

A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

Nishita Jindal ^{*}, Nitin Arora ^{**}, Lalit Singla ^{***}, Neelam Kaushal ^{****}

^{*} Corresponding author, Amity International Business School, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh, India

Contact details: Amity International Business School, Amity University, Amity Road, Sector 125, Noida, 201301 Uttar Pradesh, India

^{**} Amity International Business School, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh, India

^{***} Chandigarh University, Mohali, India

^{****} Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India



Abstract

How to cite this paper: Jindal, N., Arora, N., Singla, L., & Kaushal, N. (2024). A systematic review of human resource management practices in small and medium-sized enterprises. *Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review*, 8(3), 64–76. <https://doi.org/10.22495/cgobrv8i3p6>

Copyright © 2024 The Authors

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ISSN Online: 2521-1889
ISSN Print: 2521-1870

Received: 23.01.2024
Accepted: 10.09.2024

JEL Classification: M12, M51, M52, M53, M54, M55
DOI: 10.22495/cgobrv8i3p6

The escalating significance of human resource management (HRM) in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is underscored through a systematic review and bibliometric analysis of 144 documents from the Scopus database. This paper delineates the evolution of HRM practices within SMEs, identifying four core themes that are increasingly prevalent in scholarly publications. The study leverages content analysis, bibliometrics, and network analysis to map the intellectual structure of the field, providing a comprehensive overview of current trends and future directions. It highlights the necessity of integrating HRM practices as strategic organizational assets and emphasizes their role in enhancing efficiency across global SME networks (Davies, 2017). The growing body of literature suggests a shift towards recognizing the strategic importance of HRM in SMEs, with potential implications for enhancing organizational effectiveness in contemporary and future business environments. This research contributes to the theoretical discourse by testing various HRM theories in the SME context, offering a foundational perspective for understanding HRM challenges and practices in SMEs worldwide.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Thematic Analysis, Science Mapping, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, SMEs

Authors' individual contribution: Conceptualization — N.J. and N.A.; Methodology — N.K.; Investigation — N.J. and L.S.; Resources — N.J. and L.S.; Writing — N.J. and N.K.; Supervision — N.A.

Declaration of conflicting interests: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

1. INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are now recognized as fundamental components of both national and local economies. In many cases, these enterprises constitute a larger portion of the economic landscape than the more visible larger corporations. The sector of SME represents a critical element of economic development, significantly contributing to employment and industrial output. According to the 2006–2007 report by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (2011), SMEs are

responsible for 45% of the industrial output and 40% of the total export sector. The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act of 2006 further emphasizes the importance of these enterprises by defining their scale and scope within the Indian economy. Cassell (2002) pointed out that the economy's composition includes a multitude of smaller enterprises along with a smaller number of large companies. Despite their prevalence, the role of human resource management (HRM) in these smaller businesses has not been as comprehensively studied as in their larger counterparts. Traditional

neglect in HRM research regarding SMEs is being countered by recent studies highlighting the crucial nature of effective HRM in ensuring the survival and success of these entities.

These studies have begun to delve into various aspects of HRM that are particularly relevant to SMEs, such as recruitment strategies, employee training and development, safety protocols, updating employee handbooks to reflect the latest laws and regulations, maintaining accurate payroll records, ensuring compliance with local, state, and federal laws, managing employee relationships, resolving conflicts, and retaining valuable staff members. These focus areas reflect an evolving understanding that the dynamics of HRM in smaller enterprises are unique and deserving of targeted research and tailored strategies.

Furthermore, the importance of HRM in SMEs extends beyond mere operational necessity. Effective HRM in SMEs has been linked to significant organizational outcomes such as enhanced profitability, increased productivity, innovation rates, market share expansion, and improved environmental performance (Joseph & Shrivastava, 2024). These outcomes underscore the strategic value of HRM in fostering not only compliance and functional efficiency but also in contributing to the competitive advantage and sustainable development of SMEs.

In conclusion, the shift in focus from large corporations to SMEs in HRM research reflects a broader recognition of the diverse and significant contributions of smaller enterprises to the economy. This reorientation not only expands the scope of HRM but also enriches its applicability and relevance in today's diverse business environment, emphasizing the need for tailored human resource (HR) strategies that accommodate the distinct challenges and opportunities within SMEs.

The structure of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, providing a comprehensive background on previous research and developments in the field. Section 3 analyzes the methodology that has been used to conduct this research, outlining the approach taken to gather and analyze data. Section 4 presents the results of the study, offering insights into the findings from the software used. Section 5 discusses these results, interpreting their implications in the context of existing literature. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper by summarizing the key outcomes, sharing the limitations of this research, and suggesting potential avenues for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, the concept of HRM was predominantly associated with large corporations. Researchers such as Hooi (2024), Su et al. (2023), Ghani et al. (2022), Jamal et al. (2021), Abugre and Nasere (2020), and Sanséau and Defélix (2020) mainly concentrated their efforts on studying HRM practices within corporate giants and the banking sector. This focus stemmed from a prevailing notion that HRM theories and practices developed in the context of large organizations would be universally applicable and most impactful when applied to similarly sized entities. However, this perspective has shifted significantly over recent years, as the critical role of SMEs in driving economic activity has come to the forefront.

Despite their acknowledged economic significance, the understanding of HR practices within SMEs remains surprisingly limited. This knowledge gap can largely be attributed to several factors. Historical research in HRM has often been biased towards large organizations under the assumption that findings applicable to large entities would be universally relevant. This assumption has been challenged by numerous researchers, including De Blick et al. (2024), Abid et al. (2023), Zaridis et al. (2021), Karas and Režňáková (2021), Lukiyanto and Wijayaningtyas (2020), Yoshino and Taghizadeh-Hesary (2017), Hendry et al. (1995), and Wilkinson (1999), who pointed out the definitional complexities, access difficulties, and resource constraints that uniquely affect SMEs.

The literature reveals a chronic underrepresentation of SMEs in HRM research, which has been consistently noted by scholars such as Biea et al. (2024), Deschênes (2023), Khan and Mohiya (2020), Heneman et al. (2000), and Chandler and McEvoy (2000). These studies suggest that SMEs often lack dedicated HR departments, which complicates the implementation of sophisticated HR policies and practices. The absence of specialized HR personnel is a significant hindrance, limiting the strategic HRM that is crucial for handling issues like employee turnover, job satisfaction, and organizational compliance.

Furthermore, the research conducted by Aswale and Waghmare (2022), Ndidi et al. (2022), Vu and Nwachukwu (2020), Jiang et al. (2012), and Barslund et al. (2019) highlighted the impact of HR measures on job satisfaction and employee retention. These studies suggest that enhancing job satisfaction through effective HR practices can lead to prolonged employment and reduced turnover, which are critical for the stability and growth of SMEs. However, the literature also indicates a scarcity of empirical research specifically addressing the effectiveness of these HR practices within the SME context.

