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The Influence of Human Resource Management Practices on the SMEs Performance: Mediating Role of Employee Engagement

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History: Accepted 07 Marc 2021 Available Online March 2021	<i>Recently, human resource practices have been considered as the foremost solution for high organizational performance and attained the focus of recent studies and regulators. Therefore, the present study investigates the impact of human resource practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, and performance management on SMEs performance in Pakistan. The present research also examines the mediating role of employee engagement among the nexus of recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, performance management, and SMEs performance in Pakistan. This research has adopted the questionnaires to collect the data and executed the smart-PLS to analyze the data. The results revealed that recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, and performance management have a positive association with SMEs' performance. The findings also exposed that employee engagement positively mediating the links among recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, performance management, and SMEs performance in Pakistan. This study has provided the guidelines to the policymakers that they should extend their focus towards human resource practices that improve organizational performance.</i>
Keywords: Human Resource Practices, Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development, Reward and Compensation, Performance Management	
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1. Introduction

Human resources are the best and most important asset of any business enterprise. It's the human resources, in other words, employees who carry activities in all business areas. From the

acquisition of the resources to the sale of end products, all business operations are performed by employees. For the achievement of organization goals, skilled, efficient, and experienced employees are needed by the owner so that the organizational policies to carry a particular sort of business can be implemented effectively, and business goals can be achieved (Chahal, Jyoti, & Rani, 2016). Employees' performance is critical to the overall success of the business enterprise. The enterprises where the employees are actively performing their duties and business functions, operational performance high, which leads to high productivity, high marketing, and high financial performance. At the same time, the enterprises where the employee's performance is not efficient to have lower performance and unable to compete against their rivals (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016).

Human resource (HR) management is the strategic approach that implies the effective management of employees in the business enterprises in such a way as they help the enterprise gain business goals and competitive advantages over the rivals. It's designed to maximize employee performance. HR management is concerned with the management of employees within a business enterprise, focusing on business policies and systems (Kianto, Sáenz, & Aramburu, 2017). HR management is responsible for recruitment and selection of skilled and efficient employees, training and development of employees, reward and compensation to appreciate the employee performance, and monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of employee performance. The effective implementation of HR management practices provides the business enterprises with an efficient, able, and skilled labor force who can understand the business policies and requirements and they can perform their efficiency with a great sense of responsibility towards the enterprise and thus, help in achieving the market goals (Zaid, Jaaron, & Bon, 2018).

The current study analyzes the different HR management practices regarding recruitment & selection, training & development, reward & compensation, and performance management and checks their influences on the small and medium enterprises in Pakistan. Pakistan is a developing lower-middle-income economy. In terms of purchasing party, Pakistan has got the rank of 22nd largest economy of the world, whereas, in terms of nominal gross domestic product, Pakistan is the world's 45th largest economy. As per the statistics of 2020, the gross domestic product of Pakistan is 41,726.683 billion rupees at the current monetary value (Ahmed, Kura, Umrani, & Pahi, 2020). Pakistan is an economy that consists of all three sectors, industry sector, agriculture sector 18.74%, and service sector 61.52%. There are about 3.3 million small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan. These enterprises include manufacturing units, services-providing units, and many startups operating on different levels (Raza, Wasim, & Sarwar, 2020).

The production of SMEs has a 25 % share in the annual export of manufacturing products in Pakistan. SMEs contribute 20% to the gross domestic product of Pakistan. The labor force working in SMEs in Pakistan is 78% of the non-agricultural labor force. The SMEs, share in GDP of Pakistan is mentioned in Figure 1.

Figure 1: SMEs Share in GDP of Pakistan

HR management is getting effective in SMEs in Pakistan. As these enterprises have a higher labor force as compared to large scale enterprises, and these enterprises are mostly based on the performance of employees instead of large machinery, the establishment of HR management in these small or medium scale enterprises is an effective tool to achieve the business goals. The effective implementation of HR management practices regarding recruitment & selection, training and development, reward & compensation, and employee performance management can help SMEs to improve the working performance of employees, which would be helpful in getting business goals (Ullah, Qureshi, & Abbas, 2019).

