

The Role of Human Resource Management in Enhancing MSME Sustainability: A Systematic Literature Review Based on Scopus Database

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Abstract

Research aim: This study aims to examine the role of human resource management (HRM) in enhancing the sustainability of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through a systematic literature review. **Design/Method/Approach:** This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach using data from the Scopus database. The initial search identified 69 articles, which were screened based on relevance, publication year (2015–2025), and document type. A total of 9 articles were selected and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

Research Finding: The findings reveal that HRM practices play a significant role in enhancing MSME sustainability. Key HRM practices identified include training and development, human capital capability, leadership, knowledge sharing, and employee engagement. These practices contribute to improving innovation capability, organizational performance, and long-term business sustainability. Additionally, green HRM practices were found to support environmental sustainability in MSMEs.

Theoretical contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature by integrating HRM and sustainability perspectives within the MSME context. The novelty of this research lies in proposing a conceptual model that explains the relationship between HRM practices, human capital capability, innovation, and MSME sustainability.

Practitioner/Policy implication: The findings provide practical insights for MSME owners and policymakers to develop effective HRM strategies that support sustainable business development. Strengthening HRM practices can enhance competitiveness and long-term resilience of MSMEs.

Research limitation: This study is limited to Scopus-indexed articles and a relatively small sample of selected studies, which may limit generalizability.

Keywords: Human Resource Management; MSMEs; Sustainability; Human Capital; Innovation; Systematic Literature Review

1. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in economic development, particularly in emerging and developing economies. MSMEs contribute significantly to employment generation, economic growth, and poverty reduction, and are widely recognized

as key drivers of innovation and economic resilience. However, despite their strategic importance, many MSMEs face significant challenges in maintaining long-term sustainability due to limited resources, managerial constraints, and inadequate human resource management practices [9][13]. These challenges underscore the need to strengthening internal organizational capabilities to support sustainable MSME development.

Sustainability in MSMEs has become an increasingly important topic in both academic and policy discussions. Sustainable business practices enable firms to maintain long-term competitiveness while simultaneously addressing economic, social, and environmental responsibilities. Previous studies indicate that sustainability-oriented strategies, including knowledge management, innovation capability, and organizational learning, can significantly enhance SME resilience and performance [13][43]. These findings suggest that internal organizational resources play a critical role in supporting MSME sustainability.

Among internal organizational factors, human resource management (HRM) is widely recognized as a key determinant of organizational performance and sustainability. HRM practices such as recruitment, training and development, leadership, and performance management contribute to enhancing employee capability and organizational learning. In MSMEs, where human capital represents a vital strategic resource, effective HRM practices can improve adaptability, innovation capability, and sustainable performance [1][12][35]. Furthermore, the integration of green HRM practices has been shown to support environmental sustainability and long-term business performance in SMEs [8][49].

Despite the growing attention to HRM and sustainability, existing studies often examine these aspects separately. Only a limited number of studies have explored the relationship between HRM practices and MSME sustainability in an integrated manner. In addition, most prior research focuses on large organizations, leaving MSMEs relatively underexplored. This indicates a significant research gap in understanding how HRM practices contribute to sustainability in small business contexts [23][67]. Therefore, a systematic synthesis of existing literature is necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship.

This study aims to systematically review existing literature on the role of human resource management in enhancing MSME sustainability. By synthesizing prior research findings, this study identifies key HRM practices that influence MSME sustainability and highlights existing research gaps. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of theoretical and practical insights into HRM in MSMEs and provide directions for future research in this field.

1.1. Statement of Problem

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in supporting economic growth, employment creation, and innovation in many countries. Despite their significant contribution, many MSMEs face challenges in achieving long-term sustainability due to limited resources, managerial capabilities, and human resource management practices. Effective human resource management (HRM) is considered an important factor in improving organizational performance and supporting sustainable business development. However, existing studies on HRM and MSME sustainability remain fragmented and often focus on large

organizations rather than small and medium enterprises. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a systematic review to synthesize previous studies and identify how HRM practices contribute to enhancing MSME sustainability.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study aims to systematically review the existing literature to understand the role of human resource management in enhancing MSME sustainability. Specifically, this study seeks to identify key HRM practices that influence MSME sustainability, analyze how these practices contribute to sustainable business performance, and identify research gaps that can guide future research in this field.

