

An Investigation on the Prevailing HRM Factors Influencing the Normal Existence of SMEs in the Economic Development Atmosphere of Sierra Leone

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Abstract

This research's purpose was to look into the human resource management practices of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Sierra Leone. The author focuses on the relationship between human resource management practices and the performance of SMEs, including wages, employment, and sales. The qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews, while the quantitative data was gathered through questionnaires. The data was analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) using descriptive statistical analysis and bivariate correlation techniques. Graphs were also created in Microsoft Excel to present the findings. Statistical analysis of the survey data revealed that the majority of Sierra Leonean SMEs ensure that their employees are aware of formalized rules. This research contributes to our understanding of the impact of human resource management practices on the performance of SMEs in Sierra Leone. The findings of the study revealed significant links between recruitment and selection practices and the performance of SMEs in general (growth in profit, sales and increased productivity). The main limitations of the study were a lack of time and money, self-reporting, a limited number of dependent and independent variables, the use of questionnaires rather than semi-structured interviews, and a lack of adequate sampling frames.

DOI: 10.7176/JESD/14-6-01

Publication date: March 31st 2023

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are self-contained, non-subsidiary businesses with fewer than a certain number of employees. The amount varies by country. The upper limit for a SME, as in the European Union, is frequently 250 employees. Other countries, however, set the limit at 200 employees, whereas the United States considers businesses with fewer than 500 employees to be SMEs.

The country's private sector is dominated by a sizable informal sector, which is estimated to account for roughly 70% of the economy in Sierra Leone. Smaller businesses predominate in the formal sector, with a few large-scale corporations focusing on mining and commercial agriculture. Small businesses in Sierra Leone are fundamentally constrained by slow and fragmented markets. Despite the fact that there are numerous lucrative market opportunities, small-scale business owners have difficulty connecting with them. Despite improvements, the business environment remains expensive, particularly for small business owners who frequently face competition from lower-cost imports. Even when they have lucrative projects in the works, small businesses rarely have access to loan financing and other essential financial services. Avenue Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), in addition to being job creators, play an important role in promoting social and economic development (Magableh, 2015). SMEs account for over 95% of all businesses in emerging markets, generate up to 33% of GDP, and employ 45% of the labor force (IFC, 2010). comprising of much more than 97% of all private enterprises and hiring well over 51% of the workforce. SMEs alleviate poverty for both company owners and the working population by creating jobs (MSME, 2015). Sierra Leone's SMEs account for 54.8% of the country's GDP. They also contribute to the growth of knowledge and businesses. The nature of human management differs in SMEs, according to the size effect and a number of academics (PRICE, 2007; De Kok & Uhlanner, 2001). When compared to large industries, these businesses face difficulties in identifying, selecting, and retaining employees (Cameron & Miller, 2008). SMEs are thought to be one of the key pillars of the Sierra Leonean economy (IMF2014). However, a number of policy and strategic impediments have stymied the sector's growth. Furthermore, external factors, particularly fluctuations in the US dollar and the economies of Sierra Leone and the Leones: Supporting the SME sector can thus help to alleviate some of the stress. Bringing enough young, successful small businesses into this untapped market will result in diverse and inclusive economic growth. Following the end of the civil war in 2000, the Sierra Leonean economy underwent a series of structural adjustments and waves of transformation. According to a UNDP (2014) assessment, three significant structural changes have occurred. Sierra Leone's government focused on reorganizing the institutional structure of the country's public administration in the 2000s in order to attract international investment.

The second wave emerged in early 2007, with a focus on sectoral economic development. The first Sierra

Leone Doing Business Report was published near the end of this wave in 2010, and the SMEs Support Unit was formed in 2013. As a result, the government is directing resources to SMEs as a sector that is less affected by the political and security unrest in Sierra Leone (UNDP, 2014)

1.1 Problem Statement

Sierra Leone's SMEs account for 54.8% of the country's GDP. They also contribute to the growth of knowledge and businesses. According to the size effect and a number of academics, the nature of human management differs in SMEs (PRICE, 2007; De Kok & Uhlanner, 2001). When compared to large corporations, these firms have difficulty finding, selecting, and retaining employees (Cameron & Miller, 2008). SMEs are thought to be one of the key pillars of the Sierra Leonean economy (IMF2014). However, a number of policy and strategic impediments have stymied the sector's growth. Promoting the SME sector can help to alleviate some of the economic and social pressures that the country is currently experiencing as a result of environmental factors, especially the changes in the value of the US dollar and Sierra Leone's respective economic systems. For emerging economies to grow rapidly in the twenty-first century, their business sectors must be profitable. Many people have come to believe that in today's world, business pays. Human resource management in general is critical for business institutions to achieve sustainability, growth, and profitability. SME will now be educated on various microeconomic and commercial indicators that will emerge as a result of ineffective HRM philosophies. The HRM resource functions of a location begin with a single person. The practice begins at home, where individuals take on various roles and responsibilities to achieve the household's goals. The study draws on previous research on HRM in SMEs conducted in Sierra Leone. The goal of this paper is to raise HRM awareness among SMEs in Sierra Leone. The chapter concluded by outlining potential avenues for further research into the implications. The research's goals and objectives are also stated. The researcher covers the research background, problem statement, aim, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, limitation, scope, and delimitation of the research method in this chapter.

