

TEACHERS' OPINIONS OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN LIBYA

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to examine teachers' opinions of human resources management functions in private schools in Libya. The study deployed a qualitative study approach. The instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews were recorded and translated. Six teachers participated in the study. Content analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings showed that the functions of the HRM unit were identified as recruitment of staff, coordination of academic activities, encouragement of teachers and disciplining of erring ones; motivation of the staff, appraisal of teachers' performance, and teachers' support through the provision of necessary materials. It was also found that the teachers had positive perceptions towards these functions by the HRM unit. They all agreed that the unit has enhanced their professional development. It was also found that the HRM unit had a significant role to play in giving the school a competitive edge. However, a notable weakness identified is that the HRM unit finds faults more than they applaud the good performance.

Keywords: Human Resources Management (HRM), Functions, Private Schools, Libya.

INTRODUCTION

Management of human resources in schools is essentially important majorly because a majority of the resources in such a context revolve around human beings (Sukawati et al., 2020). Human resource management is a factor in determining the effectiveness of the employees, as it dictates the pace of employee engagement by ensuring the commitment of the organisation (Aktar & Pangil, 2018). This commitment also known as organisational support can be in the form of career advancement, performance feedback, job security, training and development, rewards and recognition, and the participation of the employees (Aktar & Pangil, 2018). Concomitantly, such commitment is likely to yield quality performance, job satisfaction, and even affective commitment from the employees (Aktar & Pangil, 2018). This is a form of social exchange as what the organisation invests in the employees is highly proportional to the output the organisation would get from them (Nazir et al., 2018).

In the school system, the appraisal of the teachers is a function of human resource management; and the way the teachers perceive the appraisal is particularly important to the success of the school, as it builds trust (Agha et al., 2020). The appraisal of the teacher helps in promotion, salary increment, appreciation, motivation, and professional development (Agha et al., 2020). These factors are highly deterministic of the teachers' performance (Andriani, 2018). And the role of the teacher in the quality of education cannot be relegated. No nation grows above the quality of the education that it possesses (Agha et al., 2020). And so, the quality of education as largely engineered by teachers is a metric for measuring the overall development of the nation.

One of the cardinal objectives of education in Libya is to ensure that Libyans across the length and breadth of the country have access to education for transformation and construction; in order to be able to fight against underdevelopment, ignorance, oppression, and diseases (Adejare & Ade, 2021). To achieve this objective, there is a need for private individuals to invest in the education sector. There are two major shifts of teaching in Libya including morning and afternoon shifts, and the private schools differ significantly from the public schools in this shift. According to reports, the proportion of private schools teaching in the morning and afternoon is 64% and 5%, respectively; with 31% operating both morning and afternoon; this is in contrast with the public schools which is 56% and 9% for morning and afternoon, respectively; and 35% for both morning and afternoon shifts (Adejare & Ade, 2021). This then offers a lot of options and convenience for Libyans. However, out of the total schools in Libya, private schools occupy about 20% (Adejare & Ade, 2021).

The role of human resource management in private schools is more pronounced because, unlike public schools, the management of schools is not vested in the state. In public schools, there is centralised management as coordinated by the Teaching Service Commission (TSC); but in private schools, the management is wholly left to the school (Adejare & Ade, 2021). The management of privately owned schools is usually set by the owners; and because there is more competition amongst the private schools, the role of management is sensitive to the school having a competitive edge. This, therefore, demands a whole lot of competency from the teacher, as reflected in knowledge, teaching implementation, innovative ability, personality; communication skills, and modern technology (Yang & Sheikh Khairuddin, 2022). The human resources management section of private schools is fully saddled with the responsibility of assessing and enhancing these components of teacher competency (Yang & Sheikh Khairuddin, 2022).

The perception of the teachers towards the human resources management practices is very important because it can either bring about turnover intention or retention of the teachers (Manthi et al., 2018). This issue is more critical for private schools because the constant disengagement of teachers does not portray the school in good light, and would consequently bring about a negative perception of the school by the public. Sometimes, the human resources management of a private school's performance of their duty may be misunderstood by the teachers. It is important for teachers to be aware of the purpose of teachers' performance appraisal for instance (Agha et al., 2020). When the purpose is not well spelled out for the teachers, they may have a negative perception of it, and this may consequently affect their performance. Also, in the reward system of the teachers, when teachers perceive their promotion to be wholly tied to merit in the form of hard work, their work ethics would be positively impacted; but when they think otherwise, it would have negative tendencies (Wandia, 2015).

In Libya, it is observed that the functions of human resources management and the way that teachers perceive these functions, particularly in secondary schools have not been sufficiently investigated. Few such attempts had been centred on public schools, where unfortunately the teachers do not have daily engagement with the central human resources management body known as Teaching Service Commission; as it is centrally located in the state. In view of this, this paper is concerned with investigating the opinions of private teachers' opinions of human resources management functions in private schools in Libya. In order to achieve this purpose, the study intends to answer the research questions thus:

1. What are the functions of human resources management in private schools in Libya?
2. How do teachers perceive the function of human resources management in Libya?

