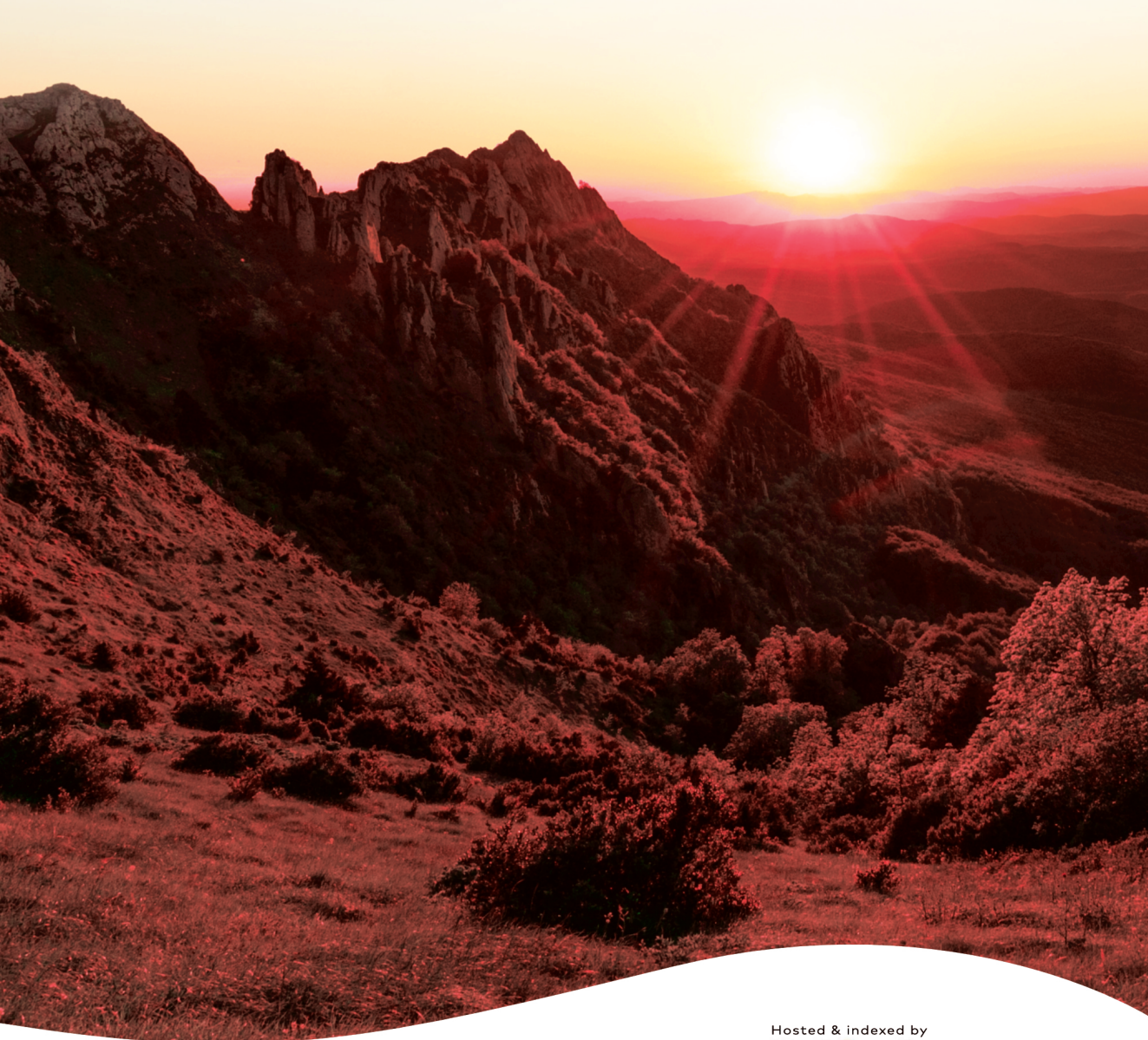


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## Recruitment and selection analytics on harnessing performance for sustainable development of retail small to medium enterprise in Mashonaland West Province Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