1.2 Research Questions

Research questions are essential because they provide a clear understanding of the topic under investigation. In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, one major research question is investigated.

What is the link between human resource management and the performance of Sierra Leone's SMEs?

1.3 Specific Questions

To help answer the aforementioned question, the following specific inquiries are investigated.

What is the relationship between human resource management and employment?

Is there a relationship between HRM and wages?

How strong is the link between HRM and sales?

1.4 Objectives of the Research

The study's goal is to discover the relationship between HRM practices and SMEs' performance (employment, wages, and sales) in Sierra Leone. The main objectives are to find out:

How do small and medium-sized businesses hire and fire employees?

How do they create compensation packages?

How do they educate their workers?

How satisfied are employees with their working conditions, salaries, and recognition?

What are the advantages of formalizing?

How many people value the formalization of human resource management?

2. Review of previous Research on Human Resource Managements and SMEs

According to Schuler and Jackson, as cited in Minbaeva (2005), Human Resources Management (HRM) is a management process concerned with the planning and fulfillment of an organization's staffing needs in terms of recruitment and selection, training and development, performance review, and employee reward. According to Minbaeva (2005), HRM includes the processes of employee recruitment, training, remuneration, and appraisal. Tan and Nasurdin (2011) agree with Minbaeva (2005), stating that HRM refers to management practices and policies put in place to attract, develop, motivate, and retain employees in order to ensure the organization's continued survival.

Strategic human resource management, according to Mapetere et al. (2018), provides firms with the internal capacity to adapt and adjust to competitive environments by aligning recruitment, selection, training, reward systems, and development with business strategies. Human resource management practices in small businesses are primarily focused on their operational requirements, which include record keeping, customer service, product quality, cost, reliability, variety, and volume. Their goal going forward is to be able to meet both market and

organizational needs through effective human resource management.

Based on the above definitions of HRM, one can conclude that HRM refers to the strategic and deliberate activity of attracting, identifying, compensating, retaining, and training human capital at the organizational level in a way that ensures the long-term growth and development of both the employee and the employing organization (Mapetere et al, 2018).

Small to medium enterprise definitions are contextual, which means there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a SME. In Sierra Leone, the number of employees at a business establishment is one way to define SMEs. The government categorizes businesses as follows:

Table 1. Average Number of Workers in Enterprises in Sierra Leone

Company size	Average number of Employees
Petty enterprise	1 to 4
Small Scale Establishment	5to 19
Medium Scale Establishment	20 to 49
Large Scale establishment	50 and above (Kanu and Conteh, 2017; p.1690)

SMEs can also be defined using capital investment as 'a company with total costs including working capital but excluding cost of land of more than Le100,000, 000 but less than Le300,000, 000 and/or workers potential of between 71 and 200 regular employees and/or yearly turnover of not more than Le20, 000, 000 only' (Kanu and Conteh, 2017; p. 1689).

2.1 Structure of Small and Medium Enterprises in Sierra Leone

The country's formal and informal SMEs are primarily concentrated in the sectors and subsectors of wholesale and retail trade, transportation manufacturing, construction, and engineering (Kanu, 2019). The Sierra Leone Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency has been established by the government as the responsible authority for the registration and regulation of Small and Medium Enterprises.

According to Sierra Leone's Ministry of Trade and Industry (2013), SMEs in Sierra Leone are also facing growth constraints that are impeding their development. Among these impediments are:

2.1.1 Informality

According to estimates, the informal sector employs 70% of the Sierra Leonean labor force. The high costs and complicated processes of registering a business create a barrier for SMEs to formalize their operations and the economy as a whole to grow (Ministry of Trade and Industry Sierra Leone, 2013; p. 15).

2.1.2 Infrastructure

Due to limited access to passable roads, reliable sources of water and sanitation, reliable and affordable electricity, and affordable transportation and storage facilities, small businesses face significant costs, significantly lowering their competitiveness (Ministry of Trade and Industry Sierra Leone, 2013; p. 15).

2.1.3 Legal/regulatory issues

Completion of the movable collateral registry and the leasing framework, further streamlining of business registration, completion of several revisions to Acts of Parliament, and completion of the SME sector policy framework, which includes a national policy that outlines the country's vision for MSME development, the National MSME Development Strategy for the next five years, and (Ministry of Trade and Industry Sierra Leone, 2013; p. 15).

