

# Research Possibilities in The Field of Human Resource Development in Small - Medium Enterprises in Developing Countries: A Review and Research Agenda

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Research in HRD in developing countries' SMEs, although significant, proved to be limited. Although HRD is evident in various levels and forms of organizations, there is a tendency for researchers to favour large organizations study. The preference of studying HRD in large firms may put SMEs at a disadvantage from not gaining the benefits of properly conducted HRD research. Past literature review revealed that there is disconnect between theory and practice of system theory and thinking in HRD research and practice. One of the recommendations made by past researchers was to increase and articulate practical application of the systems theory and thinking in the scholarly literature, teaching and research of HRD. This literature review aims to do just that by first, taking a step back and investigate what is known in the literature about HRD in developing economies' SMEs. This paper attempted a systematic approach to literature review to synthesize possible research agenda in this area, from the lens of System Theory.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A sample of 28 papers published in 25 journals from 1995 to 2017 was used.

**Findings:** The synthesis of these empirical and theoretical studies revealed that (a) a narrow range of theoretical and conceptualized perspectives were utilized; (b) Training and Development related topics remain the foremost research of interest among researchers; and (c) the dependency on quantitative methods when conducting HRD research as opposed to utilizing various methods which may provide insights to current issues on SMEs' HRD. Several suggestions for future research topics were offered based on theory, methodology and content.

**Research limitations/implications:** This paper discussed the implications of findings for future research from theoretical, content and methodological perspectives.

**Practical implications:** The literature review serves as a guide for systematic literature review processes.

**Originality/value:** This paper discussed the research trends of SMEs in developing countries where information about this is greatly lacking. This paper utilized systems theory as its framework and a systematic literature review process was used to enhance the rigor of this study.

**Keywords:** Small-medium Enterprises, Human Resource Development, Systematic Literature Review, Developing Countries, Research Possibilities