2. Literature Review

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), also known as small and medium-sized businesses, are the businesses whose personnel number is a certain limit which is determined by the country. Developing SMEs help achieve sustainable growth as a centralized theme. SMEs play a critical role in the overall production networks in the country, and they are essential to the economic growth of the country, especially developing countries. The SMEs are mostly based on the labor force instead of large machinery, so their success depends on their labor force's performance (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2019). For the improvement of employee performance, HR management practices affecting employee performance in different manners must be effectively implemented so that the business goals can be achieved efficiently. The contribution of HR management to employee performance and the overall SMEs performance has a dominant place in the past literature (Sun et al., 2020). The current study examines the influences of effective implementation of HR management practices regarding recruitment & selection, training and development, reward & compensation, and employee performance management on SMEs performance with the following references from the past literature.

The effective implementation of HR management practices regarding the recruitment and the selection of the employees affects the SMEs' performance. As all the business processes are carried out by employees, the recruitment and selection of efficient, skilled, educated, expert, and experienced employees for the vacant job position, improves the functioning of all the business processes, which leads to business success (Abrokwah, Yuhui, Agyare, & Asamany, 2018). When an employee having sufficient experience in the relevant field is recruited and selected for the vacant position, he proves to be an asset for a small-scale enterprise. He does not need initial training or practice. It saves the

company's time and money which can be spent on some other fruitful activity. The experienced candidate, as compared to a fresh candidate, can perform business functions more efficiently and improves the operational and financial performance of the enterprise (Jeske & Shultz, 2016). Similarly, the recruitment and selection of a candidate having cognitive intelligence and analytical, as is manifested during the initial demonstration, is helpful to the s. Such candidate later during the job can understand the situation or sudden shifts in the market and has the ability to respond to them. This saves the enterprise from sudden losses and enables the enterprise to take advantage of the opportunity. Moreover, the recruitment and selection of an efficient, confident, and active candidate for the vacant position of a supervisor will be fruitful for the small and medium scale business organizations (Yusoff, Nejati, Kee, & Amran, 2020). Thus,

H1: The recruitment and selection of candidates have a positive association with SMEs' performance.

In SMEs, the training and development of existing employees improve their working skills, efficiencies, knowledge, activeness, and cognitive abilities and make them more fruitful for the enterprise. The enterprises where the periodical training is given to employees have superior innovation-based performance. When the periodical training provides up-to-date knowledge about resources' quality and their means to employees, they utilize this knowledge while making purchase transactions for the enterprise. This leads to high-quality production and enhances marketing (Singh, Chen, Del Giudice, & El-Kassar, 2019). Similarly, in the training procession, the existing employees learn the features of a new production technology which gives better quality output, and they are also taught how to use this new technology. Thus, enterprises have more innovation-based productivity at minimum cost, win the confidence of the customers, and have more marketing. In SMEs, the periodical training and development guide the employees on how to handle environmental issues minimizing the emission of harmful substances, and reducing the creation of contaminated wastes (Nawaz et al., 2020). In this way, the operational and environmental performance of SMEs improve and thus, rise in the confidence of customers increases marketing and financial performance (Smart & Segalowitz, 2017). The periodical training refreshes the employees and keeps them actives; thus, they can perform their business functions actively and wholeheartedly. Thus, all the business operations, including production, are carried out efficiently, and the enterprises are high. In SMEs, periodical training and development programs train the employees how to deal with the outsider that does not damage the business image in the eyes of outsiders but builds goodwill and improves performance.

H2: Training and development have a positive association with SME performance.