The need for a focused investigation into HR management within SMEs is further underscored by recent calls for research into the role of managers and business owners as de facto HR practitioners within these smaller enterprises. Alifah and Sukmawati (2021) and Cantele (2018) opined that employees are one of the stakeholders of organizations and stress that ethical HR practice means fulfilling the social responsibility of the business. Khan et al. (2013) mentioned that SMEs do not make the best use of their HR and they ignore their people, the researchers further mentioned that it is because of a scarcity of efficient HR professionals. So far, the research has been conducted on the theme of HRM and the role of the HR professionals has been ancillary to this area of research thus better focus should now be on the managers who are responsible for the design, adoption, enactment, and then implementation of relevant HR strategies and practices (Steffensen et al., 2019). Haque (2024), Sorn et al. (2023), Kalyanamitra et al. (2020), and Long et al. (2014) argued that business owners and HR managers of SMEs play a crucial role in dealing with the challenges of employee turnover intentions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Among others, the author Sims (2002) says that the key to continued survival and successful organization is not rational or quantitative approaches, but differs significantly in activities of employees and managers that are based on support, communication and mutual loyalty. The success of the organization today and tomorrow is being seen as more and more dependent on the effectiveness of human resource management.

As firms grow, there is a need to administer the HR function. The HRM department is considered responsible for executing all HR functions in the best interest of the firm. HR measures to improve job satisfaction can prolong working lives, yet there is little evidence about the size of such an effect (Castrionta et al., 2019). Implementation of HRM practices is one of the best methods of utilizing internal resources and achieving profits by improving the performance of employees (Rahman et al., 2018). In recent years the methods of bibliometric assessment have gained much importance as they allow detailed information about a particular topic (Storey, 1994; van Eck & Waltman, 2010; White & McCain, 1998). According to Garfield (1995) and Khan et al. (2021), it accumulates various mathematical tools and statistical techniques to examine and scan publications, for example, articles, various books, book chapters, etc.

The following four objectives are addressed in the context under study:

- 1) to study the recent publication drift;
- 2) to know the utmost influential authors and their collaboration trends;
- 3) to analyze the most significant journals/documents;
- 4) to study the thematic evolution of research in this field.

For the objectives cited above, the authors have used Bibliometrics, which refers to the quantitative method of citation and content analysis for scholarly journals, books and researchers (<https://lib.guides.umd.edu/bibliometrics>) is the approach of measurable procedures to the study of media for communication, such as published articles and books. It is the process in which statistical methods are applied to explain a scientific research topic and draw attention to the trends within the discipline (De Bakker et al., 2005; Bouyssou & Marchant, 2011). Bibliometric research is defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Glossary of Statistical Terms (2008) as the statistical analysis of books, articles, or other publications "to measure the "output" of individuals/research teams, institutions, and countries, to identify national and international networks, and to map the development of new (multi-disciplinary) fields of science and technology" (p. 49). The bibliometric analysis provides important insights regarding the research objectives (Block & Fisch, 2020; Harney & Dundon, 2006). It is the complete appropriate

process for reviewing the theoretical formation of an investigation arena (Ahmed & Vijayakumar, 2024). Therefore, the current study presents below the method used and various subparts of bibliometric, network, and content analysis.

3.1. Choosing the database

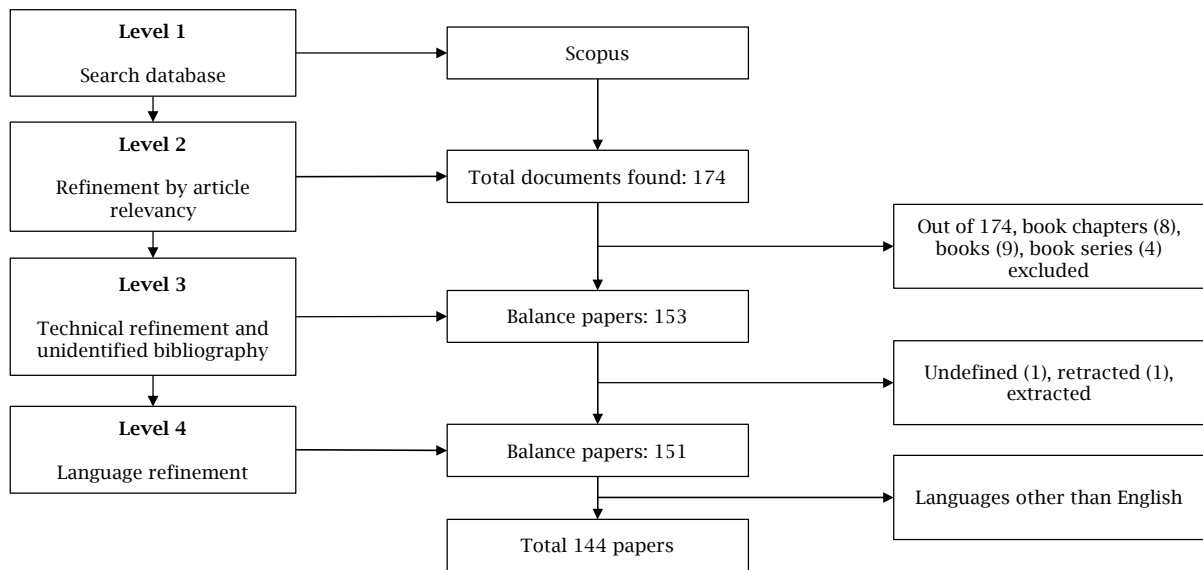
The first step in bibliographic analysis is to find useful databases for research purposes. Therefore, the data source must be reliable and appropriate to complete the analysis and select the appropriate options (Rueda et al., 2007). Databases such as Web of Science (WoS), Google Scholar, Scopus, Publish or Perish are quite reliable and used by researchers worldwide. The data extracted by Google Scholar and Publish or Perish is not supported by the software Biblioshiny. The author has relied upon the Scopus Index for the current study.

3.2. Scope of search

The scope of this bibliometric analysis includes studies only on HRM practices in SMEs. The focus was on studies that focused explicitly on human capital, entrepreneurial innovations in SMEs, employee participation in business performance, bullying, ill-treatment in SMEs, and innovative work behavior in SME gender stereotyping. The authors have also removed those studies that did not specifically address HR practices in the SME segment of society.

3.3. Search criteria

The Scopus database was tracked on October 31, 2023, with the established similar search string. To ensure that this keyword includes all the terms completely, we took the search of a string with its related keywords. Earlier literature analyses on the same areas were deliberated to categorize the related keywords exploration. Then, the results were encircled with an amalgamation of elimination and insertion principles. The search of the articles only related to green HRM was employed with six different combinations. In the advance search option, the six combinations of the words were merged together with logical operators (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("small medium enterprise" or "SME" and "HRM" or "human resource practices") or (EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE, "Ch") or EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE, "Bk") or EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE, "Tb") or EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE, "Undefined")) and (EXCLUDE (SRCTYPE, "K")) and (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))). Four steps were followed to classify the utmost appropriate papers for the concluding assessment (see Figure 1). Upon entering this string, the system showed 151 documents out of which the authors excluded books, papers in languages other than English language and unrelated documents and the final figure was 144.