2.1.4 Lack of capacity

Most Sierra Leonean entrepreneurs who run small businesses have no formal education or work experience. This is not surprising given the many years of war, lost education, joblessness, and the relocation of many people from rural to urban areas. Many SMEs are hampered by poor literacy and numeracy skills and have no way of improving them. A small number will have graduated from a university or a technical/vocational school, and they may struggle to apply their classroom knowledge to the realities of running a small business. If such opportunities become available, most businesses will be wary of enrolling in short-term business or technical training courses, believing them to be too expensive and inapplicable to their circumstances (Ministry of Trade and Industry Sierra Leone, 2013; p 15).

2.1.5 Lack of technical skills

The majority of SMEs face operational challenges. The most prevalent are information and communication technology issues, followed by financial, operations, marketing, and human resource management issues. MSME owners and managers will need to show firm determination and a willingness to work hard to stay in business, but the growth of their businesses will be primarily dependent on their ability to develop at least semi-formal technical and business skills (Ministry of Trade and Industry Sierra Leone, 2013; p 15).

2.2 Human Resource Management Practices in SMEs

According to Umer (2012), HRM practices in SMEs have been overlooked in research, despite the fact that smaller firms could produce profitable results for empirical investigation because they provide a larger sample of

organizations to study and have unique and diverse growth rates and management practices. In agreement, Chaudhary and Singh (2014) believe that the application of HRM practices in SMEs to drive performance and firm survival has been largely overlooked in human resource research. According to Heneman and Berkley (1999), only 13% of small businesses have an HR department. Similarly, Rauch and Frese (2000) discovered that HRM in SMEs is often casual and emergent, rather than a coherent set of practices typical of formal businesses. The same was found in Harney and Nolan's (2014) study, which focuses on single HRM practices in SMEs, specifically training and development. They discovered that the majority of SMEs prefer unconventional HRM interventions. Among the few studies that have examined HRM interventions used in SMEs, Golhar and Deshpande (1997) discovered, as cited in Rauch and Frese, (2000), that the vast majority of HRM practices used by SMEs and large enterprises could be contrasted. It is worth noting that larger companies used more formal recruitment and selection practices, such as qualifications-based recruitment, interviews, and written assessments, more frequently. Human resource management roles and responsibilities are initially held solely by the owner/manager in the majority of SMEs. However, as the company grows in size, the owner/manager cannot manage personnel on his or her own (Mazzarol, 2003). As a result, the owner/manager begins to delegate human resource responsibilities to others, which inevitably leads to the establishment of more formal human resource policies at the firm. The following are the key HRM practices used by SMEs:

2.2.1 Recruitment and selection

Human resource management recruitment and selection practices are the most common in SMEs, according to Bacon and Hoque (2005). Simply put, recruitment and selection refers to the selection of appropriate staff for the organization. According to Wright et al. (2005), staff selection in SMEs can be accomplished through interviews and official tests of job applicants to determine the best candidate for the organization. SMEs have fewer problems with recruitment and selection than larger firms because larger firms are forced to choose candidates from a large pool of applicants (Bacon and Hoque, 2005). According to Cardon and Stevens (2004), recruitment decisions and processes in SMEs are frequently ad hoc. According to Mulolli et al. (2015), the most popular method of recruitment in SMEs is word of mouth, which is a low-cost option for candidate withdrawal. As a result, the majority of SMEs fill their staffing needs through referrals, primarily from job applicants who have been recommended directly to or are acquainted with the owner/manager (Poljaevi and Petkovi, 2013). However, in a study on recruitment practices in SMEs conducted by Mapetere et al. (2018), 42% of respondents indicated that their organization recruits and selects new employees based on qualifications, while only 33% believed that qualifications were not considered.

2.2.2 Performance appraisal

In SMEs, performance appraisal entails planned activities that monitor and review employee performance. Performance appraisals are used to define the employee's work standards and expectations, to assess performance, and to provide performance feedback for improvement (Poljaevi and Petkovi, 2013). According to Zimbo et al., as cited by Poljaevi and Petkovi (2013), up to 78% of SMEs forego performance appraisal in management. Only 12% of SMEs stated that they conduct annual performance appraisals. These findings reflect the general dislike of employee performance reviews in SMEs. Several studies (Gilbert and Jones, 2000; Poljaevi and Petkovi, 2013) contend that the likelihood of frequent interaction between managers and employees is one reason why formal performance appraisals are rarely conducted in small businesses. In such a situation, the manager can formally identify and point out to employees performance areas that need to be improved.

2.2.3 Compensation Practices

In human resource management, compensation refers to any type of payment, monetary reward, or perquisite given to an employee in exchange for work completed. Compensation as a management practice human resource management is an important contributory principle to the success of a SME (Collins and Smith, 2006). According to Cardon and Stevens (2004), non-financial rewards such as education profits and recreational objects are included in SME compensation plans. According to Mulolli et al. (2015), employee rewards in SMEs are primarily based on individual employee performance. This reward system is advantageous in that it motivates employees to continuously strive to be productive in order to reap financial or non-financial rewards such as promotion.