The grant of rewards and compensation to the employees motivates them to perform their duties actively and wholeheartedly, which results in the high operation and financial performance of the business enterprises. When the SMEs evaluate the performance of the employees and give them reward in for of money to appreciate their better performance. It satisfies the employees for their hard labor and motivates them to sustain their hard work in favor of enterprises. The periodical grant of monetary rewards from the business enterprise to the employees in addition to their actual salary minimizes the employee's financial distress, pacifies their mind and thus, they can put their whole attention towards their duties which results in the operational and financial performance of the business enterprise (Hendijani, Bischak, Arvai, & Dugar, 2016). Similarly, the rewards in the form of honor and appreciation to the employees for their active performance in front of colleagues or some outsiders satisfy their emotions and enhances emotional commitment between employees and the organization. Consequently, the organization can achieve its business goals (Maas, 2018). The compensation to the employees in the form of a bonus, overtime wages, an extension to salary, and commission on sales financially supports the employees and motivates them to put extra effort in favor

of business enterprise, which enhances the rate of organizational performance. Free medical treatment to employees or reimbursement of hospital charges and the grant of salary for the days of leave during the period of illness or some tragedy provides financial security to the employees and makes them pay attention to the achievement of business goals (Ogwueleka & Udoudoh, 2018).

H3: Reward and compensation to the employees have a positive association with SME's performance.

The effective implementation of HR practices for performance management improves the quality of all organizational areas. Performance management is a powerful tool of HR management that assists the business enterprise to monitor and evaluate employees' work performance. The goal of performance management is to create a work environment where the organizational personnel can perform to the best of their abilities so that they give the highest-quality performance most effectively and most efficiently (Wagle et al., 2017). When, in SMEs, the HR management monitors the work environment and finds any factor which disturbs the working performance like the use of contaminating material or non-renewable energy resources which affects the health of workers, and they do not perform their functions actively, it tries to remove that factor. The active workers perform more efficiently and effectively, which gives more productivity and more profitability. Similarly, the appointment of a supervisor by the HR management to the employees to keep a check on their performance enhances the operational and production performance of the business enterprises (Nawaz et al., 2021). The constant check by a supervisor on the employees' working made them perform the operational and production functions more attentively and efficiently. This leads to better quality production and high marketing (Taufek, Zulkifle, & Sharif, 2016). Thus,

H4: Performance management has a positive association with SME performance.

The high employee engagement in the organization leads to higher quality products and higher operational performance, which leads to financial performance. The SMEs where the employees are committed to the enterprise to the largest possible extent, have passionate feelings about their jobs, and put extraordinary efforts into their work, have the higher operation and financial performance (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017). Engaged employees look at the whole of the enterprise and try to get their purpose, where, and how they fit in. This leads to better decision-making and specialization in the business functioning, which results in higher performance of the enterprise. The effective implementation of HR practices regarding the recruitment and selection of employees leads to high employee engagement. The recruitment and selection of the employees who have the better skills, complete knowledge, and sufficient experience in the relevant field provides the enterprise with engaged employees. The arrangement of periodical training and development by HR management improves employee efficiency and, thus, employee engagement. Similarly, the grant of rewards and compensation to the employees makes them emotionally with the organizational goals. The evaluation and improvement of employee performance motivate them to work for the organization to the largest possible extent (Patiar & Wang, 2020).

H5: Employee engagement plays a moderating role between recruitment & selection and SMEs performance.

H6: Employee engagement plays a moderating role between training & development and SMEs performance.

H7: Employee engagement plays a moderating role between reward & compensation and SME's performance.

H8: Employee engagement plays a moderating role between performance management and SMEs performance.

3. Research Methods

This study investigates the impact of recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, and performance management on the SMEs performance, and it also examines the mediating role of employee engagement among the nexus of recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, performance management and SMEs performance in Pakistan. This research has adopted questionnaires to collect the data from the respondents. The employees of the HR department are the respondents of the study that were selected by using simple random sampling. The researchers have distributed the questionnaires by personal visit and also by mail. A total of 530 surveys were sent to the respondents, but only 330 were received, which associated about 62.26 percent response rate.