Figure 1. The procedure of delineating articles

3.4. Measurement

For studying the literature on HR practices in SMEs, bibliometric analysis has been applied with the assistance of tools like citation, keyword, co-occurrence, and thematic evolution (Chae et al., 2020; Kaushal et al., 2021). With respect to the wide-ranging systematic review of literature, three foremost steps were measured: data collection, which consists of data loading and converting, and descriptive analysis and visualization provide us with the mapping of results. The authors have used the Biblioshiny application because it provides a web interface, and secure data importing, conversion, gathering, and filtering from different data collection frames like Scopus.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

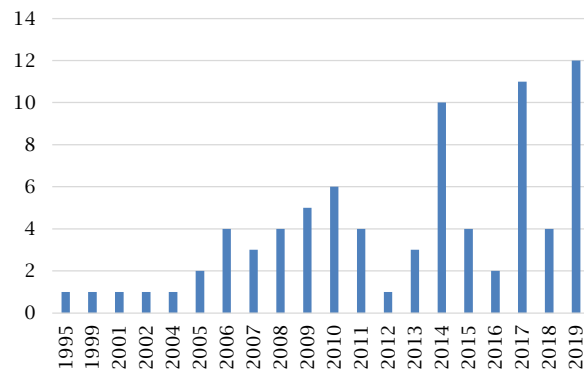
4.1. Initial data statistics

As a response to the first objective of this paper, 144 articles were identified to establish the inclination of publishers on this theme. It has been evaluated with the help of publications based on the year, region, country, journal, and institution.

4.1.1. Trend of publication (Yearly basis)

Figure 2 depicts the movement of publications in the last few years. The year 2019 showed the maximum number of publications, i.e., the total number of documents printed in this year is 12. Before 2016, the number of articles published was average. After 2016, article publications have increased. The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the HR of organizations of all sizes and types. The crisis caused alterations in working routines, working places, and employee well-being in general

(Gigauri, 2020). The issue of HRM practice and employee well-being has been under special focus in COVID-19 times. A steep rise in articles can be observed in 2019 and 2020. The main reason for this rise can be attributed to the fact that employee well-being is the main contributor towards organizational success and it is important to keep the focus alive on organizations operating with humble resources and contributing to almost two-thirds of formal employment.

Figure 2. Yearly publication of articles published on HRM practices in SME

4.1.2. Most productive journals

Table 1 demonstrates the top 10 journals contributing with their maximum citations in this area. It can be recognized that the *Employee Relations* journal by Emerald Group is in the first place in the arena, consisting of maximum citations of research papers. The below-mentioned journals have a maximum “H” and “G” index.

Table 1. Top journals

Source	Publisher	Impact score	TC
<i>Employee Relations</i>	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.	4.43	229
<i>European Journal of Training and Development</i>	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.	3	90
<i>Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice</i>	SAGE Publications	12.75	59
<i>European Journal of Management and Business Economics</i>	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.	4.59	29
<i>Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management</i>	John Wiley & Sons	10.83	28
<i>Enterprise Information Systems</i>	Taylor & Francis Ltd.	5.22	28
<i>European Planning Studies</i>	Routledge Publications	3.59	21
<i>Education + Training</i>	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.	4.51	17
<i>Chinese Management Studies</i>	World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.	0	10

Note: TC — times cited.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the Resurchify database.

4.2. Bibliometric analysis

Traditionally, this method was generally applied in the area of information and library science, etc., but now it has found its relevance in the area of HRM as well. Based on association indicators, it is typically divided into two forms. The first part communicates facts concerning the measure of the impact factor and the second recognizes the interconnected relatives amongst several study areas, as well as among scholars. Both of these actions affect a comprehensive evaluation of the content of the investigation and its advancement (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004).

4.2.1. Affiliation analysis

Affiliation analysis refers to the analysis of the author's memberships to collect data regarding the most significant region and country. Table 2 displays the affiliations that have four or more

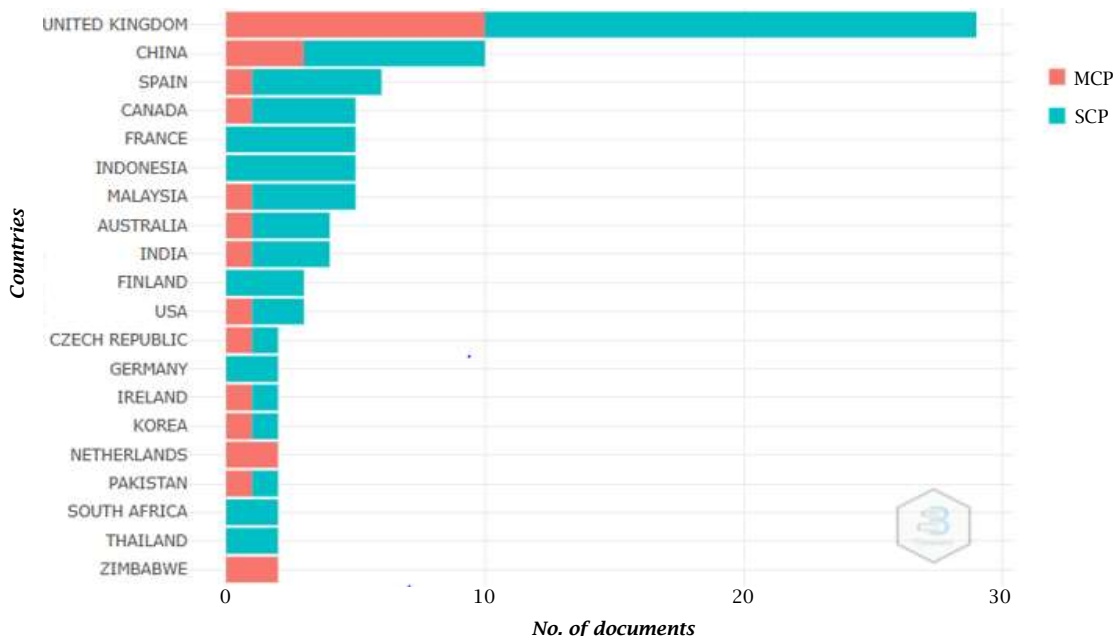
documents. The University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières of Canada emerged as the foremost productive university, with 13 papers; the University of Malaysia with 12 articles attained the second position.

Table 2. Top institutions

No.	Affiliations	Articles
1	University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières	13
2	University of Malaysia	12
3	Central University of Technology	6
4	Aix Marseille University	5
5	Northwestern Polytechnical University	5
6	Nottingham University Business School	5
7	University of Management and Technology	5
8	Bina Nusantara University	4
9	Erasmus University	4
10	London South Bank University	4

The United Kingdom tops the chart in terms of maximum contributions from the authors in this area. The United Kingdom is also the most cited country having a maximum citation count of 1002.

Figure 3. Country-wise contribution of the corresponding author



Note: MCP — multiple country publication, SCP — single country publication.