2.2.4 Training and Development

Due to rapidly changing technology, an increasingly competitive and volatile business environment, and a growing gap between theory and practice of business management, SMEs must pursue continuous training and development of human resources. (Poljaevi and Petkovi, 2013). Most SMEs are afraid of the cost of a personnel training and development program, so they are unresponsive to employee needs in this area. According to Hani (2016), skill development through personnel training, particularly manager skills that influence employee performance and, ultimately, SMEs performance, is critical to achieving SME growth. Quality assurance, software engineering, safety, project financing, entrepreneurship, marketing, and management are just a few of the courses and trainings available to SMEs. According to Panagiotakopoulos (2011), most SME owners are unaware of the importance of human resource development in improving the firm's bottom line.

Hani (2016) agrees that participation in training and staff development correlates with SME performance and

growth, citing a Pakistani study on the obstacles and weak points that impede the development and training process of Palestinian SMEs. Macpherson and Jayawarna (2007) investigated the determinants of willingness to participate in training programs among 198 manufacturing SMEs in the United Kingdom in another study. According to the findings of the study, formal training is an important component in the development of SMEs in the country. Jones (2005) investigated the rise in training at Australian SMEs and discovered that the main reasons for the rise are changes in production technology, improved products, and improved process technology, all of which resulted in an increase in SME productivity. (2013).

2.2.5 Employee Retention

Employee loyalty and retention are often difficult for small and medium-sized businesses, especially when dealing with employees with high growth potential. According to some authors, small businesses "have more difficulty retaining employees because they are more likely to have lower levels of employer legitimacy than larger firms" (Williamson, 2000 as cited in Coetzer et al., 2007, p. 20). It is worth noting that retention programs and activities are frequently less expensive than recruitment, selection, training, and development of new employees. Unfortunately, many small and medium-sized businesses are unaware of the importance of employee retention, resulting in brain drain (Poljaevi and Petkovi, 2013).

2.3 Role of Human Resource in SME Success

Human resource management is a component of management systems that allow organizations to achieve their strategic objectives. As a result, researchers have made a concerted effort to establish links between human resource management and successful large firm performance. A critical examination of the academic literature revealed that the relationship between human resource management and organizational potency is a phenomenon with significant implications for organizational performance. Rauch and Frese (2000) discovered that HRM strategy has a long-term positive effect on business success. According to them, it can take up to five years for a company to start reaping the benefits. As a result, HRM strategies do not yield immediate results for SMEs. In fact, HRM practices may cost SMEs in the long run. As a result, Rauch and Frese (2000) argue that there is no such thing as a contemporaneous effect of HRM on SMEs, only a longitudinal one. HRM strategy provides employees with better information and greater insight into business decisions and objectives on a continuous basis. As a result, employees become more active and efficient over time. Human resource management is the practice of harnessing and utilizing employees' collective competencies and knowledge in order to ensure business outcomes (Huselid et al, 1997). In a traditional sense, HRM facilitates SME success by directing managers' energies toward managing, measuring, and controlling personnel in order to achieve organizational goals. HRM can be divided into tactical/technical HRM and strategic HRM, according to Huselid et al. (1997). Both are advantageous to SMEs. Tactical/technical HRM promotes goal attainment through selection testing, training, performance measurement, and benefit administration (Bercu, 2011). HRM experts maintain that HRM tools boost productivity by improving employees' skills and motivation. Furthermore, human resource practices contribute to the achievement of company goals through technological planning or technical proficiency. Recent empirical studies on larger companies have supported the basic assumptions of HRM theory (Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Huselid et al., 1997). However, Rauch and Frese (2000) question whether this theory also applies to small businesses. HRM adoption is associated with costs, which may cancel out the positive corollaries of HRM in SMEs.

Performance management and appraisal systems can also be designed to encourage employees to learn and share their knowledge with others (Khandekar and Sharma, 2005).

Given the critical importance of HRM for institutional growth and sustainability among SMEs, as well as the critical economic role these firms play in Sierra Leone and around the world, this study seeks to investigate the effects of HRM practices on the operations of small businesses in Sierra Leone.

2.4 Factors influencing HRM adoption in SMEs

Given the discussion above about the role of human resource management in improving employee performance and achieving organizational goals, the low adoption rate of HRMs by SMEs in developing economies is cause for concern (Dunn et al., 2008). As a result, it is necessary to investigate the various factors influencing the adoption of HRM practices in SMEs in order to identify the challenges that SMEs face when formalizing their HRM strategy.

2.4.1 Firm Size

The nature of decision making at a firm is typically influenced by its size. According to Mazzarol (2003), as SMEs grow, the owner/manager is forced to expand the staff, and as a result, human resource management becomes a critical skill in the operation of the business. With the expansion of the business comes a greater demand on employees to perform more diverse tasks. According to Mintzberg (1979), as cited in Mapetere et al, (2018), as firms grow in size, jobs become more specialized, the span of control grows, a more formalized structure develops, and there is a greater need for decentralization (Mapetere et al, 2018). As a result, while one interpretation for the limited adoption of human resource management may point to the country's economic situation inherent in SMEs,

this should be supported by consideration of the possibility that not adopting certain practices may be strategically prudent.