This research has executed the smart-PLS for data analyses because the complexity of the model and purpose of the research is hypotheses testing (Hair Jr, Babin, & Krey, 2017). This study has adopted the four predictors, such as recruitment and selection (RS) that has five items, training and development (TD) with four items, reward and compensation (RC) with four items, and performance management (PM) with five items. In addition, the employee engagement (EE) is taken as the mediating variable with four items, and SMEs performance (SMEP) has been used as a dependent variable with six items. These variables with links are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Theoretical Model

4. Findings

This research has investigated the convergent validity that shows the links among the items. The figures highlighted that the values of Alpha and CR are larger than 0.70 and the figures also show that the values of loadings and AVE are more than 0.50. These values have shown that convergent validity is a valid and high association among the items. These values are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Employee Engagement	EE1	0.794	0.773	0.803	0.511
	EE2	0.512			
	EE3	0.742			
	EE4	0.776			
Performance Management	PM1	0.800	0.840	0.893	0.676
	PM2	0.837			
	PM4	0.835			
	PM5	0.817			
Reward & Compensation	RC1	0.856	0.775	0.821	0.605
	RC3	0.756			
	RC4	0.715			
Recruitment & Selection	RS1	0.798	0.866	0.901	0.647
	RS2	0.738			
	RS3	0.824			
	RS4	0.820			
	RS5	0.839			
SMEs Performance	SMEP2	0.843	0.849	0.898	0.688
	SMEP3	0.844			
	SMEP5	0.827			
	SMEP6	0.804			
Training Development	TD1	0.882	0.890	0.925	0.754
	TD2	0.792			
	TD3	0.911			
	TD4	0.885			

This research has also investigated the discriminant validity that shows the links among the variables. The figures highlighted that the values of Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) ratios are not higher than 0.85. These values have shown that the discriminant validity is a valid and low association among the variables. These values are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	EE	PM	RC	RS	SMEP	TD
EE						
PM	0.727					
RC	0.697	0.737				
RS	0.651	0.735	0.558			
SMEP	0.711	0.737	0.716	0.760		
TD	0.689	0.844	0.611	0.648	0.648

Figure 3: Measurement Model Assessment

This study also examines the nexus among the variables by path analysis, and the results revealed that recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, and performance management have a positive association with the SMEs performance and accept H1, H2, H3, and H4. In addition, the findings also exposed that employee engagement positively mediating the links among the recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, performance management, and SMEs performance in Pakistan and accept H5, H6, H7, and H8. These values are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Path Analysis

Relationships	Beta	S.D.	T Statistics	P Values	L.L.	U.L.
EE -> SMEP	0.131	0.032	4.114	0.000	0.071	0.188
PM -> SMEP	0.134	0.038	3.518	0.001	0.046	0.189
RC -> SMEP	0.201	0.042	4.788	0.000	0.131	0.278
RS -> SMEP	0.397	0.036	10.954	0.000	0.308	0.454
TD -> SMEP	0.068	0.035	1.952	0.044	0.005	0.122
PM -> EE -> SMEP	0.019	0.008	2.250	0.027	0.000	0.036
RC -> EE -> SMEP	0.026	0.008	3.326	0.001	0.014	0.041
RS -> EE -> SMEP	0.029	0.009	3.254	0.002	0.014	0.047
TD -> EE -> SMEP	0.028	0.009	3.165	0.002	0.015	0.048

