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Skills-Based Recruitment and Performance of Small and Medium-Sized Public Enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: The Moderating Role of Remuneration and the Mediating Role of Employee Effectiveness

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Abstract

The analysis of the influence of skills-based recruitment on the performance of public SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo takes place within a context marked by low productivity, dependence on subsidies, deteriorating equipment, salary delays, and governance deficiencies. These constraints limit the operational capacity and competitiveness of public enterprises. They are exacerbated by recruitment practices based on favoritism, cronyism, nepotism, politicization, and opacity, which undermine equal opportunities, organizational justice, and trust in institutions. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of 305 observations collected from 60 SMEs with interviews conducted with agents, human resources managers, and executives. The results show that 68.6% of respondents judge their company's performance to be lower or significantly lower than that of its competitors. This perception varies according to socio-professional category, company size, and geographic location, the latter being the most decisive factor. Furthermore, the explanatory model of relational recruitment remains inconclusive, suggesting that informal networks and political loyalties largely escape observable variables. Qualitative data, however, reveals that a genuine match between skills and job roles fosters initiative, autonomy, and employee effectiveness. Conversely, inappropriate assignments lead to frustration, underutilization of skills, and a dilution of responsibilities. Skills only produce lasting results when supported by sufficient resources, appropriate supervision, ongoing training, rigorous evaluation, and regular, fair compensation. Therefore, professionalizing recruitment emerges as a key driver of performance, provided it is integrated into a governance framework based on competence, transparency, fairness, integrity, and accountability.

Keywords

Skills-Based Recruitment, Organizational Performance, Fair Compensation, Managerial Ethics

1. Introduction

1.1. General Context

Small and medium-sized public enterprises are important instruments of the state's economic and social action in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They play a role in the production and distribution of goods and services, job creation, public revenue mobilization, resource exploitation, the provision of essential services, and land-use planning. In a country characterized by its vast territory, weak infrastructure, and regional disparities, these enterprises can contribute to reducing economic and social imbalances.

However, their contribution remains below their potential. Many of them suffer from low productivity, persistently insufficient revenue, high debt, delays in salary payments, dependence on public subsidies, deteriorating equipment, and a limited capacity to generate sustainable added value. These difficulties are also linked to poor internal organization, inadequate oversight, and the absence of genuine strategic human resource management.

The performance of a public enterprise depends not only on its financial or material resources. It also relies on the quality of its employees, the coherence of its organizational structure, and its ability to mobilize the skills necessary to fulfill its missions. From this perspective, recruitment is a strategic decision. It determines the quality of available skills, the distribution of responsibilities, the capacity for innovation, administrative efficiency, and ultimately, organizational performance.

According to Becker (1964), workers' knowledge and skills constitute a form of human capital that can improve productivity. Barney (1991), for his part, considers that human resources can be a source of organizational advantage when they are valuable, scarce, difficult to imitate, and properly organized. Thus, a company can have a large workforce without being efficient if the recruited profiles do not match the organization's actual needs.

In public enterprises, however, recruitment is often influenced by institutional, social, and political considerations. While recruitment may be based on skills and job requirements, it can also be affected by favoritism, cronyism, nepotism, or political networks. These practices can create a mismatch between the profiles of those recruited and the responsibilities assigned. They can also lead to overstaffing, poor task allocation, weak accountability, and declining performance.

1.2. African Exploration of the Professionalization of Recruitment and Performance of Public SMEs: Lessons Learned from Some African Countries and Perspectives for the DRC

The challenges faced by public SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo reveal organizational, institutional, and financial dysfunctions. Recruitment is often insufficiently based on job analysis, skills, and strategic objectives, leading to quantitative, qualitative, and financial imbalances. These imbalances result in an accumulation of staff, a mismatch between profiles and roles, low productivity, dependence on subsidies, and a decline in service quality. Political interference, patronage, an aging workforce, inadequate continuing education, poor career management, and the lack of formal employment for some staff exacerbate this situation. Furthermore, salary disparities between employees performing comparable functions, particularly between Kinshasa and the provinces, can undermine motivation and the sense of fairness. Yet, Becker (1964) already recognized that the knowledge, skills, training, experience, and qualifications of individuals constitute genuine capital in which organizations invest to increase productivity and work efficiency. From this perspective, the performance of one of the Congolese SMEs depends in part on its ability to attract, select and assign agents whose skills truly match the requirements of the positions they hold.

Applied to the context of small and medium-sized public enterprises in the DRC, Becker's work helps us understand the importance of skills-based recruitment. When employees are selected based on their qualifications, experience, and suitability for the job requirements, they are more likely to master their tasks, make appropriate decisions, and produce results that align with the organization's objectives. Conversely, when recruitment is based primarily on considerations other than required skills, the organization risks placing under-prepared employees in positions they struggle to master. This mismatch between available skills and job requirements can then reduce individual effectiveness and, through a cumulative effect, negatively impact the overall performance of the organization.