2.4.2 Experience of Owners

Aside from firm-specific characteristics, owner/manager characteristics also influence HRM practice adoption. Many small businesses suffer from owner/manager deficiencies because it is difficult to distinguish between ownership and management in SMEs. As a result, Mapetere et al (2018) discovered a link between the owner/level manager's of education, age, previous experience, and human resource management practices in their study. Hung (2016) contends that managers/owners of SMEs frequently perceive HR practices to be costly, bureaucratic, and time consuming.

2.4.3 Macro-Environmental Factors

SMEs that are more in tune with market trends, economic conditions, and legal regulations are more likely to adopt HRM (Hung, 2016). It is obvious that employees are the most valuable asset that any company has; making the best use of the workforce by developing their abilities, skills, and motivation through an HRM system can lead any company to a long-term competitive advantage (Rauf, 2007).

2.4.4 Age of the Firm

The age of a company has an impact on its growth and size. As a result, it can be deduced that there is a link between formalization of management practices, particularly personnel management, and the number of years the SME has been in operation. As part of their growth and expansion, older SMEs are more likely to implement formal HRM practices (Rauf, 2007). As a result, there is a positive relationship between the number of years a company has been in business and the use of HRM systems. According to Rauf (2007), mature firms are more likely to use sophisticated HRM systems and practices than new and/or start-ups.

3. Methodology

This section of the research describes the steps and processes used to collect data, as well as the reasons for selecting specific approaches to data collection. The research topic, An Investigation On the Prevailing HRM Factors Influencing the Normal Existence of SMEs in Sierra Leone's Economic Development Atmosphere, is critical in the sense that in order to make proper analyses and conclusions, a very careful and effective method of data handling must be used.

The majority of the data was gathered through the use of questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. The methods used in the research would be described in the subtopics below.

3.1 Questionnaire and Interview

A questionnaire is a type of research tool that consists of a series of questions (or other types of instructions) designed to collect information from respondents through a survey or statistical study. When compared to other survey technologies, questionnaires have the advantages of being less expensive, requiring less work from the respondent than verbal or telephone surveys, and frequently having standardized answers that make data collection easier. Data were collected using such techniques within Osathanunkul. (2006) because questionnaires and interviews are popular strategies in the ground of small company research (Curran & Blackburn, 2001)..The target population for the study, from which the sample was obtained, consisted of four provinces as representative of former SMEs in the nation. A team of 5 people were trained and deployed to distribute the questionnaire at the offices of the SME Managers and also perform face to face interviews with the Managers. The Responders did not always have to fill in their answers: Since they were being interviewed, their answers could be written for them. This eases their effort, which tends to improve response rates. Techniques for sampling with probability and without probability were also used. Additionally, preliminary interviews were done. The number of SMEs in the sample (n) for the survey was 865. But just 712 of them were finished. This led to a 82.3% response rate. Later, interviews with people in person were undertaken. 85 SMEs owner/managers in all were spoken with. The responders were to provide answers to the following questions:

How does your company hire and fire employees?

How does your company design compensation benefits?

How do you train your employees?

Are your employees satisfied with the working conditions, salaries and recognition?

What benefits are derived from formalizing?

How many appreciate the formalization of HRM?

3.2 Frequency and Percentage Tables and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Another important aspect of data collection for this study was the generation of frequency. Quantitative data were presented in frequency and percentage tables, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated. The frequency of a specific value in the data is the number of times it appears (f). The frequency pattern of a variable is the collection of all conceivable values and the frequencies corresponding to those values. Frequency tables or charts

are used to represent frequency distributions. The main reason for using frequency tables in this study is that frequency distributions can show the proportion of observations or the actual number of observations that fall within each range. To analyze quantitative data, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Analysis was used. A coefficient of correlation is commonly used in statistics to determine the relationship between two variables. The correlation provides a precise value for the degree of a linear relationship between the X and Y variables, let's say X and Y. There are various types of correlation coefficients. Pearson's correlation (also known as Pearson's R) is the correlation coefficient that is typically used in linear regression.

4. Human Resource Management and Data Analysis with Statistics

The purpose of the study was to determine whether the SMEs under examination had an HRM division. In this regard, Table 2's findings show that when owner/managers were asked if they had an HRM department, as few as 15.8% responded positively and as many as 84.2% negatively. Figure 1 also presents a more graphical presentation of the responses in percentages recorded. These results support the claims made by Hornsby and Kuratko (1990) and Bhatti et al. (2012) that SMEs have subpar human resource management systems. Therefore, this study can contend that SMEs' owner/managers are prevented from establishing HR departments within their companies by a lack of funding. The scale of the company in terms of the number of employees is still another explanation that is conceivable.