Literature Review

The functions of human resources management in any firm have been identified as very critical to organisational growth (Sukawati et al., 2020; Manthi et al., 2018). Sukawati et al (2020) examined effective human resources management in basic education. The researchers intended to know the formula for the effectiveness of the roles of human resources management at the basic education level. From a comprehensive scoping review, it was found that effective human resources management at the basic education level is saddled with the responsibility of job analysis, employee selection, orientation, placement; training, mutation, promotion, and compensation (Sukawati et al., 2020). The job analysis reveals the need for employee recruitment; employee selection aims at meeting the identified need; placement is done to ensure that the candidates meet up with the requirement for the job, while orientation is done to get the new staff familiar with the environment (Sukawati et al., 2020). Also, training is done to tailor the skills of the employees to the specific needs of the school, and subsequently, the employees are placed in the appropriate roles; while promotion and compensation are given to the employed teachers in order to motivate them (Sukawati et al., 2020).

Uysal and Caganaga (2018) examined teachers' opinions of human resources management functions in private schools in Northern Cyprus. Participants of the study were selected through purposive sampling, and the sample included six teachers teaching at a private school in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus. The instrument for data collection was a structured interview, analysed through content analysis and a qualitative descriptive model. Two researchers looked at the data to arrive at the credibility and reliability of the themes. With that, the identified functions of human resources management in private are personnel selection/staffing, training and development, planning, evaluation, and reward (Uysal & Caganaga, 2018). It was also identified that the teachers have positive perceptions of these functions. The six participants all agreed that the human resources unit in the school is very crucial, basically because the school's main resources are humans; and this requires human relations (Uysal & Caganaga, 2018). Teir and Zhang (2016) also found out that human resources management is the most pivotal asset of any organisation. It was however found that the seriousness given to human resources management practices by different institutions varies. This implies that some take it seriously while many others do not.

For instance, Qehaja and Kutllovci (2015) investigated the role of human resources in gaining a competitive advantage. The study was undertaken in seven wholesale distribution firms of food and non-food products in Kosovo. The result of the study revealed that many wholesale distribution firms do not consider human resources management veritable to their gaining competitive advantage (Qehaja & Kutllovci, 2015). This is justified by the lack of a standard strategy for human resources development. Another major finding from the study is that although these firms have a human resources management department, in practice the departments are merely carrying out administrative functions (Qehaja & Kutllovci, 2015).

Similarly, Hamadamin and Atan (2019) evaluated the influence of strategic human resources management practices in achieving competitive advantages and the commitment of the employees. After procedural data collection from a significant sample size from universities in Iraq, and analysis, it was found that strategic human resources management has a linear positive influence on sustaining competitive advantage and employee

commitment, especially with the mediation of human capital development. Conversely, the influence of both human capital development and employees' commitment has partial mediation on strategic human resources management practices and competitive advantage (Hamadamin & Atan, 2019). In like manner, Runhaar and Sanders (2015) found in their study that strategic human resources management enhanced the relationship between occupational self-efficacy and knowledge sharing amongst teachers. The positive relationship between human resources management and occupational self-efficacy of the teachers, as well as their knowledge-sharing propensity, is significantly strengthened by the teachers' perception of high commitment to human resources management (Runhaar & Sanders, 2015). In other words, when the teachers perceive the human resources management unit to be highly committed, the practices of the unit would have a more positive impact on the teachers. These revelations are in contrast with the findings of Qehaja and Kutllavci (2015) who barely found human resources management significant to competitive advantage.

Manthi et al (2018) investigated how human resource management practices predict employee turnover intentions by carrying out an empirical survey on teachers in teacher training colleges. The study basically aimed at establishing the influence of training, compensation, career development, and performance management. The result from the analysis of the empirical data showed that the basic functions of human resources management such as training, compensation, career development, and performance management were poorly practiced, and as a result significantly predicted the turnover intention of the employees (Manthi et al., 2018). It thus means that human resources management practices have a long way to go on whether the employees would continue with the job or not. In a related study, Alabri et al (2022) concluded that human resources management practices significantly impacted employees' adaptive performance, particularly as mediated by transformational leadership. These findings corroborate the criticality of the human resource unit in any firm.