The study aimed to examine the effects of recruitment and selection analytics on the performance of retail SMEs in Mashonaland West Province. SMEs are globally recognised as pivotal drivers of economic growth due to their significant contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and are therefore of considerable value (World Bank, 2022). Notably, there exists a paucity of literature on the relationship between recruitment and selection analytics and the performance of the retail SME sector in Zimbabwe, a gap this study sought to address. The research also explored how data-driven decision-making offers valuable insights that enable retail SMEs to make informed hiring decisions. Through the analysis of recruitment data, SMEs can identify trends, patterns, and correlations that guide the decision-making process. A purposive sample of 22 retail SMEs was selected, and the study employed a purely qualitative approach. Interview guides were utilised to collect data from SME owners and managers, and thematic analysis was applied to interpret the findings. The study established that recruitment and selection analytics enhance hiring efficiency by enabling SMEs to utilise data-driven insights to identify the most effective recruitment channels, refine job descriptions, and target the most suitable candidates. Furthermore, the research found that analytics help reduce high employee turnover, a factor detrimental to retail SME performance, by identifying turnover patterns and their contributing factors. Data related to employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance can be analysed to identify areas for improvement, thereby fostering a more stable and productive workforce (Bersin, 2019). The study recommends that the government should actively support SMEs by providing essential resources and technological infrastructure necessary to facilitate access to high-quality data.

**Key Words:** Mashonaland West Province, Recruitment and Selection Analytics, Retail SMEs, Performance, Zimbabwe

## Introduction

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognised as critical drivers of economic development, poverty reduction, and employment creation across both developed and developing economies (Karedza & Govender, 2020; Manuere, Mabvure, Sifile, & Viriri, 2018). In Zimbabwe, SMEs constitute approximately 94% of registered businesses and contribute significantly to job creation, especially in underserved communities (Finscope, 2022). Despite their scale, SMEs continue to face structural challenges, particularly in attracting and retaining skilled human capital. Traditional recruitment methods often prove inefficient and costly, leading to suboptimal hires, high staff turnover, and weak organisational performance (Zindiye et al., 2012). However, recent advancements in digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Human Resource Management Systems (HRMS), and talent analytics platforms, have opened new opportunities for data-driven recruitment practices, enabling SMEs to make more strategic and evidence-based hiring decisions (Zeb et al., 2018).

Recruitment and selection (R&S) analytics, a subset of HR analytics, offers SMEs a powerful tool for enhancing workforce quality, minimising recruitment costs, and improving organisational outcomes. By leveraging data on candidate performance, behavioural traits, job-fit, and recruitment channels, SMEs can optimise hiring processes and gain a competitive edge in a resource-constrained environment (Deeba, 2020; Abbas et al., 2021). In Zimbabwe's retail SME sector, characterised by high competition, informal hiring practices, and limited access to strategic HR tools, the adoption of R&S analytics is not only timely but also essential. It aligns with the country's national blueprints, which advocate for technological innovation and private sector efficiency as levers for sustainable economic recovery (Nyoni, 2020). This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which retail SMEs in Mashonaland West Province are utilising R&S analytics and examines its impact on hiring outcomes, employee performance, and overall business sustainability.

## Background

Recent technological advancements are significantly levelling the playing field for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Artificial Intelligence (AI) and talent intelligence platforms have effectively dismantled traditional barriers to entry, granting SMEs access to capabilities previously reserved for larger corporations (Zeb et al., 2018). These technological engines are

democratising access to sophisticated tools, enabling SMEs to compete more effectively. Recruitment and selection (R&S) analytics play a critical role in enhancing organisational success across enterprises of all sizes. Human Resource Management (HRM) practices are widely recognised as foundational to improving organisational performance and profitability (Deeba, 2020). In particular, R&S analytics are instrumental in helping SMEs improve areas such as staff accountability, competence, and adaptability, factors that ultimately contribute to enhanced employee performance and organisational effectiveness.