2. Method

This study uses a conceptual research approach through a systematic literature review (SLR) to analyze the role of human resource management in enhancing MSME sustainability. A systematic literature review was conducted to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research on human resource management practices and sustainability in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). This approach enables researchers to systematically review prior studies and develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The data used in this study were obtained from the Scopus database, which is widely recognized as a reliable source of high-quality academic publications. The article search was conducted using the following query: TITLE-ABS-KEY (("human resource management" OR HRM) AND (SME OR MSME) AND sustainability).

The search process initially identified 69 articles. The screening process was then conducted by applying several inclusion criteria, including that articles were published in English, between 2015 and 2025, and were limited to journal articles. Articles that were not relevant to the research topic or did not specifically discuss the relationship between human resource management and MSME sustainability were excluded from the analysis. After applying the screening criteria, a total of 9 articles were selected as the final dataset for this systematic literature review.

The article selection process followed the PRISMA flow procedure, which includes identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. The process of selecting relevant articles is illustrated in Figure 1.

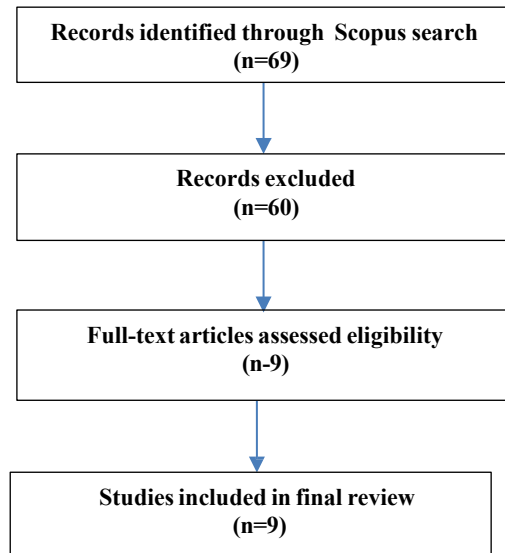


Figure 1 Diagram Prisma

The selected articles were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Each article was examined to identify key themes related to human resource management practices that influence MSME sustainability. The analysis focused on identifying common research findings, theoretical perspectives, and research gaps in the literature. Through this process, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of human resource management in supporting the sustainable development of MSMEs.

3. Results and Discussion

The selected studies included in this systematic literature review are summarized in Table 1. The table presents the authors, publication year, research method, and key findings related to the role of human resource management in enhancing MSME sustainability.

Table 1. Authors' processing of Scopus data (2015–2025).

No	Author	Year	Method	Focus of Study	Key Findings
1	Nabi, Joshi, Malik, Siddiqui, Ye	2023	Quantitative (survey)	Green HRM and sustainable development	Green HRM practices improve environmental performance and support sustainable business practices in SMEs.
2	Najam Shaikh, Sohu, Shaikh, Zahra	2022	Quantitative	HRM practices in SMEs	HRM practices such as training, employee engagement, and leadership improve SME performance and long-term sustainability.
3	Tariq, Elahi, Zainab, Ashfaq	2021	Quantitative	Human capital and SME performance	Human capital development enhances innovation capability and supports sustainable SME growth.
4	Labelle, Parent-Lamarche, Koropogui	2021	Mixed method	Sustainable HRM in SMEs	Sustainable HRM practices improve employee well-being and contribute to long-term organizational sustainability.
5	Arsawan, Suhartanto, Koval, Tralongo	2022	Quantitative	Knowledge sharing and SME competitiveness	Knowledge sharing and HR capability strengthen sustainable competitive advantage in SMEs.
6	Subramanian, Suresh	2023	Quantitative	HRM and sustainable performance	HRM practices positively influence sustainable performance through employee productivity and innovation.
7	Sánchez-Rodríguez, Pérez-Campdesuñer, García-Vidal	2022	Case study	Human capital in SMEs	Human capital management improves organizational resilience and sustainability in SMEs.
8	Haeruddin, Natsir, Aswar	2021	Quantitative	HR capability in SMEs	HR capability and leadership improve SME competitiveness and business sustainability.
9	Benjamin, Shee, De Vass	2020	Qualitative	HRM capability in SMEs	Strategic HRM practices support SME innovation and sustainable development.