Aktar and Pangil (2018) examined the mediating role of organisational commitment on the relationship between human resource management practices using an emerging economy such as Bangladesh. 383 employees from commercial banks in Bangladesh participated in the study. The data were elicited using a questionnaire. Analysis was carried out using structural equation modelling, and the findings showed that all the identified indices of human resources management practices such as career advancement, employee participation, job security, performance feedback, rewards and recognition, training, and development; all significantly predict employee engagement (Aktar & Pangil, 2018). The result also confirmed the significant mediation of organisational commitment on the relationship between human resources management and employee engagement. These findings corroborate that of Manthi et al (2018), who stated that human resources management significantly influences the turnover intention of employees.

Waruwu et al (2020) researched the role of transformational leadership, organisational learning, and structure on innovation capacity in private schools in Indonesia. The study specifically aimed at measuring the effect of transformational leadership, organisational structure, and learning on teacher innovation capacity. In order to achieve this objective, a questionnaire was administered to 645 private school teachers in Indonesia. The outcome of the analysis showed that transformational leadership has a significant and positive impact on the innovation capacity of teachers. It thus implies that the management of the school is the leading force in promoting educational innovations in the schools (Waruwu et al., 2020). School management is part of the human resources management unit of the school; and they are the major driver of innovations, competitive edge, and the general progress of the school (Waruwu et al., 2020, Uysal & Caganaga, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The method deployed for this study is a descriptive qualitative study. Qualitative design is notable for its predilection for words rather than numbers. It helps to get an in-depth view of a particular phenomenon. The population for the study included all the teachers in private schools in Libya. The sample size is six (6) teachers that were purposively selected. Four of the teachers were females, while two were males. The instrument for data collection is a semi-structured interview. The instrument contained approximately five interview questions. This nature of the instrument helps to get targeted responses from the interviewees.

Data analysis was done qualitatively through content analysis, by analysing the responses of the participants thematically. The responses were coded to find out differences and similarities. In order to do this, the participants were coded as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, & P6 so as to keep their real identities confidential for ethical reasons.

FINDINGS

1.1 Theme One: Functions of the HRM units in Private School

The first research question sought to know the functions of the HRM unit according to the views of the teachers. The answer is however elicited from the second interview question which enquired about the functions of the HRM

unit existing in your school. Divergent responses were obtained from the participants. These responses are thematically summarised thus:

P1: *coordination of academic activities in the school*

P2: *encouragement of hardworking teachers and disciplining of erring ones*

P3: *recruitment of new teachers, retraining of teachers*

P4: *motivation of teachers*

P5: *an appraisal of teachers' performance and giving of feedback*

P6: *teachers' support through the provision of necessary materials*

On the second aspect of that question which sought to know the strengths and weaknesses of the HRM unit in their school, some of the strengths mentioned included *friendliness, honest assessment, and decisiveness*; while of some, the weaknesses mentioned are *poor motivation, poor teachers' support, and welfare*. In particular, a participant said *'My problem with them is that they are quick to notice and emphasise someone's weakness, then applaud one's good performance'*. On the positive side, a participant said *'I like how decisions are taken promptly to enable know us the direction to go as staff'*.

1.2 Theme Two: Perception of Teachers about the Functions of HRM Units

On the first interview question which sought to know if the human resources management unit existed in the school of the participants; they all affirmed 'yes'. On the second aspect of that question which enquires about the necessity of an HRM unit, the six participants admitted that the unit is very necessary. In justifying their point, according to Participant 1 (P1), *the major resources in the school are human beings, so the HRM unit is important*. Another person, P3 said: *the effectiveness and success of a private school depend largely on the HRM unit*. In like manner, another participant stated: *for the sake of efficiency and orderliness, I think it is necessary for the HRM unit to exist in a private school like ours* (P5).

1.3 Theme Three: Opinions of Teachers on Benefits of HRM in Terms of Professional Development

Interview question number 3 sought to know the opinions of the teachers about the benefits of HRM in terms of professional development. The six participants admitted that this role of the HRM unit is very important. Take for instance, according to P3, *'When I started this job, I was still finding it difficult preparing lesson notes, but after a seminar conducted by the HRM unit, it was no longer difficult for me'*. Another person said: *Through their orientations, I think I now have a better human relationship with colleagues*. Similarly, another participant noted how she has improved in using ICT both for preparation and delivery of lessons: *'yes, I think my ICT skills have improved in this job through their support'*. On the suggestion on how to improve the service, almost all the participants noted that professional development should be more prioritised by making seminars and workshops more regular.

1.4 Theme Four: The Role of HRM Unit in Achieving Competitive Edge

On the question that enquired whether the HRM unit in the school of the participants plays important role in the achievement of a competitive edge, all the participants responded in the affirmative that indeed HRM unit is critical in achieving a competitive edge. On the further probe to know how the following responses were elicited from them:

P1: *"By recruiting quality teachers, the standard of the school is improving and this gives the school an edge"*.