The adoption of R&S analytics within Zimbabwe's SME retail sector is of strategic importance, aligning closely with the objectives of the country's developmental road maps (Nyoni, 2020). As both technology and HR practices continue to evolve, SMEs are increasingly positioned to embrace data-driven recruitment models. Numerous studies affirm that utilising R&S analytics enhances the quality of hiring decisions within SMEs (Zeb et al., 2018; Deeba, 2020). By leveraging data insights, retail SMEs can identify key predictors of job success and make more informed hiring choices. This leads to improved employee-job fit, elevated performance, and lower turnover rates (Masamba et al., 2023).

One of the notable benefits of R&S analytics is the reduction in time-to-hire, as it allows SMEs to streamline recruitment processes and minimise delays. Through analysing data on recruitment stages, bottlenecks, and candidate assessments, SMEs can identify inefficiencies and implement strategies to expedite hiring (Abbas et al., 2021; Manuere, Mabvure, Sifile, & Viriri, 2018). This enables quicker access to qualified talent and reduces costs associated with prolonged vacancies. Moreover, R&S analytics can yield substantial cost savings. By evaluating recruitment-related expenses, such as advertising costs and agency fees, SMEs are able to adopt cost-effective strategies and optimise their recruitment budget allocation (Zindiye et al., 2012; Mamman et al., 2019). This data-driven approach enables SMEs to eliminate waste and improve efficiency in their hiring processes.

The SMEs retail sector is a key pillar of economic development in many countries, including Zimbabwe. SMEs contribute significantly to national economic output, employment creation, and the provision of goods and services (ZEDCON, 2023). In Zimbabwe, SMEs represent 94% of the business population, yet account for only 15% of economic output, signalling both their dominance and untapped potential (Karedza & Govender, 2020). Globally, SMEs are celebrated for their dual role in poverty alleviation and wealth creation for



both business owners and employees (Manuere, Mabvure, Sifile, & Viriri, 2018). As such, SMEs are increasingly prioritised by policymakers and development practitioners as engines for inclusive economic growth (Karedza & Govender, 2020).

**R**egarding the Zimbabwean case, over 1.6 million SMEs are registered, with Mashonaland West Province, accounting for approximately 17% of this total (Finscope, 2022). The growth of retail outlets such as tuckshops, informal supermarkets, and small-scale manufacturing stores has driven GDP growth, which reached 60% in 2022 (Ministry of Women Affairs, SMEs and Cooperative Development, 2023). The government continues to support SMEs due to their high labour-to-capital ratio and their potential for quick economic recovery (ZEDCO, 2023).

**G**lobally, scholarly evidence show that recruitment and selection (R&S) analytics are increasingly appreciated for their contribution to SME performance. In Germany, for example, R&S analytics have been linked to decent work environments, improved employee well-being, and workplace harmony (Sels, 2016; Sypniewska, 2016). Similarly, in Canada, 80% of businesses are SMEs, generating 40% of national employment, with R&S analytics playing a role in improving hiring quality (Mashavira et al., 2019). In China and India, SMEs have accelerated economic growth and domestic market expansion through technology-driven recruitment strategies (Roy et al., 2018). In Ireland, the use of HR analytics has contributed to poverty reduction by improving company performance and job creation (Holden et al., 2016). These international experiences demonstrate how strategic HR practices, including analytics, can drive SME sustainability, growth, and contribution to national development.

**E**mployee performance is central to SME competitiveness and is influenced by various HR practices such as training, workplace climate, employer–employee relations, and performance monitoring (Mashavira et al., 2019). Performance can be assessed using indicators such as job satisfaction, productivity, absenteeism, and employee retention (Holden et al., 2016). The increasing importance of human capital as a source of competitive advantage is well documented (Naz et al., 2016). Recruitment and selection, when conducted systematically, beginning with expectation clarification, mutual information exchange, and role alignment, serve as a foundation for talent optimisation (Chada et al., 2022). As part of Human Capital Management (HCM), R&S processes help organisations attract, assess, and retain productive workers (Gay & Szostak, 2019). For SMEs, the challenge extends beyond hiring to ensuring post-recruitment development and

skills alignment. Employees with the right skills and training can significantly influence enterprise-level productivity and innovation.