4.2.2. Author impact analysis

From Table 3 it has been observed that out of the top three contributing authors Raymond L.,

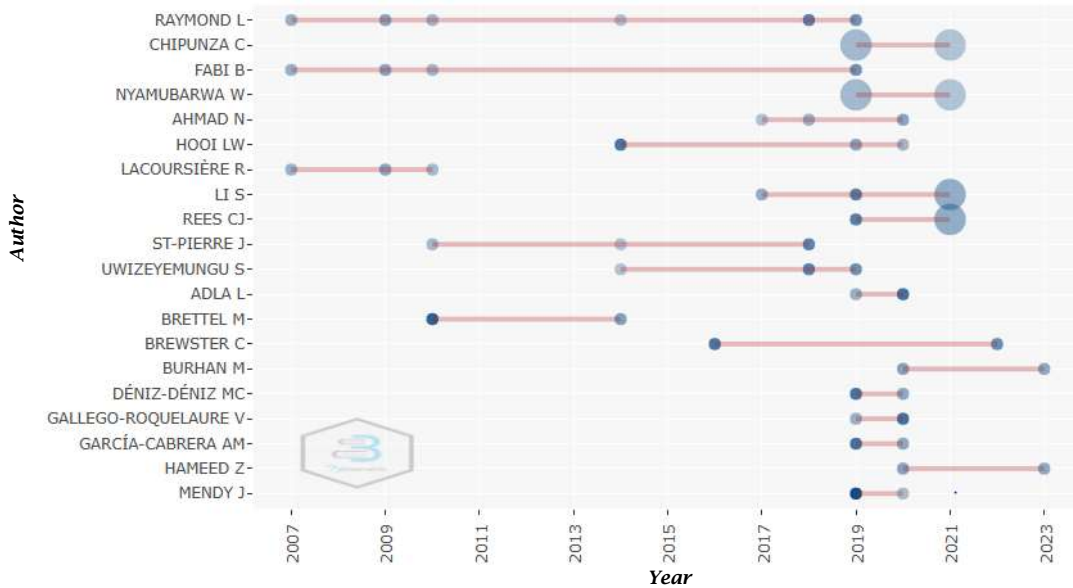
Chipunza C., and Fabi B. at a position of first, third, and seventh, respectively, belonged to Canada (with 13 publications). It has also been interpreted that most of the contributing authors are also from Canada.

Table 3. The most productive and significant authors

No.	Author	Affiliation	Country	TP
1	Raymond L.	University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières	Canada	6
2	Chipunza C.	Central University of Technology	South Africa	4
3	Fabi B.	University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières	Canada	4
4	Nyamubarwa W.	Central University of Technology	South Africa	4
5	Ahmad N.	Northwestern Polytechnical University	China	3
6	Hooi L. W.	University of Qatar	Qatar	3
7	Lacoursire R.	University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières	Canada	3
8	Li S.	Shandong University of Finance and Economics	China	3
9	Rees C. J.	University of Manchester	United Kingdom	3
10	St. Pierre J.	University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières	Canada	3

Note: TP – total papers.

Figure 4. Top authors' production over the period



Based on the study's second research objective, we analyzed that researchers worldwide are constantly exploring the HR practices that are being followed by SMEs worldwide and what is the impact of such practices on their success. As illustrated in Figure 4, Raymond L. and Fabi B. have the most prolonged timeline, spanning from 2007 to 2019. The line denotes the author's chronology. From 2010 to 2018 St. Pierre J. was active in this arena, followed by Hooi L. W. from 2015 to 2020. Similarly, the bubble size indicates the proportion of the document to the total number of documents, and Li S. became the author of three documents in 2020. In the same line, Lacoursiere R. and Ahmad N. published three articles in the entire period under review. Additionally, the intensity of the color is proportional to the total number of citations per year. The paper titled "Employees' perceptions of human resource management practices

and employee outcomes: Empirical evidence from small and medium-sized enterprises in China" by Li S. with colleagues (Li et al., 2019) has received 25 total citations per year.

4.2.3. Journal quality and impact analysis

Academic Journal Guide (AJG) rates the excellence of business and management journals so, the authors have taken it as a measure to check the superiority of the document. It categorizes quality journals in 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 groupings in sequential order, which is generally used by academic researchers (Tüselmann et al., 2016; Mingers & Willmott, 2013).

We have examined that *Human Resource Management* falls under 4 ratings from among the list of top five journals.

Table 4. Total citations of the articles of top journals and AJG 2021 ratings

No.	Sources	Articles	TC	AJG ratings
1	<i>Employee Relations</i>	11	229	2
2	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	11	513	3
3	<i>Personnel Review</i>	8	205	2
4	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	3	393	4
5	<i>International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship</i>	3	83	3

4.2.4. Citation trend analysis

In common parlance, citations refer to an act of quoting others. Citation analysis amounts to how many times other papers cite a specific document to

find the status and influence of the document in the scientific group (Ding & Cronin, 2011).

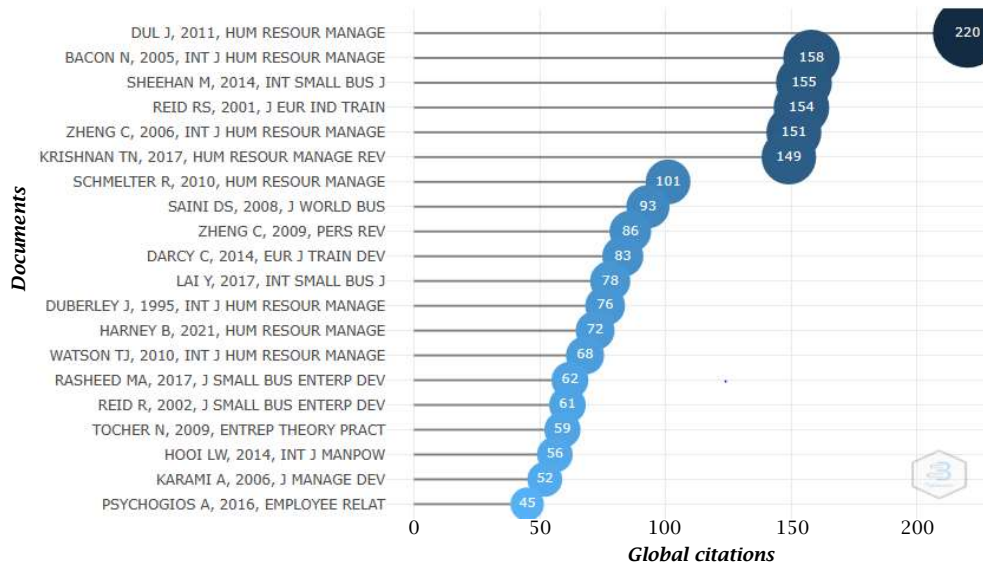
The authors have studied the global citation of 144 articles located on the "total times cited count" furnished by Scopus. Results exposed that

the citation of 144 papers data set ranges from 1 to 220. This has been depicted in Figure 5 for a total number of 20 global cited papers.

