangible resources such as goodwill, patents, technical know-how and the employees (Dwyer & Mesak, 2005).

Apparently, the employee is arguably the most strategic of all resources (man, material, money and machine) that the organization could possess (Nwachukwu, Chladkova & Olatunji, 2018). This is because the employee determines the effective and efficient utilization of other resources (machine, material and money) owned by the organization (Igwe, Onwumere & Egbo, 2014; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Nda & Fard, 2013). By implication, an organization could have excellent resources but would still be uncompetitive

when it fails to properly invest in attracting and retaining the best and most skillful human resources. In addition, human resources tend to be inimitable because of the natural characteristic of human beings where each person will tend to have a unique set of capabilities that make them stand out. As opposed to material resources that can be replicated or substituted, the human characteristics are unique to each individual. This means that if an organization manages to create a system in which it can bring out the best of its employees, its human resources becomes an important source of competitive advantage for it. Indeed, human resources are the sources of achieving competitive advantage because of its capability to convert the other resources other than man into output.

Interestingly, one of the ways in which an organization can exploit its human resources to achieve competitive advantage is by increasing their level of productivity which refers to the volume of output produced from a given volume of inputs or resources (OECD, 2001; O'Mahony & Timmer, 2009). Productivity growth is important to the firm because more real income means that the firm can meet its obligations to customers, supplier, workers, shareholders and government (taxes and regulations) and still remain competitive or even improve its competitiveness in the market place (Parboteeah & Cullen, 2017). In a nutshell, high productivity level translates into lower unit costs and this is why Gillespre and Hennessey (2016) refer to productivity as one of the major drivers of success in the organization. It means growing the business in a way where the employees and the employers are satisfied. It is achievable to have a productive workplace where the business grows in a way in which the workers, clients and management are satisfied.

However, Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd (ENP) is one of the leading edible nut concerns in the North-Central Nigeria (ENP, 2019). The company's range of products for both local and export markets focuses on three principal nuts such as cashew nuts, palm nuts and Peanuts. ENP was founded in 1992, and it has grown over the years to occupy a prominent position in the region's nut processing business. The factory facility in Kogi State employs state-of-the-art technology in its operations, allowing for high standards of hygiene and efficiency (ENP, 2019). Nevertheless, a number of inconsistencies have been observed in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd recent performance reports which revealed that productivity in the company has however stagnated over the last three years in spite of the various initiatives that the company has put in place aimed at enhancing productivity (ENP Ltd, 2019). Against this backdrop, this study sought to examine the socio-cultural factors; with specific reference to culture and education that influence employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria.

Review of Literature

Socio-Cultural Factors

Socio-cultural factors are those forces within cultures and societies that influence the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the people (Drucy, 2012). Thus, business organizations should be aware of the predominant attitudes, values and beliefs in their business environment so that they can satisfy their customers better. Indeed, the differences in the attitudes and values among management of business organizations and employees can lead to

grave functional issues (Ajami & Goddard, 2014). There are various socio-cultural factors that significantly influence business activities as well as the performance of managers and business firms. The main socio-cultural factors that have major impact on the operation of business firms according to Masovic (2018) include culture, language, religion, education, customer preferences and attitude of the society towards goods and services.

Culture

Organizational culture cum individual culture of the society has significant impact on employee productivity. Culture is indubitably a part and parcel of human society and history (Okolo et al., 2015). In fact, culture is sacrosanct and that is why it is peoples' *raison d'être*. Culture can be defined as shared values, motives, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meaning of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations (Shenkar, Luo & Chi, 2015). It is people's way of life and therefore define the way they interact and behave with others from within and different cultural backgrounds (Bennett, 2015; Sibani, 2018). In general, culture is considered as the accepted behaviors, customs and values of a given society (Dlabay & Scott, 2011). Many components can be considered as elements of culture which arise and are related to the beliefs and behavior of people. A culture of every country through its elements affects their business activities (Lukic, Dzamic, Knezevic, Alcakovic & Boskovic, 2014; Yesil & Kaya, 2013). The main elements of culture that may have impact on the operation of companies according to Masovic (2018) include attitude and beliefs, attitude towards time, attitude towards work and leisure, attitude towards achievement, attitude towards change and attitude towards job.