Table 2: Availability of HRM department in SMEs

HRM Department	Frequency	Relative frequency	Percentage %
Available	112	0.16	15.8
Unavailable	600	0.84	84.2
Sum	712	1.00	100

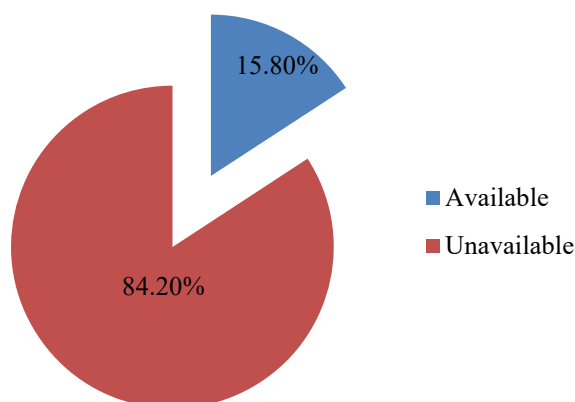


Figure 1: Human Resource Management Availability

4.2 Human Resource Management Practices

This section of the study focused on identifying the HRM practices used by SMEs across the country. According to Rowden and Ahmad, the development of human resources within a company, whether micro, small, medium, or large, appears to be essential to increasing productivity and bridging the gap between the level of workers' skills and present and future needs (2000).