The article topping the chart with a total citation count of 220 was written by Dul J., Ceylan C., and Jaspers F. from Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, the Netherlands, and Department of Business Administration, Uludag University, Bursa, Türkiye, titled “Knowledge workers’ creativity and the role of the physical work environment” in 2011. In this paper, the author examines some of the key issues in the effect of the physical work

environment on the creativity of knowledge workers, compared with the effects of creative personality and the social-organizational work environment. Bacon N. and Hoque K.’s (Nottingham University Business School, the United Kingdom) article “HRM in the SME sector: Valuable employees and coercive networks” stood second on the chart with 158 citations. This article assesses the extent to which a range of factors both internal and external to the workplace predict the extent to which HRM practices have been adopted in SMEs.

Figure 5. Most globally cited documents



4.2.5. Thematic analysis and evolution

In this subsection, we focused our attention on the conceptual structure of HR practices in SME publications. As we said, this type of analysis helps to understand the topics covered by the journal and to define which are the most important and the most recent ones. Identifying the conceptual structure could also be useful for studying the research topic’s evolution over time (Oliveira, 2018). The basic idea is that terms that appear together in a document — e.g., keywords, terms extracted from titles or abstracts — can be represented as a term co-occurrence network. This analysis allows finding subgroups of strongly linked terms, where each subgroup corresponds to a center of interest or a given research theme/topic of the analyzed collection. Once the analysis is carried on, it is possible to plot the results in a so-called strategic or thematic diagram (Cobo et al., 2011). The graphical representation allows defining four typologies of themes (Cahlik, 2000), depending on the quadrant in which they are plotted:

- **Motor themes:** These are important themes in the upper-right quadrant. They are crucial and well-established in the research field.

- **Basic and transversal themes:** These are in the lower-right quadrant. They are important across different research areas but are more fundamental and general.

- **Emerging or declining themes:** These themes are in the lower-left quadrant. They are still developing or losing importance and are not strongly established.

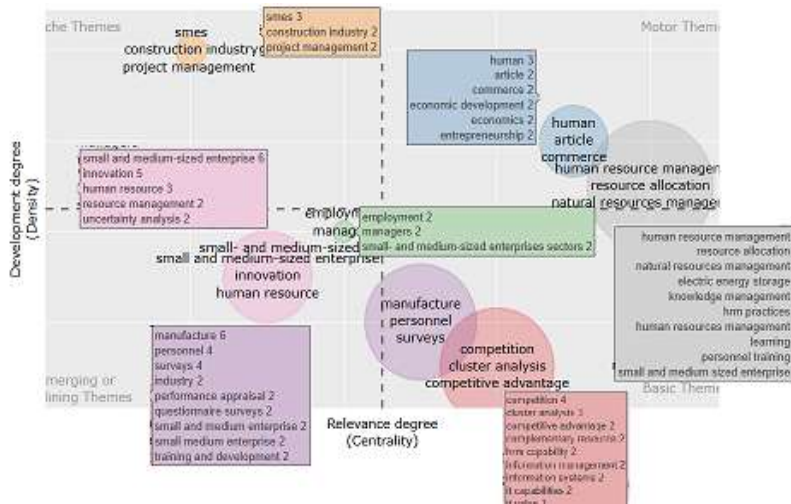
- **Highly developed and isolated themes:** These are in the upper-left quadrant. They are well-developed internally but not very important in the broader field.

Our research aimed to delve into the predominant themes in HR practices within SMEs and track their evolution. We meticulously examined the keywords employed in diverse documents authored by different individuals. Figure 6 encapsulates a concise overview of information across various periods, categorized into motor, basic, emerging, and niche themes.

In the first quadrant, a cluster emerged as a motor theme with notable centrality and density, underscoring its significance. Dominant terms in this cluster encompassed “human resource management”, “resource allocation”, “natural resource management”, “human”, “electric energy storage”, and “article”.

The second quadrant featured clusters with high centrality and low density, signifying a basic and comprehensive theme. Key terms within this cluster included “manufacture”, “personnel”, “competition”, “surveys”, and “cluster analysis”.

Figure 6. Thematic map cluster



Source: Authors' elaboration using Biblioshiny software.

Transitioning to the third quadrant, two clusters with low centrality and density emerged, indicating their nascent and marginal nature. Terms within these clusters comprised “SMEs”, “innovation”, “human resource”, “resource management”, and “uncertainty analysis”.

The fourth quadrant accommodated an isolated theme with high density and low centrality, incorporating terms like “SME”, “construction industry”, and “project management”. This positioning suggested limited significance in the broader field.

In essence, our analysis aimed to illuminate the dynamic shifts in HR practices within SMEs, offering insightful perspectives into their evolving landscape over time.

The above diagram explains how thematic evolution analysis can be used to visualize field growth, comprehend development direction, and forecast field trends (Cobo et al., 2011). Another useful feature of Bibliometrix is the ability to plot a Sankey diagram, also known as a Sankey energy

diffuence diagram, which is a type of flow chart (see Figure 7). Multiple attributes can be visualized at the same time. Figure 7 displays a three-field plot (Sankey diagram) with the writers (middle), author keywords (right side), and the year of their cited references (left side).

The size of each node in the Sankey diagram corresponds to the number of keywords used in the theme. Themes in neighboring study time zones are wired together to show temporal consistency between research topics. The width and color of the line are its visual characteristics. The width is typically used to denote the number of keywords that are exchanged. The greater the overlap between the two themes, the thicker the line. Different research themes can be distinguished by using color. The above diagram explains how thematic evolution analysis can be used to visualize field growth, comprehend development direction, and forecast field trends (Cobo et al., 2011).

Figure 7. Three-field plot



Note: CR — references, AU — authors, DE — authors' keywords.

It is clearly shown that the most significant reference in the field under study is Delery J.E. under the keywords covering the impact of HRM practices on turnover productivity and corporate financial performance of SMEs. Also, there can be observed significant citations in Kotey B., Huselid M. A., and Sels I. with "human resource management" as the keyword.

4.2.6. Analysis of authors' keywords

The exploration of the authors' keywords reveals word-level sentiment. The authors suggested keywords

are the meta-data of articles that specifically selected keywords by authors for representing the topical sentiment of the article (Chae et al., 2020). Keywords were extracted from a set of 144 related papers; then for the same network of authors keywords were built with the help of using Biblioshiny software. To produce the systematic results, we set a threshold limit of five minimum co-occurrence of keywords. Finally, we obtained 762 keywords, and from it, only 50 keywords met our threshold.

It was found that HRM is the maximum co-occurring keyword; followed by manufacture, SMEs, innovation, and resource allocation.

Figure 8. Authors' keywords analysis



Figure 9. Authors' keywords analysis: Percentage-wise



The network in Figure 8 shows that keywords displayed with an alike color connected to a homogeneous group and that in Figure 9 quantifies the presence of each keyword in percentage. It could be seen that the keyword "human resource management" is portrayed in several ways business

development, complementary resource, and social capital. This analysis exhibits that innovation, competition, SMEs, HR, personnel, and information management are the most studied topics in the current context.