**I**n Zimbabwe, support for SMEs has remained a national priority since independence, with policies designed to enhance viability and vibrancy across the sector (Chada et al., 2022; Mashavira et al., 2019). However, SME retailers face persistent challenges in attracting and retaining top talent. High youth unemployment, officially at 19.3%, compounds this problem (Zimstat, 2022). Furthermore, working conditions in the SME sector are influenced by national labour regulations, market informality, and limited access to HR tools (Finscope, 2022). R&S analytics offer a potential remedy, enabling SMEs to attract qualified talent more efficiently, optimise fit, and reduce turnover (Forth & Bryson, 2018). In embracing data-driven hiring, Zimbabwean SMEs can enhance productivity and better align with national economic objectives. Despite these opportunities, literature on the adoption and contextual impact of R&S analytics in Zimbabwe's SME retail sector remains limited. This study, therefore, aims to conceptualise and assess the use of R&S analytics in Mashonaland West Province, investigating how it influences performance and sustainability in the local SME retail context.

**S**ecuring improved sustainability and performance within the SME retail sector in Mashonaland West Province remains a significant barrier to economic growth, export competitiveness, and industrialisation. The sector is operating in a volatile and turbulent environment, marked by a shortage of appropriate workspaces, limited market access, inadequate business management skills, and an unfavourable regulatory framework (ZEDCO, 2023; Masamba et al., 2023). Further compounding these constraints is a mismatch between available job types and employment preferences, against a backdrop of a national unemployment rate of 19.3% (ZIMSTAT, 2022; Igwe et al., 2018). These structural challenges have contributed to high attrition rates and widespread absenteeism within the SME workforce (ZIMSTAT, 2022). While policy instruments such as the Zimbabwe National Export Strategy (2020–2024) aim to empower SMEs to enhance productivity and product quality, a critical gap persists in understanding how the adoption of data-driven human resource practices, particularly recruitment and selection (R&S) analytics, can address these performance-related issues.

**D**espite the recognised value of HR analytics globally, their contextual application in Zimbabwe's retail SME sector remains limited. The integration of R&S analytics could potentially help SMEs in Mashonaland West Province identify skill gaps, improve employee fit, reduce turnover, and support long-

term performance and sustainability. However, empirical evidence in this regard remains scarce. Therefore, this study seeks to determine the effects of recruitment and selection analytics on the performance of SMEs in the retail sector in Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe.

## Methodology

This qualitative study adopted an exploratory research design, which is particularly appropriate for investigating phenomena that are not yet well understood. Qualitative methods allow researchers to capture participants' subjective experiences, interpretations, and nuanced understandings of a given situation. Exploratory research is often guided by qualitative data collection techniques and is designed to uncover causes, motives, and contextual explanations that support or challenge existing assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016; Yin, 2013). In this study, 22 owners of registered retail SMEs operating for more than five years in Mashonaland West Province were purposively selected as participants. Structured interviews were used to collect data, which were subsequently analysed and presented thematically, allowing for rich interpretation of the emerging patterns and insights.

## Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which emphasises that sustainable competitive advantage is derived from an enterprise's internal resources and capabilities (Daniel, 2018). The RBV framework views these two dimensions, resources and capabilities, as essential for strategic performance and long-term sustainability. In the context of SMEs, entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is a central element of the RBV framework. SMEs with strong EO are better positioned to identify emerging market opportunities and achieve rapid growth or internationalisation (Chiwara, 2016). Given that SME operations are often centred on the owner-manager, their managerial skills, decision-making agility, and strategic vision are vital for organisational performance and adaptation (Masamba et al., 2022). The decision-making process in SMEs tends to be individualistic, driven by the owner's personal experiences, knowledge, and proximity to their operating environment.