Figure 4: Structural Model Assessment

5. Discussion and Implication

The study results have indicated that the HR management practices, recruitment & selection have a positive relationship with the performance of small and medium enterprises. The performance of all the business processes is dependent on the working performance of the human resources along with the physical resources. So, the effective recruitment and selection processes that provide the organization with a skilled, able, educated, and active workforce improves the business performance. These results are in line with the past study of James et al. (2019), which indicates that through the efficient undertaking of HR management practices regarding recruitment and selection of employees, the production, operational, and marketing performance increases as it is the human resources who handle all these organizational areas. The study results have also indicated that HR management practices regarding training and development of employees have a positive association with the performance of small and medium enterprises. These results are in line with the past study of Passfield, Hopker, Jobson, Friel, and Zabala (2017), which shows that the small and medium enterprises where the HR management practices regarding the training and development of employees have efficiently implemented the operational and financial performance of the small and medium enterprises. The study results have revealed that HR management practices regarding reward & compensation to the employees have a positive association with the performance of small and medium enterprises. These results are supported by the past study of Kanama and Nishikawa (2017), which reveals the reward and compensation to the employees creates work motivation within them which results in the superior performance of small and medium enterprises.

It has also been indicted by the past study that the HR management practices regarding the

evaluation and management of performance of organizational performance have a positive association with the performance of small and medium enterprises. The study results have revealed that employee engagement plays a mediating role between the recruitment & selection of HR practices and the performance of small and medium enterprises. These results are supported by the past study of Stirin Tzur, Ganzach, and Pazy (2016), which shows the influences of employee engagement on the HR management practices regarding the recruitment and selection of employees. The study results have indicated that employees' engagement is the significant mediator between the training and development of employees and the performance of small and medium enterprises. These results are supported by the past study of Eldor (2017), which shows that employee engagement is improved by the training practices, and then, in turn, it improves the performance of small and medium enterprises. The study results have revealed that employee engagement is a mediator between the reward & compensation of employees and their work performance and the performance of small and medium enterprises. These results are approved by the past study of Gupta and Sharma (2016), which indicates that reward & compensation and the management of employee performance enhance employee engagement which results in the achievement of the higher performance of small and medium enterprises.

The present study carries theoretical as well as empirical implications. The study makes a significant addition to the existent literature based on HR management. The study examines that the influences of three different areas of HR management, such as HR management practices regarding recruitment and selection of employees, training and development of employees, reward & compensation to employees, and evaluation of employees' performance on the performance of small and medium enterprises. This study contributes to the literature as it introduces employee engagement as a mediator between HR management practices regarding recruitment and selection, training and development, reward & compensation, and evaluation of employee performance and the performance of small and medium enterprises. The study has a great empirical significance to the economists in the developing economy like Pakistan. It provides guidance to the management of small and medium enterprises on how to achieve higher performance with the implementation of effective HR management practices regarding recruitment and selection, training and development, reward & compensation, and evaluation of performance. The study also suggests how to efficiently implement the aforementioned HR management practices and the performance of small and medium enterprises with effective employee engagement.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

Our study examines different HR management practices and the influences of their effective implementation on the performance of small and medium enterprises in an emerging economy like Pakistan. The study implies that when the HR management practices regarding the recruitment and selection of employees are effectively implemented in the small and medium enterprises, they have a skilled, educated, experienced, and active labor force who performs their business functions efficiently. Thereby, the operational and financial performance is superior. Similarly, the arrangement of the periodical training for the development of the employees is useful to the small and medium enterprises as it enables the employees to perform their functions more efficiently and actively, and the overall performance of the enterprises improves. The study also suggests that in the small and medium enterprises, the act of HR management to give reward or compensation to employees to justify their efforts and hard work makes them emotionally attached to the enterprises and to perform wholeheartedly. This increases the performance of these enterprises. The study examines that the employees' engagement improves the implementation of aforementioned HR management practices

and thereby accelerates the performance of small and medium enterprises.

Though the study has a significant contribution to the existing literature, it has some limitations too that must be filled by future authors. This study talks about the influences of only some HR management practices like recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, and performance evaluation on the performances of small and medium enterprises. There are several other economic and social factors that affect the performance of these enterprises but are not under consideration in this study. Thus, it is recommended to future scholars to address some economic and social factors too while analyzing the performance of these enterprises. The scope of the study is also limited because the data has been collected by the author in support of this study only from a single source. It is recommended to the authors in the future to acquire data for their study from multiple sources.

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