Excitedly, language as part and parcel of people's culture is very important in boosting the productivity of employees in an organization (Dale-Olsen & Finseras, 2020). There is greater opportunity and productivity in recruiting indigenes of a particular country and also, those who can speak certain universally accepted languages like English, French, Portuguese, Arabic etc. This will help management to easily identify the needs and wants of the citizens and satisfy them substantially. Where workers fail to understand and speak the language of the locals, conducting day to day business activities becomes stalled and this will dwarf the productivity of the employees (Grzeszczyk, 2015). Similarly, religion has significant influence on employee productivity (Kaasa, 2016). Certain religion forbids certain products. For instance, the Jews forbid the consumption of meat such as pigs, camels, rabbits, rodents, reptiles, insects, camel's milk; sea food such as catfish, swordfish, crab, lobster, shrimp and oysters; poultry such as ostrich, hawk, owl, stork; and dairy such as cheeseburger and milk with chicken (Small, Bastin & Clouthier, 2014), such that when a firm chooses to render their services in Israel, they need to serve the Jewish populations those menus which their culture permits.

Unequivocally, the consequences of producing products and services that are religiously and culturally forbidden is disastrous as customer will boycott such company leading to low employee productivity. Conversely and from the employee perspective, where those products are allowed, employees instead of being idle or redundant will become very productive.

Another point of credulity is for instance, in Nigeria where religion (Christianity and Islam) are highly practiced in both Southern and Northern part respectively and a lot of public holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Id el Fitr, Id El Kabir, Id El Maulud, are declared and observed and these holidays drastically reduce working days and consequently affect the productivity of the employees. The influence of culture on the operation of companies is real and widespread (Shenkar, Luo & Chi, 2015). Therefore, it is very important for companies to adapt their production, marketing and sales activities depending on the culture of the given people or country. Culture of people in a particular country directly or indirectly reflects on the achieved performance of companies. The hypothesis is thus stated that:

H1: There is a significant positive influence of culture on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria.

Education

The education of organization employees as well as the customers they serve is highly relevant in achieving high employee productivity in a society (Khanmohammadiotaqsara, Khalili & Mohseni, 2012; Dogarawa, 2011; Chevalier, Harmon, Walker & Zhu, 2004). Education is supreme to everything and thus, a pathfinder to science, technology and development. (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Kola, 2013). It is a sine qua non to the success of all business opportunities and activities. Both the employees and the target consumer population (the market) of firms need to be literate to serve and be served and satisfied better. Employees become more productive when they have a huge population of literate target market to serve goods and services. An illiterate population of target consumers is very difficult to serve as they lack the knowledge to identify which marketing communication, prices and places that are accessible at cheaper or affordable prices (Mhlanga & Kotze, 2014; Chishti & Nasreen, 2017).

From the business perspective too, an illiterate employee is highly unproductive. This is consequent upon the fact that such an employee lack the knowledge of research to understand whom his/her consumer is, and what marketing mix is required to appeal to him/her to illicit patronage and satisfaction. Fortunately, research reveals that an educated salesperson will know more about a firm's company, supplies, customers, products, policies, competitors and design appropriate marketing-management strategies to satisfy the various needs and wants of all stakeholders (Feng, Fay, Xiang, 2020; Bolander, Bonney & Satornino, 2014). Also, it is only a literate market that knows a firm's reputation and so can vouch for the firm even in time of crises.

Education significantly shapes the hearts and minds of a country's population and lunches them into unfettered economic and social development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Idris, Hassan, Ya'acob, Gill, Aziah & Awal, 2012). The quality of workforce is determined by the level of education and rate of literacy of the people (Aswathappa, 2010). Education also determines the economic, social, cultural, science and technological, political, and military development of any nation in the world (Beckley, 2010). Without mincing words, consumers in a highly educated country are savvy, more knowledgeable, sophisticated and therefore, demand more quality products and services, better price of goods and services, aid in research

that guarantee the manufacture of sustainable (consumer are there on ground even before production) (Okolo, 2017; Anetoh et al., 2020).

In the same vein, as the business environment becomes highly dynamic and as competition heightens, literate employees need better working conditions and ergonomics, better working environment, and greater opportunities for further improvement (Parboteeah & Cullen, 2017). In a nut shell, there is always a strategic collaboration between management and customers and only education can foster a sustainable relationship geared towards customer satisfaction, monumental employee productivity and higher profit. Therefore, the hypothesis is stated thus:

H4: There is a significant positive influence of education on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria.

Employee productivity

In the most dynamic and competitive business arena, employee productivity determines a firm's effectiveness and success (Arya, Sainy & Vaidya, 2016). In their study, it was revealed that organizational effectiveness has a significant relationship with employee productivity. Arya, Sainy and Vaidya (2016) are in tune with this findings too. Nevertheless, Arya et al. (2016) argue that one of the fundamental issues facing organizations today is employee productivity. Communicating employee productivity in all departments of an organization is very imperative. This can be done through newsletters, speeches, seminars, workshops, conferences and the social media. The social media which is the modern media has proven to be very efficacious in communicating employee productivity. This is supported by a study done by Aguenza, Al-Kassem and Som (2012) which revealed that the social media has a positive influence on employee productivity.