Figure 10. Keyword co-occurrence network

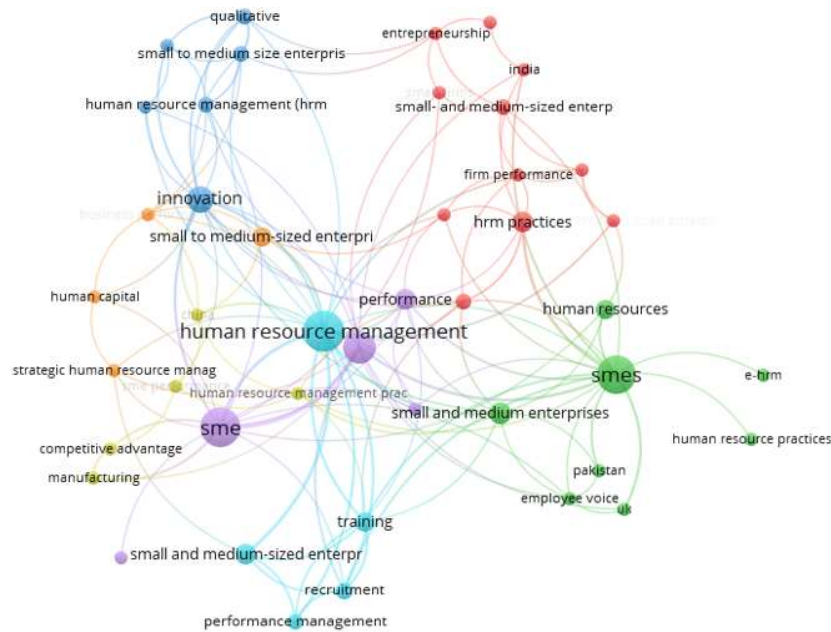


Figure 10 has been obtained by analyzing the extracted 144 papers in VOSviewer software. In the diagram, the bigger nodes show keywords that appear more frequently, while smaller nodes represent less frequent ones. The thickness and length of the lines connecting nodes signify how closely these keywords are linked. The colors of the nodes indicate the clusters to which the keywords belong. It shows the pattern of co-occurrence of the keyword “human resource management” mostly with SME, performance, and innovation.

5. DISCUSSION

The discussion of this study on HRM within SMEs highlights several crucial insights and implications for both theory and practice. The findings from the bibliometric analysis and case studies provide a nuanced understanding of how effective HRM contributes to the operational success and strategic objectives of SMEs. This section delves deeper into the practical applications of the research, theoretical contributions, and future directions for this important field.

Firstly, the analysis confirms that HRM in SMEs is not merely a scaled-down version of what is applicable in larger corporations. Instead, it requires a distinct approach that considers the unique challenges and limited resources typical of SMEs. The research underscores the importance of adaptability and customization in HR strategies to enhance employee retention, productivity, and ultimately, business sustainability. For practitioners, this means implementing HR practices that are not only compliant with legal standards but also aligned with the overall business strategy and sensitive to the workforce’s specific needs and expectations.

Theoretically, this paper enriches the HRM literature by systematically documenting the evolution and impact of HR practices within the SME context. It challenges the traditional focus of HRM research on larger organizations and contributes to a more inclusive understanding that addresses the substantial

segment of the economy represented by SMEs. The findings advocate for the integration of HRM theories that accommodate the variability in business sizes and conditions, suggesting that such integration could significantly enhance the relevance and applicability of HRM research.

Looking ahead, the study identifies several areas for further research, particularly in exploring the causal relationships between specific HR practices and business outcomes in SMEs. Future research could also examine the role of technology in facilitating HRM in resource-constrained settings, which is increasingly relevant in today’s digital economy.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has thoroughly examined the pivotal role of HRM within SMEs, offering a fresh perspective on an often overlooked segment of the economic landscape. Through a methodical review and bibliometric analysis, the paper underscores the necessity for bespoke HR strategies that acknowledge the unique challenges and operational realities faced by SMEs. It brings to light the significant impact that adept HR practices can have on the performance and sustainability of these enterprises, which are the backbone of global economic activity.

The findings reveal that effective HRM in SMEs correlates strongly with enhanced business outcomes such as increased profitability, innovation, and employee retention. These benefits are critical for SMEs that operate under more constrained resources compared to larger corporations. The study argues convincingly that SMEs can achieve remarkable competitive advantages through strategic HR initiatives tailored to their specific needs and environments.

This study is subject to several limitations that must be acknowledged. The research is based on a systematic review and bibliometric analysis of 144 documents from the Scopus database. While comprehensive, the sample size may not fully

capture all relevant studies and regional practices, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on the Scopus database, although a reliable source, may exclude relevant publications indexed in other databases such as WoS, Google Scholar, or regional databases, which could have provided a broader perspective. Geographically, the research predominantly reflects practices in regions and countries where the most publications were available, potentially overlooking unique HRM practices in less-researched areas or emerging economies. The study primarily analyzes peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers, possibly neglecting valuable insights from industry reports, white papers, and unpublished studies that could provide practical perspectives. Additionally, the inclusion criteria limited the search to English-language publications, potentially excluding significant research published in other languages. The bibliometric analysis focused on specific themes related to HRM in SMEs, and as a result, other relevant themes and emerging topics in the broader HRM field may not have been explored in depth.

These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results and implications of this research. Future studies are encouraged to address these constraints by incorporating a broader range of data sources, extending the time frame, and exploring diverse geographical contexts.

However, this paper contributes to the academic discourse by bridging the gap in HRM research, which has historically centered around larger organizations. It provides a comprehensive analysis that not only enhances the theoretical understanding of HRM's role in SMEs but also serves as a valuable reference for practitioners and policymakers. The insights derived from the bibliometric analysis and case studies pave the way for future research and practical applications, suggesting that the field of HRM is evolving in response to the dynamism and diversity of the SME sector.

In conclusion, as SMEs continue to play a crucial role in economic landscapes worldwide, understanding and implementing effective HR practices within these entities is not merely beneficial but essential. This study not only enriches the existing body of HRM literature by focusing on SMEs but also provides a robust framework for future research and practical applications, ultimately aiming to bolster the efficacy and sustainability of SMEs through strategic HRM. The recommendations offered herein advocate for a more nuanced approach to HRM, tailored to the operational realities of SMEs, thereby fostering a more resilient and thriving sector that is well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern business environment.