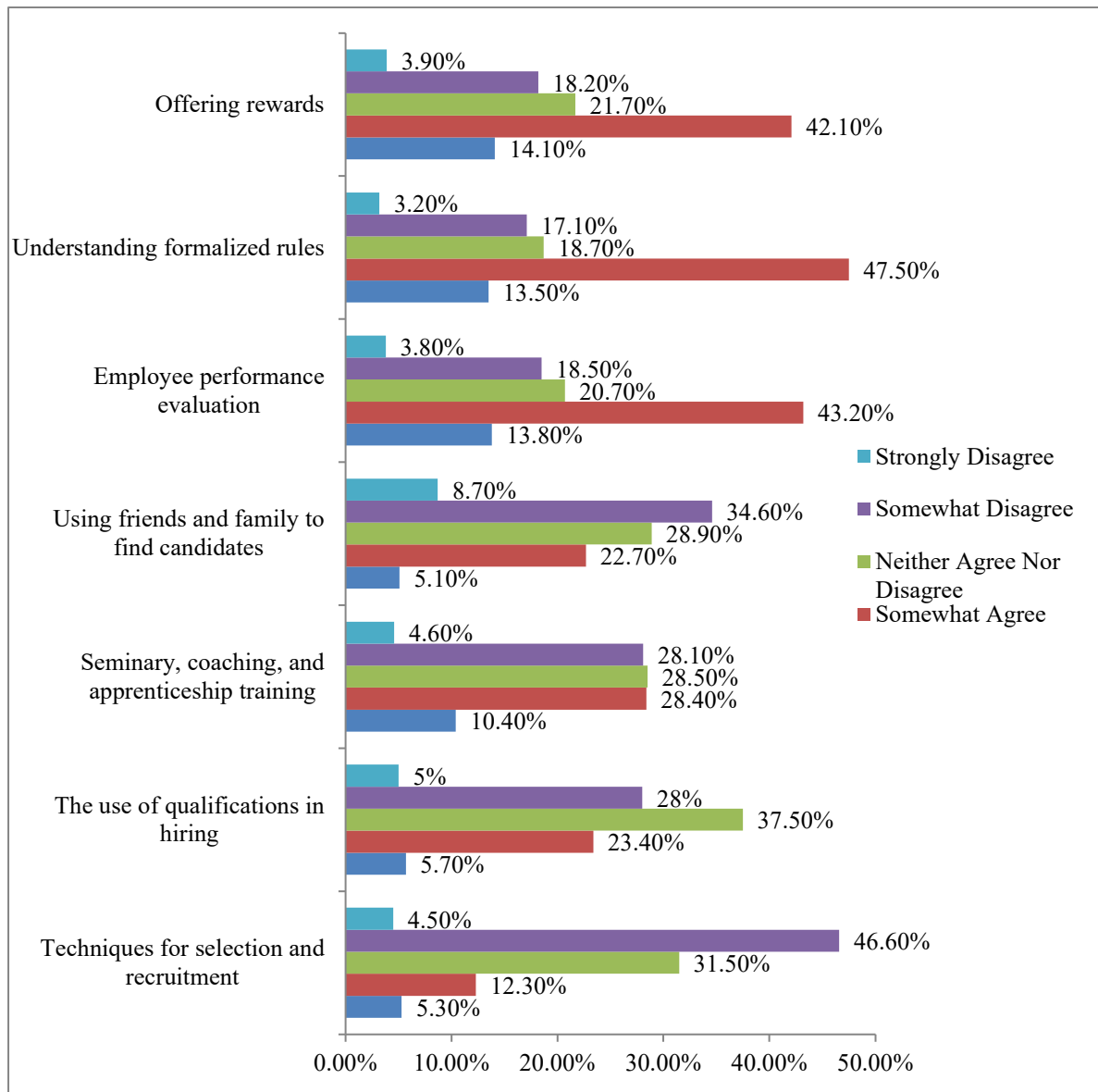


Figure 2: Human Resource Management Practices

When asked how HRM practices contribute to the success of their businesses, 51.1% of owner/managers disagree with the statement that recruitment and selection techniques help them identify, attract, and choose suitable personnel to meet their human resource requirements (Figure 2). They implied that recruiting and selection are the most common HRM practices used by SMEs and have a significant impact on their success and sustainability. Figure 4 shows that 28.4% of respondents believe that hiring should be based on qualifications. This was supported by one respondent in a semi-structured interview, who stated, "I don't hire people based on their academic qualifications; instead, I consider how physically capable they are of carrying out the job." In contrast to this conclusion, OduroNyarko (2013) discovered that 95% of SMEs hire based on qualifications in a survey. Figure 2 also shows that 38.8% of owners/managers keep their employees' knowledge and skills current through seminars, coaching, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training.

However, fieldwork observations revealed that the majority of training within Sierra Leone's SME sector is informal, possibly due to financial constraints on externally training staff. This is consistent with the findings of Loan-Clarke et al. (1999), Kotey and Folker (2007), Storey (1994), (MacMahon & Murphy, 1999), and Hill and Stewart (2000), who discovered that management development is rarely, if ever, provided for in the SME sector, and training is informal and on-the-job. In terms of hiring, the study discovered that a sizable portion of owner/managers employ informal hiring practices. This is supported by the fact that 27.8% of SMEs said they hire employees through friends and family. This finding is consistent with the findings of Cassel et al. (2002), Carroll et al. (1999), Asiedu-Appiah et al (2013), and Oduro-Nyarko (2013), who discovered that word-of-mouth referrals appear to be the most effective method for hiring the best candidate (s). However, 43.3% of respondents disagreed

with the claim that they hire family members without taking into account their skills and contributions to the company. 57% of respondents agreed with the statement about performance evaluations. This is consistent with the findings of Asiedu-Appiah et al (2013). They discovered that 73.3% of business owners and managers conduct performance evaluations. Some owners/managers (61%) ensured that employees were aware of established guidelines. For instance, during a semi-structured interview, a respondent said, "As a general rule, an employee should not enter the operating room, and the credit cards should not be misplaced. If an employee loses a charging card, a \$2 fee is assessed. When asked how this HRM practice affects the success of his business, the respondent stated, "With this regulation, customers' mobile phones are now safe, and I no longer pay for lost mobile phones." To encourage their employees to work harder and produce more, 56.2% of SMEs provide incentives such as cash bonuses, free food, free transportation, or Christmas gifts. (Table 3) In a semi-structured interview, one respondent stated, "I provide breakfast, lunch, a cash bonus, and pay employees between the first and sixth of every month."

4.3 Relationship between Wages and HRM practices in Sierra Leone's SMEs

Figure 3 displays the Pearson Correlation results. Human resource management practices are critical to the success and growth of SMEs. HRM is critical in the knowledge-based economy, according to Audretsch and Thurik (2001), because companies face the dual challenge of a need for more exceptionally trained employees as well as a shortage of qualified labor. In SMEs, adequate and efficient HRM practices may result in increased productivity. As a result, one attempted to investigate the relationship between HRM and SMEs' performance (employment, wages and sales). As a result, it was proposed that there might be a positive relationship between HRM and SMEs' performance (employment, wages and sales). Figure 3 supports this claim by demonstrating a significant positive relationship between HRM and SMEs performance (Sales $R=0.215$, and Employment $R=0.221$). Wright et al. (1994), Barney (1991), and Gamage (1994) have all found similar results (2014). Human resource management practices, according to them, have a significant impact on a firm's human and organizational resources, which can be used to gain a competitive advantage over competitors and improve performance. However, the relationship between HRM and wage satisfaction is not statistically significant ($r=0.183$). This finding is consistent with the findings of Clark and Oswald (1996), who discovered that employee well-being is only weakly related to wages. The implication is that the well-being of employees in Sierra Leone SMEs does not correspond to their pay. In contrast, Petrescu and Simmons (2008) discovered a significant relationship between HRM practices and wage satisfaction.