One of the foremost indicators for organizational competitiveness and survival is employee productivity and this has resulted to increased research on how it can be improve organizational performance. An employee's work environment has great influence on his or her productivity (Duru & Shimawua, 2017). In their study conducted it was revealed that the ambience of a worker's office environment will improve productivity. In their word, it was observed that "if a worker's office is neat, noiseless, properly arranged well lighted and ventilated, employees will feel a sense of belonging and this will make them to work efficiently and effectively." Undoubtedly, workers are more creative and innovative, more obedient, more proactive to service delivery, come to work early and regularly and spend more time in their offices when good working environment is made available (Duru & Shimawua, 2017).

Furthermore, safety measures, avoidance of overcrowding, good colouration, adequate ventilation, quality lighting system, suitable office setting, noise control, good planning layout and general cleanliness as the factors that influence employee productivity. On the contrary, unsafe equipment and tools, poor lighting system, bad temperature and poor weather condition, noise, unkempt and dirty environment and poor office setting are some of the factors causing poor employee productivity (Duru & Shimawua, 2017). Similarly, some

other factors of improving employee productivity include salary, remuneration, provision of challenging job designs, motivation, training and development, incentives, rewards, and recognition, autonomy, appreciation, bonus, participation, promotion and the suitability of the organizational culture among other factors (Frynas & Mellahi, 2015). Al-Shammri (2013) notes work related family struggle, work identity, work commitment, individual job fitting and job satisfaction, linkages between work environment and family satisfaction, and life satisfaction as factors improving employee productivity. Job designs tend to give employees the inertia to actualize the objectives for the organization. Although meeting objectives might be very tasking it is yet achievable when strategic approaches are deployed performing business activities. Interestingly, job designs encourage employees to put in their best by utilizing their time and resources judiciously.

Moreover, training and development impact on the employees the skills required to effectively and efficiently deliver on their responsibilities (Drucy, 2012). In essence, lack of requisite knowledge and skills among staff to perform optimally will lead to low productivity even in highly employee motivated situations. That is the rationale for organizations to invest significantly in training their employees.

Socio-cultural Theory

Socio-cultural theory was first systematized and applied by Vygotsky (1986) and his associate in Russia. The theory is based on the social constructivist paradigm which considers that knowledge is constructed socially through interaction and shared by individuals (Bryman, 2015). Socio-cultural theory describes learning and development as being embedded within social events and occurring as the learner interacts with other people, objects and events in the collaborative environment (Vygotsky, 1986). Therefore, human cognitive development cannot be separated from the social, cultural and historical contexts from which such development emerges (Rogoff, 2010). This social and cultural engagement is mediated by culturally constructed tools such as language, materials, signs and symbols that create uniquely human forms of higher level thinking.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory has been discussed in relation to four aspects of human cognitive development namely; mind, tools, zone of proximal development (ZPD) and community of practice (Wang, 2007). Firstly, mind which extends beyond a person or people is socially distributed. Thus, our mental habits and functioning are dependent upon our interaction and communication with others which are also affected by our environment, context and history. The second aspect of cognitive development is the tools which assist in developing communicative and cognitive functions in moving from the social plane to the psychological plane. Such tools include language, various systems of counting, algebraic symbol systems, works of art, writing, diagrams, map and mechanical drawings, etc. The third aspect of cognitive development is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which was defined by Vygotsky (1986) as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Finally, the community of practice where learning a subject domain is viewed

as a process of becoming a member of a community of practice, is the fourth aspect of cognitive development. A community of practice is a group of people who are recognized as having a special expertise in some area of significant cultural practice (Hughes, 2012).

Research Methods

Survey method of descriptive research design was used in this study. The population of the study comprised all the management staff of Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd (ENP) in the following departments/units: production, research and development, marketing, sales and public relations respectively which brought the total to 520. A sample size of 225 was drawn from the population of the study using Taro Yamani statistical formula. The stratified random sampling was used. The primary data were generated through questionnaire administered to the respondents through personal contact. The content validity of the instrument was ascertained by using a questionnaire review-panel that did objective assessment of the questions and ensured their relevance and coverage of the entire study. In establishing the reliability estimate, the test/retest method was used. The instrument was administered to the same group of individual on two different occasions separated by time interval of between 7-14 days. The two sets of data from the two occasions were correlated using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient which was calculated and used to adjudge the reliability of the instrument. The value of the coefficient of correlation obtained was 0.76 which confirmed the instrument reliable and acceptable. The statistical technique adopted in testing the hypotheses was simple linear regression.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Peoples’ culture in an organization directly or indirectly reflects on their achieved performance.