REFERENCES

- Abid, N., Ceci, F., & Aftab, J. (2023). Attaining sustainable business performance under resource constraints: Insights from an emerging economy. *Sustainable Development*, 32(3), 2031-2048. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2763>
- Abugre, J. B., & Nasere, D. (2020). Do high-performance work systems mediate the relationship between HR practices and employee performance in multinational corporations (MNCs) in developing economies? *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 11(4), 541-557. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEMS-01-2019-0028>
- Ahmed, U. S. A., & Vijayakumar. (2024). Unlocking the keys to employee retention: Insights from bibliometric analysis and systematic review in the Indian pharmaceutical sector. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Reinventing Business Practices, Start-ups and Sustainability (ICRBS 2023)* (pp. 567-579). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-374-0_48
- Alifah, A., & Sukmawati, A. (2021). Searching effective leader to improve SME performance: A literature review of leadership style. *AMAR: Andalus Management Review*, 5(1), 61-76. <http://amareview.fekon.unand.ac.id/index.php/amar/article/view/66>
- Aswale, N., & Waghmare, R. (2022). A global review of the impact of human resource management practices on SMEs and start-ups. In L.-P. Dana, N. Sharma, & V. K. Singh (Eds.), *Managing human resources in SMEs and start-ups: International challenges and solutions* (Vol. 5: New teaching resources for management in a globalised world, pp. 37-52). World Scientific Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811239212_0003
- Bacon, N., & Hoque, K. (2005). HRM in the SME sector: Valuable employees and coercive networks. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(11), 1976-1999. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190500314706>
- Barslund, M., Bauknecht, J., & Cebulla, A. (2019). Working conditions and retirement: How important are HR policies in prolonging working life? *MREV Management Revue*, 30(1), 120-141. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0935-9915-2019-1-120>
- Biea, E. A., Dinu, E., Bunica, A., & Jerdea, L. (2024). Recruitment in SMEs: The role of managerial practices, technology and innovation. *European Business Review*, 36(3), 361-391. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-05-2023-0162>
- Block, J. H., & Fisch, C. (2020). Eight tips and questions for your bibliographic study in business and management research. *Management Review Quarterly*, 70, 307-312. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-020-00188-4>
- Bouyssou, D., & Marchant, T. (2011). Ranking scientists and departments in a consistent manner. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 62(9), 1761-1769. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.21544>
- Cahlik, T. (2000). Comparison of the Maps of Science. *Scientometrics*, 49, 373-387. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010581421990>
- Cantele, S. (2018). Human resources management in responsible small businesses: Why, how and for what? *International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management*, 18(1-2), 112-126. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJHRDM.2018.092291>
- Cassell, C., Nadin, S., Gray, M., & Clegg, C. (2002). Exploring human resource management practices in small and medium sized enterprises. *Personnel Review*, 31(6), 671-692. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480210445962>
- Castriotta, M., Loi, M., Marku, E., & Naitana, L. (2019). What's in a name? Exploring the conceptual structure of emerging organizations. *Scientometrics*, 118, 407-437. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-018-2977-2>
- Chae, C., Yim, J.-H., Lee, J., Jo, S. J., & Oh, J. R. (2020). The bibliometric keywords network analysis of human resource management research trends: The case of human resource management journals in South Korea. *Sustainability*, 12(14), Article 5700. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12145700>

- Chandler, G. N., & McEvoy, G. M. (2000). Human resource management, TQM, and firm performance in small and medium-size enterprises. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 25(1), 43–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104225870002500105>
- Cobo, M. J., López-Herrera, A. G., Herrera-Viedma, E., & Herrera, F. (2011). Science mapping software tools: Review, analysis, and cooperative study among tools. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 62(7), 1382–1402. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.21525>
- Davies, H. (2017). Managing and leading people in China. In H. Davies & M. Rašković (Eds.), *Understanding a changing China: Key issues for business*. Routledge.
- De Bakker, F. G. A., Groenewegen, P., & Den Hond, F. (2005). A bibliometric analysis of 30 years of research and theory on corporate social responsibility and corporate social performance. *Business & Society*, 44(3), 283–317. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650305278086>
- De Blick, T., Paeleman, I., & Laveren, E. (2024). Financing constraints and SME growth: The suppression effect of cost-saving management innovations. *Small Business Economics*, 62, 961–986. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-023-00797-9>
- Deschênes, A.-A. (2023). Human resource development in SMEs in a context of labor shortage: A profile analysis. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 47(7–8), 747–768. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-02-2022-0015>
- Ding, Y., & Cronin, B. (2011). Popular and/or prestigious? Measures of scholarly esteem. *Information Processing & Management*, 47(1), 80–96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2010.01.002>
- Dul, J., Ceylan, C., & Jaspers, F. (2011). Knowledge workers' creativity and the role of the physical work environment. *Human Resource Management*, 50(6), 715–734. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20454>
- Garfield, E. (1955). Citation indexes for science: A new dimension in documentation through association of ideas. *Science*, 122(3159), 108–111. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.122.3159.108>
- Ghani, B., Zada, M., Memon, K. R., Ullah, R., Khattak, A., Han, H., Ariza-Montes, A., & Araya-Castillo, L. (2022). Challenges and strategies for employee retention in the hospitality industry: A review. *Sustainability*, 14(5), Article 2885. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052885>
- Gigauri, I. (2020). Influence of COVID-19 crisis on human resource management and companies' response: The expert study. *International Journal of Management Science and Business Administration*, 6(6), 15–24. <http://doi.org/10.18775/ijmsba.1849-5664-5419.2014.66.1002>
- Haque, F. (2024). Retention of tech employees in India: Lessons from the extant literature. *The Learning Organization*, 31(4), 585–629. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-03-2023-0050>
- Harney, B., & Dundon, T. (2006). Capturing complexity: Developing an integrated approach to analysing HRM in SMEs. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 16(1), 48–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2006.00004.x>
- Hendry, C., Arthur, M., & Jones, A. (1995). *Strategy through people: Adoption and learning in SMEs*. Routledge.
- Heneman, R. L., Tansky, J. W., & Camp, S. M. (2000). Human resource management practices in small and medium sized enterprises: Unanswered questions and future research perspectives. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 25(1), 11–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104225870002500103>
- Hooi, L. W. (2024). Pathways to corporate entrepreneurship: Do HRM practices and organizational learning capability matter? *Evidence-Based HRM*, 12(1), 230–246. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBHRM-05-2023-0125>
- Irwin, D., & Scott, J. M. (2010). Barriers faced by SMEs in raising bank finance. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 16(3), 245–259. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13552551011042816>
- Jamal, T., Zahid, M., Martins, J. M., Mata, M. N., Rahman, H. U., & Mata, P. N. (2021). Perceived green human resource management practices and corporate sustainability: Multigroup analysis and major industries perspectives. *Sustainability*, 13(6), Article 3045. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063045>
- Jiang, K., Lepak, D. P., Han, K., Hong, Y., Kim, A., & Winkler, A.-L. (2012). Clarifying the construct of human resource systems: Relating human resource management to employee performance. *Human Resource Management Review*, 22(2), 73–85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2011.11.005>
- Joseph, A., & Shrivastava, M. (2024). Measuring the return on investment (ROI) of employee retention efforts at SG Pvt Ltd. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(4), 3451–3457. <https://kuey.net/index.php/kuey/article/view/2055>
- Kalyanamitra, P., Saengchai, S., & Jermsittiparsert, K. (2020). Impact of training facilities, benefits and compensation, and performance appraisal on the employees' retention: A mediating effect of employees' job satisfaction. *Systematic Reviews in Pharmacy*, 11(3), 166–175. <https://doi.org/10.5530/srp.2020.3.19>
- Karas, M., & Režňáková, M. (2021). The role of financial constraint factors in predicting SME default. *Equilibrium. Quarterly Journal of Economics and Economic Policy*, 16(4), 859–883. <https://doi.org/10.24136/eq.2021.032>
- Kaushal, N., Kaushik, N., & Sivathanu, B. (2021). Workplace ostracism in various organizations: A systematic review and bibliometric analysis. *Management Review Quarterly*, 71, 783–818. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-020-00200-x>
- Khan, M. H., & Muktar, S. N. (2020). A bibliometric analysis of green human resource management based on Scopus platform. *Cogent Business & Management*, 7(1), Article 1831165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2020.1831165>
- Khan, N. R., Awang, M., & Zulkifli, C. M. (2013). Small and medium enterprises and human resource practices in Pakistan. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 3(2), 460–471. <https://archive.aessweb.com/index.php/5007/article/view/2430>
- Khan, S., & Mohiya, M. (2020). Determinants of SMEs employees' creativity and their impact on innovation at workplace. *Management Science Letters*, 10, 3865–3872. <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2020.7.025>
- Li, S., Rees, C. J., & Branine, M. (2019). Employees' perceptions of human resource management practices and employee outcomes: Empirical evidence from small and medium-sized enterprises in China. *Employee Relations*, 41(6), 1419–1433. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-01-2019-0065>
- Long, C. S., Ajagbe, M. A., & Kowang, T. O. (2014). Addressing the issues on employees' turnover intention in the perspective of HRM practices in SME. *Procedia — Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 129, 99–104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.653>
- Lukiyanto, K., & Wijayaningtyas, M. (2020). Gotong royong as social capital to overcome micro and small enterprises' capital difficulties. *Heliyon*, 6(9), Article E048879. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e04879>