Chiwara (2016) argued that SME location decisions are influenced by a variety of factors including cultural dynamics, regulatory frameworks, language, education levels, and existing business activities. Proximity to resources,

whether human, financial, or informational, is crucial for SMEs seeking to enhance competitiveness. A persistent challenge, however, lies in the SME's ability to disrupt established markets dominated by large firms. The RBV framework posits that SMEs must acquire or gain control over resources they do not initially own in order to thrive in competitive environments. Successful product development, market expansion, and innovation are all contingent on the SME's capacity to mobilise and strategically deploy resources. As Knizkov and Arlinghaus (2020) observed, growth in market share is often linked to the ability to leverage critical resources. According to Clough et al. (2019), such resources fall into three broad categories: human, social, and financial, each of which plays a pivotal role in determining the growth and sustainability of SMEs.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### ***Recruitment***

**R**ecruitment is a key component of human resource planning, involving decisions regarding the number of employees required, the timing of their engagement, and the criteria for their selection. It serves as the initial step in staffing and is primarily aimed at attracting a qualified pool of candidates for job vacancies (Armstrong, 2016). Blustein et al. (2020) contend that recruitment provides a pathway for talented individuals to enter organisations, with time-bound training enabling their integration and validation.

**S**imilarly, Abbasi, Tahir, Abbas, and Shabir (2020) argue that recruitment is the mechanism through which suitable candidates seeking employment can be channelled into organisations, enhancing their competitive positioning. In a globalised and fast-evolving business environment, Geetha and Bhanu (2018) emphasise that successful corporate performance is largely dependent on the recruitment and retention of high-calibre personnel. Consequently, organisations adopt varied recruitment methods, balancing cost-effectiveness with sustainability. The overarching goal is to evaluate and attract the most suitable candidates from the applicant pool (Agyapong, 2010).

### ***Selection***

**S**election begins after recruitment has yielded a pool of prospective employees. Abbasi et al. (2020) described selection as a procedural activity designed to identify the most appropriate candidates from those available. According to Ofori and Aryeetey (2011), this process involves applying rigorous methodologies to isolate the best-fit individual or, conversely, to eliminate those who do not



meet organisational requirements. Agyapong (2010) echoes this view, noting that selection aims to match individuals to roles based on predefined criteria, thus ensuring operational efficiency. Mamman et al. (2019) underscore that the selection process is critical for maintaining organisational effectiveness, requiring that the right individuals are placed in roles that maximise performance and productivity. Abbas et al. (2021) affirm that successful selection underpins an organisation's ability to maintain quality and competitiveness.

### *Effects of recruitment and selection analytics on retail SMEs in Zimbabwe*

There is a notable gap in the literature concerning the use of recruitment and selection (R&S) analytics in SMEs, with existing studies predominantly focused on large firms (Forth & Bryson, 2018; Abbas et al., 2021). This oversight limits understanding of the unique challenges faced by SMEs. The adoption of R&S analytics has become increasingly relevant, particularly post-COVID-19, as HR professionals in SMEs seek to optimise hiring through technology. Tailored HR analytics can improve employee selection, lower turnover rates, and enhance organisational productivity. Digital platforms now enable broader candidate outreach and facilitate decision-making during selection (Kajongwe, Machaka, & Chibhoyi, 2021). The pandemic accelerated the shift towards e-recruitment, especially as SMEs sought to overcome skilled labour shortages by expanding their geographic reach (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018; Ncube, Tsandukwa, & Ndlovu, 2021).

Analytics-driven recruitment allows SMEs to evaluate candidates based on data such as qualifications, experience, and assessment outcomes, thus improving job fit and organisational performance (Kaufman & Miller, 2021). Moreover, it shortens time-to-hire and reduces associated costs by automating key recruitment stages (Ncube, Tsandukwa, & Ndlovu, 2021). It also supports retention by identifying patterns linked to employee turnover, allowing SMEs to proactively address risks (Chada et al., 2022). In addition, analytics can assess cultural fit and compatibility with existing teams by analysing personality traits and values (Kajongwe et al., 2021). This data-driven insight informs training initiatives, closing skill gaps and driving long-term growth.

### *Performance strategies by retail SMEs in Zimbabwe*

Organisations, regardless of size, face continuous challenges due to globalisation, technological advancement, deregulation, and market shifts (Ncube et al., 2021). As a result, strategic planning has become indispensable. SMEs now face demands traditionally associated with larger firms, and the

lack of strategic foresight often results in business failure (Chada et al., 2022). Armstrong and Taylor (2016) emphasise that strategic planning significantly increases an organisation's chance of success. Within this context, human resources play a pivotal role in transforming the other factors of production to meet organisational goals (Masamba et al., 2023).