Source: Source: Authors' processing of Scopus data (2015–2025).

The selected studies included in this systematic literature review are summarized in Table 1. The table presents the authors, publication year, research method, and key findings related to the role of human resource management in enhancing MSME sustainability.

The results of this systematic literature review are based on the analysis of selected studies that examine the role of human resource management (HRM) in enhancing MSME sustainability. The findings highlight several key themes, including green HRM practices, human capital development, knowledge sharing, leadership, and innovation capability as the main drivers of sustainable MSME performance.

First, green human resource management (GHRM) practices have been identified as a critical factor in promoting sustainability in MSMEs. Empirical studies show that GHRM practices, such as environmentally oriented training and employee engagement, significantly improve environmental performance and support sustainable business development [8][49][65]. These findings indicate that integrating environmental values into HRM practices is essential for achieving long-term sustainability in SMEs.

Second, general HRM practices, including employee training, engagement, and organizational learning, play a significant role in improving MSME performance and sustainability. Research suggests that effective HRM systems enhance employee productivity, commitment, and adaptability, which ultimately contribute to sustainable organizational performance [1][35][47]. In this context, HRM acts as a strategic mechanism that enables MSMEs to survive and grow in dynamic business environments.

Third, human capital development is a fundamental determinant of MSME sustainability. Human capital, which encompasses employees' knowledge, skills, and competencies, serves as a key resource for innovation and business growth. Studies indicate that investment in human capital enhances innovation capability and supports sustainable SME development [12][41][60]. This highlights the importance of continuous training and capacity building in MSMEs.

Furthermore, sustainable HRM practices also contribute to employee well-being and organizational resilience. Evidence shows that sustainable HRM practices improve employee satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn strengthen long-term sustainability [31][54]. This demonstrates that sustainability is not only related to economic performance but also involves social and organizational dimensions.

In addition, knowledge sharing and innovation capability are identified as important mediating factors between HRM practices and MSME sustainability. Knowledge management enables organizations to generate new ideas, improve processes, and enhance competitiveness. Previous studies confirm that knowledge sharing, supported by HRM practices, significantly

improves sustainable business performance in SMEs [43][50]. This suggests that HRM plays a crucial role in facilitating organizational learning and innovation.

Leadership and HR capability also play an important role in supporting MSME sustainability. Leadership practices that encourage creativity, innovation, and employee involvement contribute to improved organizational performance. Empirical evidence shows that leadership and HR capability significantly influence SME competitiveness and sustainability [26][45]. This highlights the importance of managerial capability in small business environments.

Moreover, strategic HRM practices have been shown to support sustainable development and long-term business performance in MSMEs. Studies indicate that aligning HRM strategies with sustainability goals enables SMEs to achieve competitive advantage and long-term growth [67]. This suggests that HRM should be positioned as a strategic function rather than merely an operational activity.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that HRM practices play a central role in enhancing MSME sustainability. HRM contributes both directly, through improving employee performance, and indirectly, through strengthening human capital, innovation capability, and knowledge sharing. These findings emphasize that integrating HRM into business strategy is essential for achieving sustainable development in MSMEs.

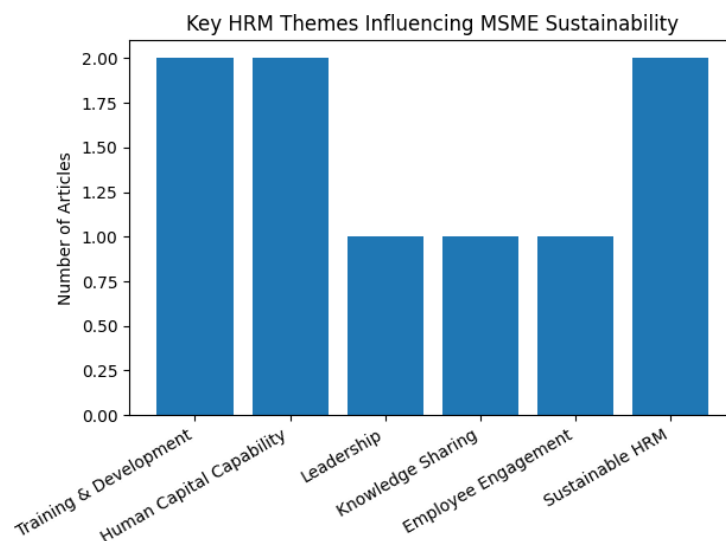


Figure 2 : Source: Processed by the authors based on Scopus literature review.