- Mingers, J., & Willmott, H. (2013). Taylorizing business school research: On the “one best way” performative effects of journal ranking lists. *Human Relations*, 66(8), 1051–1073. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726712467048>
- Ministry of Law and Justice. (2006). The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act No. 27 of 2006. <https://samadhaan.msme.gov.in/WriteReadData/DocumentFile/MSMED2006act.pdf>
- Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. (2011). *Final report: Fourth all India census of micro, small & medium enterprises 2006–2007: Registered sector*. Development Commissioner, MSME. <https://www.dcmsme.gov.in/publications/FinalReport010711.pdf>
- Ndidi, A. M., Amah, E., & Okocha, B. F. (2022). Micromanaging behaviour and employee productivity in SMEs in Rivers state. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 6(4), 745–755. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2022.6434>
- Oliveira, T. D. (2018). *From modelmania to datanomics: The top journals and the quest for formalization* (STOREPapers Working Paper No. 2-2018). Italian Association for the History of Political Economy. <https://www.storep.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/WP-2-2018.pdf>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2008). *OECD glossary of statistical terms*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264055087-en>
- Pearce, C. L., & Sims, H. P., Jr. (2002). Vertical versus shared leadership as predictors of the effectiveness of change management teams: An examination of aversive, directive, transactional, transformational, and empowering leader behaviors. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 6(2), 172–197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.6.2.172>
- Rahman, A. A., Ab Hamid, K., & Mustaffa, J. (2018). Human resource management practices and performance in Malaysian SME: A proposed conceptual framework. *Journal of Global Business and Social Entrepreneurship*, 4(10), 65–71. <http://gbse.my/v4no10JANUARY2018/Paper-153-.pdf>
- Ramos-Rodríguez, A.-R., & Ruiz-Navarro, J. (2004). Changes in the intellectual structure of strategic management research: A bibliometric study of the Strategic Management Journal, 1980–2000. *Strategic Management Journal*, 25(10), 981–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.397>
- Rueda, G., Gerdşri, P., & Kocaoglu, D. F. (2007). Bibliometrics and social network analysis of the nanotechnology field. In *Proceedings of the PICMET 07 – 2007 Portland International Conference on Management of Engineering & Technology* (pp. 2905–2911). Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). <https://doi.org/10.1109/PICMET.2007.4349633>
- Sanséau, P.-Y., & Defélix, C. (2020). The leader-entrepreneur in an apprenticeship position. In J.-L. Cerdin & J.-M. Peretti (Eds.), *The success of apprenticeships: Views of stakeholders on training and learning* (Vol. 3, pp. 27–32). ISTE Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119694793.ch4>
- Sims, R. R. (2002). *Organizational success through effective human resources management*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Sorn, M. K., Fienena, A. R. L., Ali, Y., Rafay, M., & Fu, G. (2023). The effectiveness of compensation in maintaining employee retention. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10(7). <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1110394>
- Steffensen, D. S., Ellen, B. P., Wang, G., & Ferris, G. R. (2019). Putting the “management” back in human resource management: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 45(6), 2387–2418. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318816179>
- Storey, D. J. (1994). *Understanding the small business sector*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315544335>
- Su, Y., Xia, J., Zahra, S. A., & Ding, J. (2023). Family CEO successor and firm performance: The moderating role of sustainable HRM practices and corporate philanthropy. *Human Resource Management*, 62(3), 307–330. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22143>
- Tüselmann, H., Sinkovics, R. R., & Pishchulov, G. (2016). Revisiting the standing of international business journals in the competitive landscape. *Journal of World Business*, 51(4), 487–498. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2016.01.006>
- van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2010). Software survey: VOSviewer, a computer program for bibliometric mapping. *Scientometrics*, 84, 523–538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0146-3>
- Vu, H. M., & Nwachukwu, C. (2020). Strategic human resource management, organizational culture and academic staff retention: Literature review. *Economics Management Innovation*, 12(2), 5–12. <https://shorturl.at/A2BAL>
- White, H. D., & McCain, K. W. (1998). Visualizing a discipline: An author co-citation analysis of information science, 1972–1995. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 49(4), 327–355. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4571\(19980401\)49:4<327::AID-ASI4>3.0.CO;2-4](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4571(19980401)49:4<327::AID-ASI4>3.0.CO;2-4)
- Wilkinson, A. (1999). Employment relations in SMEs. *Employee Relations*, 21(3), 206–217. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01425459910273062>
- Yoshino, N., & Taghizadeh-Hesary, F. (2017). *Solutions for SMEs’ difficulties in accessing finance: Asian experiences* (ADB Working Paper No. 768). Asian Development Bank Institute. <https://shorturl.at/8MQCK>
- Zaridis, A., Vlachos, I., & Bourlakis, M. (2021). SMEs strategy and scale constraints impact on agri-food supply chain collaboration and firm performance. *Production Planning & Control*, 32(14), 1165–1178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09537287.2020.1796136>