Despite progress in strategic management, performance challenges persist. Literature suggests that while SMEs can benefit from strategic planning, their outcomes vary widely. To mitigate failure, Zimbabwean SME owners must prioritise decent work practices and formal strategy development (Nyoni, 2020). Given the complexities discussed above, the strategic execution capacity of SMEs will shape their competitiveness and long-term viability in the national economy.

## Results and Discussion

An interview guide was completed by all 22 purposively selected respondents in the study. However, data saturation was achieved at 14 participants, representing 64% of the total response rate. The primary objective of the study was to determine the effects of recruitment and selection (R&S) analytics on the performance of the SMEs retail sector.

Through thematic analysis, five overarching themes emerged:

1. improved hiring decisions,
2. reduced time and cost,
3. enhanced retention rates,
4. team dynamics, and
5. identification of skills gaps.

### *Theme 1: Improved Hiring Decisions*

This theme emerged strongly across the data set, with several participants noting the pivotal role of data-driven hiring in shaping SME performance outcomes. Respondents 1 and 7 emphasised that improved hiring decisions had significantly enhanced the performance of their retail SMEs. In particular, Respondents 2 and 5 highlighted a direct correlation between R&S analytics and operational performance, citing increases in production levels, sales turnover, and profitability.

Respondent 3 added that strategic hiring had introduced new ideas into the business, expanded market share, and enhanced the corporate image of their SME. Respondent 4 further observed that analytics-assisted hiring helped align



## ***Theme 2: Identifying skill gaps and training needs.***

A prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was the role of recruitment and selection analytics in identifying skill gaps and informing training and development strategies within SMEs. Respondent 1 indicated that R&S analytics facilitates the identification of existing gaps in employee competencies, enabling SMEs to tailor training programmes accordingly. This aligns with Daniel's (2018) findings that targeted training accelerates employee learning, reduces operational errors, and lowers correction costs.

Respondent 2 noted that training not only enhances individual performance but also contributes to greater employee motivation and improved succession planning. Similarly, Respondent 3 emphasised the link between effective training and increased productivity, elevated employee morale, enhanced interpersonal relationships, and ultimately higher sales revenue. These views were echoed by Respondent 4, who asserted that training serves as both a performance booster and a motivational tool within the organisation.

Respondent 5 reiterated that well-structured training initiatives improve employee skills, raise sales volumes, and support leadership development, an observation supported by Karedza and Govender (2020), Nyoni (2020), and Chada et al. (2022). Respondent 6 viewed training as a key motivational lever that fosters continuous learning and enhances staff competencies, while Respondent 7 highlighted that training plays a strategic role in strengthening organisational relationships, enhancing responsiveness to environmental shifts, and building resilience.

Further, Respondent 8 emphasised that recognition through training initiatives contributes to skill enhancement and overall staff development. Respondents 9 and 13 associated training with reductions in labour turnover and improvements in efficiency and productivity. Respondents 10 and 11 stressed the role of training in attracting and retaining top talent, boosting profit margins, and raising motivation, job satisfaction, and morale.

Respondent 12 identified the development of a multi-skilled workforce, better customer care, and stress management as key outcomes of training. Similarly, Respondent 13 emphasised the role of training in managing change, fostering greater employee engagement, and increasing motivation and confidence, which in turn reduces staff attrition. Lastly, Respondent 14 concluded that trained employees contribute significantly to enhanced productivity, superior



customer service, improved client satisfaction and loyalty, all of which drive increased revenue.

Overall, these perspectives demonstrate that recruitment and selection analytics not only guide effective hiring but also underpin strategic training interventions that improve the human capital capabilities of SMEs in Zimbabwe's retail sector.



Figure 2: Identifying skill gaps and training needs.

Source: Masamba (2024)

Figure 2, titled provides a word cloud that visually interprets the key concepts from the qualitative data. The most prominent words, such as “improvement,” “skill,” “performance,” and “motivation,” are prominently displayed, highlighting the central role of training and skill development in driving positive outcomes for SMEs. The word cloud effectively shows that the core focus of the respondents’ discussion on this topic revolved around improving skills to boost performance, efficiency, and employee morale.