Figure 2 illustrates the key human resource management themes identified from the reviewed studies. The findings indicate that training and development, human capital capability, and sustainable HRM practices are the most frequently discussed factors influencing MSME sustainability. Meanwhile, leadership, knowledge sharing, and employee engagement were also identified as important supporting factors for sustainable business development in MSMEs.

Based on the findings of the systematic literature review, a conceptual model is proposed to illustrate the relationship between HRM practices and MSME sustainability. The model, presented in Figure 3, highlights how HRM practices contribute to strengthening human capital capability and innovation, which ultimately support MSME sustainability.

Figure 3 Conceptual model of human resource management practices influencing MSME sustainability



The conceptual model presented in Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between human resource management (HRM) practices, human capital capability and innovation, and MSME sustainability. The model emphasizes that HRM practices are foundational drivers of MSMEs' internal capabilities.

Specifically, HRM practices such as training and development, leadership, knowledge sharing, and employee engagement play a crucial role in enhancing employees' skills, competencies, and motivation. These practices enable MSMEs to build strong human capital, which is essential for improving organizational performance and adaptability in dynamic business environments. In addition, effective HRM practices facilitate the development of innovation capability by encouraging creativity, knowledge exchange, and continuous learning within the organization.

Furthermore, the model highlights that human capital capability and innovation mediate the relationship between HRM practices and MSME sustainability. Strong human capital and innovation capability allow MSMEs to improve productivity, enhance competitiveness, and respond effectively to market changes. As a result, these capabilities contribute significantly to achieving long-term business sustainability.

Overall, the model suggests that the implementation of effective HRM practices not only directly strengthens internal organizational capabilities but also indirectly supports MSME sustainability through the development of human capital and innovation. This indicates that HRM plays a strategic role in fostering sustainable growth and long-term resilience in MSMEs.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the role of human resource management (HRM) in enhancing MSME sustainability through a systematic literature review. The findings indicate that HRM practices play a crucial role in supporting the sustainability of MSMEs. Key HRM practices identified include training and development, human capital capability, leadership, knowledge sharing, employee engagement, and sustainable HRM practices. These factors contribute to improving employee competence, organizational learning, innovation capability, and ultimately sustainable business performance in MSMEs.

This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive synthesis of research on HRM and MSME sustainability. It integrates the perspectives of human resource management and sustainability, which are often examined separately in previous studies. The novelty of this research lies in the development of a conceptual model that explains the relationship between HRM practices, human capital capability, innovation, and MSME sustainability. Practically, this study provides insights for MSME practitioners and policymakers to develop effective HRM strategies to support sustainable business development.

This study has several limitations. First, the number of articles included in this review is relatively limited, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relies on secondary data from selected literature, which may not fully capture real-world variations across MSMEs. Therefore, future research is recommended to conduct empirical studies to validate the proposed conceptual model and explore the role of HRM practices across different sectors and regions. Further studies may also incorporate additional variables such as digital capability, innovation strategy, and organizational culture to provide a more comprehensive understanding of MSME sustainability.

Content Attribution (If you use AI assistance):

The author acknowledges the use of ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.3) to support the research and writing process of this study, particularly in organizing ideas, synthesizing relevant literature, and improving clarity. The AI application was used solely as a supporting tool and not as a source of original content.

All AI-generated content has been carefully reviewed, edited, and validated by the author to ensure the accuracy, authenticity, and integrity of the information presented. The author's critical judgment played a significant role in interpreting and refining the AI-generated output. Therefore, the final results presented in this study represent the author's original work, supported by AI as an assistive tool.

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