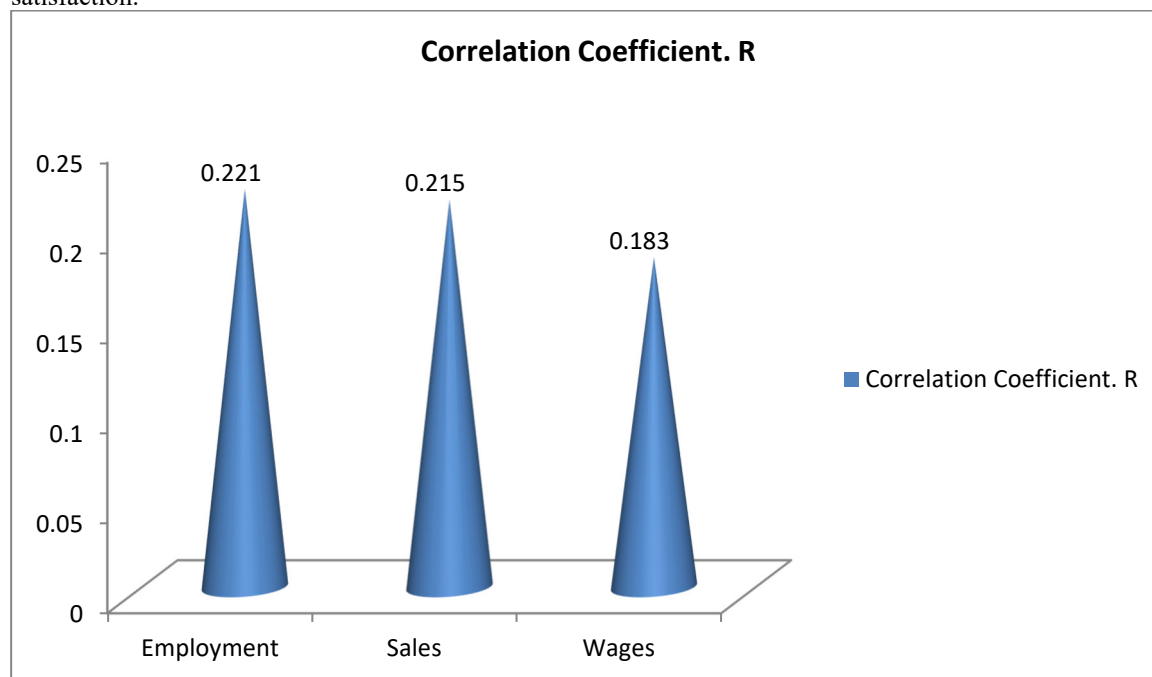


Figure 3: Relationship between Wages and HRM practices in Sierra Leone's SMEs

5. Conclusion

This study investigated how HRM procedures influenced the performance of SMEs. Following a review of the literature, a conceptual framework based on the resource-based theory was developed to examine the HRM procedures of SMEs. This study advances knowledge by shedding light on the relationship between HRM practices and the performance of SMEs. One of the few studies ever conducted in Sierra Leone. As a result, it has filled a research gap on the impact of HRM practices on the performance of SMEs. Furthermore, the majority of HRM

research has concentrated on large corporations, with little attention paid to HRM practices in SMEs. As a result, by investigating HRM practices among SMEs in Sierra Leone, this study added to existing knowledge. Decisions about recruitment should not be based solely on the results of one method of selection. You frequently need to combine two or more techniques to assess a wide range of skills, knowledge, and qualities in candidates. Work samples, for example, are a great way to assess a candidate's capability (i.e., peak performance), but they don't tell you what the candidate does on a daily basis (ie their typical performance). Reference checks must also be used to obtain this information. There is a significant positive relationship between recruitment and selection practices and profits, according to the findings. This implies that implementing recruitment and selection practices has a significant impact on profits. This implies that by recruiting and selecting the right candidates, employees are more likely to perform in order to meet the enterprise's objectives. Another thing to consider is that owners/managers should focus on recruitment and selection. This will increase the company's profit. Furthermore, the research found a positive and significant relationship between recruitment and selection practices and sales growth. Inferring that SMEs do, albeit in a highly informal manner, follow recruitment and selection practices.

6. Recommendations

The study's goal was to look into the effect of recruitment and selection practices on the performance of SMEs. Given the limitations of the study, the researcher made several recommendations for future research. To begin, future studies must investigate the impact of recruitment and selection practices on the performance of SMEs in Sierra Leone using a random sample of larger SMEs. This study used a quantitative data collection method. Using qualitative methods, the impact of recruitment and selection practices on the performance of SMEs can be thoroughly investigated. Finally, additional research using additional sampling frames should be conducted in order to increase the extent of representation of the sampled SMEs.

There are limitations to every study. As a result, this study is subject to a number of financial and non-financial constraints. Due to a lack of resources (time and money) and the nature of the investigation, the study was forced to focus on a small number of research questions and hypotheses. The investigation was also hampered by Sierra Leone's scarcity of appropriate sampling frames. As a result, only one sample frame was used to identify SMEs owner/managers in the country. In light of the study's shortcomings, several recommendations for future research are made. To begin, future research should randomly select larger samples of SMEs in Sierra Leone to investigate the relationship between HRM practices and SMEs performance. Second, future research should focus on more HRM practices that influence the success of SMEs. Furthermore, the study shed light on the cross-sectional relationship between HRM practices and the performance of SMEs. The study proposes a longitudinal study to supplement the findings of this research and possibly add new insight into the relationship between HRM practices and SMEs performance. Future research should look into how broadly the findings of this study can be applied to SMEs in other countries.

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