### *Theme 3: Team dynamics and Cultural fit.*

Respondents 1, and 11 emphasise that recruitment and selection analytics promotes team dynamics, communication both internally and externally, leading to improved decision-making processes and the development of specialised skills. Respondents 2, 5, and 9 associate teamwork with increased productivity and the alignment of employees toward common goals.

Respondent 1 denoted that:

*It removes selfish ideas, reduces conflicts, and fulfils the mission of the organisation.*

Respondent 7 postulated that:

*Employee teamwork strengthens relationships with customers, contributing to improved customer service, satisfaction, and loyalty, ultimately benefiting SMEs in the retail sector.*

Respondents 12 indicated that:

*Teamwork enables individuals to motivate themselves, increases gains from community cooperation, and blends unique skills together to promote growth and succession planning.*

Respondent 9 noted that:

*Teamwork reduces conflict within the workplace, minimises duplication of resources, and ensures the fulfilment of the same goal mission.*

Respondent 14 concluded that:

*Teamwork leads to improved productivity and better problem-solving. Employees working together as a team accomplish tasks more efficiently, share knowledge, and approach problems from diverse perspectives, resulting in more comprehensive and effective solutions.*

To visually support these findings, the study presents **Figure 3**, a word cloud that illustrates the key concepts related to team dynamics and cultural fit. The word cloud shows that words such as “productivity,” “development,” and “improved” are the most prominent, signifying that participants most frequently associated these outcomes with teamwork.



Figure 3: Team dynamics and cultural fit

Source: Masamba et al (2024)

The visual reinforces the qualitative data, demonstrating that employees working together accomplish tasks more efficiently and approach problems

from diverse perspectives, leading to more comprehensive solutions. In summary, the use of recruitment and selection analytics helps SMEs build cohesive teams that are not only more productive but also better equipped to solve problems and drive growth through shared knowledge and collaboration. This data-driven approach ensures that new hires are a good cultural fit, thereby promoting workplace harmony, which is crucial for the long-term viability and success of retail SMEs in a competitive market.

#### ***Theme 4: Enhanced retention rates.***

Another recurring theme identified during the analysis was the potential of recruitment and selection (R&S) analytics to enhance employee retention within the SME retail sector.

#### ***Respondents 11 emphasised that:***

*Analytics play a critical role in identifying the underlying factors contributing to employee turnover. By systematically analysing employee-related data, SMEs are better positioned to recognise early warning signs of dissatisfaction or disengagement that may lead to attrition.*

Respondents 7, 8, 9, and 14 corroborated this view, underscoring the utility of analysing metrics related to employee satisfaction, engagement levels, and job performance. This analytical approach enables SMEs to uncover patterns and trends indicative of potential workforce instability. With such insights, businesses are empowered to make data-driven adjustments to their recruitment and selection strategies, such as refining job role alignment, identifying attributes of high-retention employees, or correcting selection biases, that may otherwise go unnoticed.

These proactive strategies foster the recruitment of candidates more likely to remain committed over time, thereby strengthening organisational stability and reducing the financial burden of high turnover. This outcome aligns with Nyoni's (2020) assertion that data-informed HR practices can significantly improve retention rates, particularly within dynamic and resource-constrained environments like Zimbabwe's SME sector.

#### ***Theme 5: Reduced time and cost***

Respondents 7, and 13 highlighted that “traditional recruitment processes are often time-consuming and financially burdensome for SMEs”.

Respondent 14 further observed that:

*... by leveraging recruitment and selection (R&S) analytics, SMEs can streamline and automate key stages of the recruitment process, such as CV screening, candidate evaluation, and interview scheduling. This automation reduces the reliance on manual processes, thereby saving time and enabling SMEs to reallocate resources to other strategic business functions.*

Indeed, approximately 90% of respondents concurred that R&S analytics improves operational efficiency and expedites the hiring cycle, which is particularly valuable in resource-constrained environments. This aligns with the findings of Nyoni (2020), who asserts that successful implementation of recruitment analytics hinges on the adoption of a data-driven mindset, adequate technological infrastructure, and the availability of skilled HR personnel capable of utilising analytic tools and interpreting outcomes effectively. Moreover, the literature stresses that SMEs must also uphold ethical considerations, especially around data privacy and confidentiality, in order to comply with regulatory standards and protect candidate information throughout the recruitment process.