P2: *"Training given to teachers reflects in the performance of students, and parents that send their children to private schools are mainly interested in the performance of their wards"*

P3: *"Motivation given to teachers makes them more committed to their work and this gives a good image to the school."*

P4: *"As a teacher, I speak well about the school outside because I have a good working relationship here. It is advertisement too."*

P5: *"Yes, I think the HRM unit plays a significant role in giving the school a competitive edge by regular supervision of the instructional activities of the teachers. By this, the students are constantly engaged"*.

P6: *"Our school has a competitive edge because they don't owe teachers unlike some other private schools"*.

DISCUSSION

In answering the first research question, the following functions of HRM were identified by the participants: recruitment of staff, coordination of academic activities, encouragement of teachers and disciplining of erring ones; motivation of the staff, appraisal of teachers' performance, and teachers' support through the provision of necessary materials. These views are in agreement with the position of Agha et al (2020) who maintained that teachers' appraisal is a basic function of the HRM unit. Zhen et al (2022) also agreed that HRM should assess the competency of the teacher, and this is one of the critical factors in teachers' recruitment which is an exclusive function of the HRM unit. Similarly, in line with the findings of the present study, Sukawati et al (2020) opined

that effective human resources management at the basic education level is saddled with the responsibility of job analysis, employee selection, orientation, and placement; training, mutation, promotion and compensation. These functions are a bit different from administrative functions, which some firms have construed HRM unit to be (Qehaja & Kutllovci, 2015). It thus implies that although the administrative unit of firms can be part of the HRM unit, yet, it is irrational to consider the HRM unit the same as an administrative unit. It is however notable that the teachers that participated in this study did not mention a very important function of the HRM unit, which is placement, as also acknowledged by Sukawati et al (2020). Placement is a veritable function of the HRM unit because it determines how teachers will become effective in their duties. For instance, a teacher that supposed to be teaching at the junior secondary and is placed at the senior secondary may not perform effectively.

Another finding from this study, which answers the second research question is that the teachers have positive perceptions towards the HRM unit in their school. They all justified the existence of an HRM unit in their school. They also agreed that the HRM unit has enhanced their professional development. This outcome is in consonance with Uysal and Caganaga (2018) who also found that teachers have positive perceptions toward the functions of the HRM unit. The finding is however in contrast with Manthi et al (2018) who observed that the functions of HRM were poorly practiced. The positive perception of the teachers about HRM unit functions in their school is not hundred percent because some of the teachers bemoaned how the HRM unit is eager to quickly detect fault but slow to applaud the performance. This is obviously a red flag on the side of the HRM unit in the school. Wandia (2015) revealed that it is imperative teachers have a positive perception of their work and also the human relationship that exists in their work environment. But such a negative view by some of the teachers would rather demotivate them. This is against the position of Wandia (2015) who concluded that positive perception is a source of motivation for employees. On the whole, it can generally be said that the teachers interviewed have positive perceptions about the function of the HRM unit in their school, as it is just in a few areas that some of them have reservations about.

Again, the finding that the HRM unit enhances the competitive edge of the school aligns with the findings of Runhaar and Sanders (2015) who concluded that firms need HRM units to effectively function so as to survive and thrive in the competitive market. However, this view is in contrast with Qehaja and Kutllovci (2015) who posited that the HRM unit does not have a significant influence on the competitive edge of a firm. Although the position of Qehaja and Kutllovci is yet to gain acceptance, it is also notable that their study was carried out in a wholesale distribution company. Studies in the context of private schools (Uysal & Caganaga, 2018), particularly acknowledge the function of the HRM unit in the school for gaining a competitive edge.

CONCLUSION

It has been found that the roles of the HRM unit are very critical to the sustainability of particularly private schools. The perceptions of the teachers about the functions of HRM in private schools have also been found to be very significant. It is therefore suggested that HRM units of private schools should particularly put the opinions of their teachers towards their functions into consideration. This would enhance the competitive edge of the school as found in the study. The finding of this study is however limited by the small sample size. It is therefore recommended that future researchers should consider carrying out this study using a quantitative approach, so as to increase the sample size; and enhance the validity.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study have both theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, the school of thought which considers the school administration to be the same as the HRM unit has been proved wrong by this study outcome. It is therefore important that schools particularly private schools spell out their HRM units and their roles in the school. Also, the outcome of this study reveals that the HRM unit should from time to time interact with the teachers to ascertain their opinions about their policies and actions. This study outcome is also a pointer on how private schools can gain a competitive edge by ensuring that the HRM unit is performing optimally.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

- 1) Do you have a human resources management unit in your school?
- 2) If so what do you think about the necessity of human resources management unit in a private school?
- 3) In your opinion, what are the functions of the human resources unit existing in your school? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the HRM unit in your school?
- 4) What do you think about the benefits of HRM in terms of the professional development of the employees? What suggestion can you make for the improvement of this service?
- 5) Do you consider human resources management in your school playing important role in achieving competitive advantage in your school? And how?