Response options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	60	27.00
Agree	130	59.00
Strongly Disagree	10	5.00
Disagree	15	7.00
Neutral	5	2.00
Total	220	100.00

Source: Survey Data, 2020

Table 1 above revealed that a total of 190 representing (86%) respondents were in agreement that Peoples’ Culture in an organization directly or indirectly reflect on their achieved performance while 25 (12% respondents did not agree. Only 5 (2%) respondents were undecided at the instance of the research.

Table 2: The company employees' education and literacy levels are indicators of their level of productivity.

Response options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	70	31.00
Agree	110	50.00
Strongly Disagree	10	5.00
Disagree	30	14.00
Neutral	-	-
Total	220	100.00

Source: Survey Data, 2020

Table 2 above indicated that 180 respondents representing 81% were in agreement about the statement that the company employees' education and literacy levels are indicators of their level of productivity. While 40 respondents representing 19% disagreed with the statement. None of the respondents was undecided at the instance of the research.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis I:

H1: There is a significant effect of culture on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.773 ^a	.597	.347	12.199

a. Predictors: (Constant), Culture

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	859.524	1	859.524	5.776	.043 ^b
	Residual	1190.476	8	148.810		
	Total	2050.000	9			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee productivity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Culture

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.143	11.934		-.180	.862
	Culture	.905	.376	.773	2.403	.043

a. Dependent Variable: Employee productivity

The regression model summary above shows a regression coefficient value of 0.773 which is significant in achieving employee productivity in the Equatorial Nut processors company ltd. The coefficient of determination (R²) 0.597 indicates that 59% of variations in employee productivity in the studied company can be explained by culture. The remaining 41% can be explained by other related factors not noted in the regression model. This implies that there is an evidence of significant effect and linear relationship between culture and employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria.. Therefore, we accept the alternative hypothesis that there is significant effect of culture on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2

H4: There is a significant effect of education on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.768 ^a	.589	.347	12.199

a. Predictors: (Constant), Education

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	859.524	1	859.524	5.776	.043 ^b
	Residual	1190.476	8	148.810		
	Total	2050.000	9			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee productivity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Eeducation

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.143	11.934		-.180	.862
	Education	.905	.376	.768	2.403	.043

a. Dependent Variable: Employee productivity

The regression model summary above shows a regression coefficient value of 0.768 which is significant in achieving employee productivity in the studied organization. The coefficient of determination(R²) of 0.589 indicates that 58% of variations in employee productivity in the studied organizations can be explained by education. The remaining 42% can be explained by other related factors not noted in the regression model. This implies that there is an evidence of significant effect and linear relationship between education and employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. Therefore,

we accept the alternative hypothesis that there is significant effect of education on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one of this study states that there is no significant effect of culture on employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. The result of the analysis of the hypothesis indicated a regression coefficient value of 0.773 which is significant in achieving employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. This implies that culture has a significant positive influence on employee productivity of Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. This result agrees with the study carried out by Shenkar, Luo and Chi (2015) that the influence of culture on the operation of companies is real and widespread.

Also, there is a significant influence of education on employee productivity of Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. The result of the analysis of the hypothesis showed a regression coefficient value of 0.768 which is significant in achieving employee productivity in Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. This implies that education has a significant positive influence on employee productivity of Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd, North-central Nigeria. This result is in agreement with the study of Aswathappa (2010) that education of the population of a given company or country is indicators of the quality of their potential workforce (Aswathappa, 2010).

Conclusion

Culture and education have tremendous impact on the employee productivity of Equatorial Nut Processors Company Ltd. It has become a reality that companies should nowadays embark on creating a system in which it can bring out the best of its employees in order to remain competitive in the increasingly competitive global business environment. Human resources are the sources of achieving competitive advantage because of its capability to convert the other resources into profitable output. Consequently, it becomes imperative that companies should be proactive and analyze their SWOT tools to keep them abreast of relevant information on their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Furthermore, companies should adapt their production, marketing and sales activities in line with the predominant socio-cultural forces in the environment where they operate. Thus, management should adapt to the culture of their operating communities and countries in order to improve their employee productivity. Similarly, management should encourage the education and training (part of education) of their employees to improve on their productivity.

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