## Discussion

The study's finding that R&S analytics lead to improved hiring decisions is strongly supported by existing literature. The research found that data-driven insights enabled retail SMEs to make informed hiring choices, which directly correlated with higher production, sales, and profitability. This aligns with a number of studies that affirm the use of R&S analytics to enhance the quality of hiring decisions, leading to better employee-job fit, elevated performance, and lower turnover rates. By analyzing recruitment data, SMEs can identify trends and patterns that guide their decision-making process. This strategic approach to hiring introduces new ideas, expands market share, and improves the corporate image. Furthermore, analytics-assisted hiring helps to align candidates with specific job requirements and organizational culture, which translates to heightened productivity and consistent performance. This demonstrates that analytics not only enhance workforce quality but also provide broader business advantages, such as innovation and customer satisfaction.

The study found a prominent theme in the use of R&S analytics to identify skill gaps and inform training and development strategies. This is a crucial finding, as traditional recruitment often proves inefficient and costly, leading to suboptimal hires and weak organizational performance. Recruitment and selection analytics enable SMEs to pinpoint existing gaps in employee



competencies, allowing for tailored training programs. This finding is consistent with Daniel's (2018) research, which found that targeted training accelerates employee learning, reduces errors, and lowers correction costs. The study also highlighted that training enhances individual performance, contributes to motivation, and supports succession planning. Respondents in the study noted that effective training leads to increased productivity, elevated morale, and higher sales revenue. This emphasizes how R&S analytics can underpin strategic training interventions that improve the human capital capabilities of SMEs in Zimbabwe's retail sector.

## Conclusions

This study concludes that recruitment and selection analytics significantly influence the performance of retail Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Mashonaland West Province. The integration of data-driven strategies in the recruitment process has enabled SMEs to improve the quality of hires, reduce employee turnover, identify skill gaps, and enhance organisational productivity. The findings confirm that when SMEs leverage analytics, they are better equipped to make informed hiring decisions that align with their business needs and performance objectives.

Furthermore, the study highlights that analytics tools contribute to enhanced retention by identifying patterns related to employee satisfaction and performance, allowing for timely interventions. Despite these advantages, adoption of recruitment analytics in SMEs remains limited, largely due to infrastructural constraints, lack of technical expertise, and minimal government support. However, the evidence strongly suggests that digital recruitment strategies, when effectively implemented, can offer SMEs a competitive edge and contribute significantly to employment creation and economic development.

## Recommendations

### *1. Government Support for Digital Infrastructure*

The Government of Zimbabwe, through the Ministry of Women Affairs, Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperative Development, should strengthen its support for SMEs by providing access to ICT infrastructure, affordable internet, and data management tools to facilitate the implementation of recruitment analytics.

### *2. Capacity Building for SME Owners and Manager*

**T**raining programmes should be introduced to upskill SME owners and human resource managers in data literacy, analytics interpretation, and digital recruitment platforms. This will enable informed decision-making and better alignment between hiring strategies and business goals.

### *3. Promotion of Digital Transformation in SMEs*

SMEs are encouraged to embrace digital transformation through the adoption of e-recruitment systems, automated screening tools, and applicant tracking software. These tools can reduce time-to-hire, improve cost-efficiency, and enhance access to diverse talent pools.

### *4. Incentivising Private Sector Collaboration*

**P**ublic-private partnerships should be fostered to support SMEs in accessing cloud-based recruitment platforms and analytical tools. This collaboration can ensure cost-sharing and promote sustainable technology integration in the sector.

### *5. Policy and Regulatory Alignment*

**C**lear policy guidelines should be established to promote the ethical use of recruitment analytics in line with data protection laws. This will safeguard candidate privacy and ensure fair hiring practices while promoting innovation in human capital management.

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