Human capital theory also establishes a direct link between the skills of employees in DRC's public SMEs and their effectiveness. An employee with the knowledge and skills required for their job is theoretically better positioned to perform their tasks quickly, effectively, and autonomously. Employee effectiveness can thus be seen as a mechanism by which acquired or utilized skills translate into organizational results. In this framework, recruitment is not merely an administrative operation aimed at filling vacancies; it represents a strategic choice that partly determines the quality of the human capital available to the organization.

In our case, remuneration in SMEs (DRC) is considered a crucial factor in valuing, retaining, and mobilizing their human capital. When employees possess the necessary skills but receive insufficient or irregular compensation, these SMEs struggle to maintain their engagement and fully leverage their capabilities. Appropriate compensation can therefore contribute to fostering skills mobilization and workplace efficiency. Within the framework of this research, remuneration is thus considered a moderating factor that can either strengthen or mitigate the relationship between skills-based recruitment and organizational performance.

This approach also helps to understand the role of training and professional development. According to Becker (1964), investment in human capital increases individuals' productive capacity. Thus, even when initial recruitment is skills-based, employee effectiveness can be enhanced through ongoing training, the acquisition of new knowledge, and the development of professional skills. For public SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, continuous skills development therefore appears as a way to transform individual qualifications into sustainable organizational capacity.

In light of this logic, the model of this research can be understood as follows: skills-based recruitment allows for the creation of human capital better suited to the requirements of the positions; this human capital fosters the efficiency of employees; and this efficiency then contributes to improved performance in small and medium-sized public enterprises. Compensation acts as a moderating variable that can either strengthen or weaken the effects of skills-based recruitment on performance.

1.3. Phenomenology of Recruitment in Small and Medium-Sized Public Enterprises in the DRC

In small and medium-sized public enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, recruitment is not simply an administrative operation to fill a vacancy. It represents an institutional and human process in which candidates' skills, organizational needs, formal rules, and informal practices all come into play. When it is based on job analysis, the definition of precise profiles, transparent criteria, professional tests, structured interviews, and a documented decision, it can foster professional development, accountability, and performance. Conversely, when access to employment depends primarily on personal connections, recommendations, political affiliation, or external interference, recruitment loses its meritocratic function and becomes a source of institutional distortion.

A phenomenological approach allows us to study this phenomenon from the perspective of the actors' lived experience. Researchers are encouraged to set aside their existing assumptions and preconceived categories, allowing them to examine and describe a phenomenon based on how it is experienced and understood by those directly involved. Recruitment must therefore be understood through the narratives of candidates and agents: their expectations, hopes, uncertainties, perceptions of the selection process, their impact, and their relationship to work. The aim is not to immediately label the process as politicized, clientelistic, or corrupt, but rather to understand how the actors concretely experience a situation in which competence does not always seem to be the primary decision-making criterion.

This approach places everyday experiences and personal accounts at the center of the inquiry, seeking to reveal the meanings that individuals attach to their experiences and situations. A candidate may thus discover that their qualifications and professional experience are insufficient to guarantee recruitment, while the intervention of an influential relationship appears to be a determining factor. Such a situation can generate feelings of devaluation, injustice, or uncertainty, particularly when the recruited individual understands neither the reasons for their selection nor the organization's true expectations. Individuals are understood as being situated within the physical, social, and everyday worlds in which their experiences unfold. Therefore, a poor job placement does not simply correspond to a measurable mismatch between a position and a candidate's profile; it can be experienced as a feeling of powerlessness, frustration, shame, loss of confidence, or disengagement.

Inadequate recruitment also leads to job displacement. In these companies, employees confirmed that someone trained in accounting might be assigned to a technical department, an IT specialist to an administrative role, or a human resources specialist to a position unrelated to their skills. In such cases, the employee is not necessarily incompetent; they may be competent in a different field than the one they are assigned to. The difficulty, therefore, stems from the mismatch between the individual, the task, and the work environment. According to these employees, the lack of up-to-date job descriptions, skills frameworks, and onboarding mechanisms in these companies exacerbates this uncertainty. It fosters overlapping responsibilities, increased staffing levels, waiting for instructions, and a dilution of individual accountability.

We use the idea of general relativity as a metaphor to help make sense of this situation. Just as mass curves spacetime and alters the trajectory of bodies, politicization, clientelism, corruption, opacity, and weak controls can distort the normal recruitment process. Professional logic should follow the sequence: job analysis, skills identification, evaluation, decision, integration, and performance. In a distorted institutional environment, this trajectory becomes: intervention, recommendation, appointment, assignment, mismatch, and low productivity. This analogy remains heuristic: it does not transpose physical laws to the social sciences, but it allows us to consider how institutional forces influence organizational decisions.

Politicization reduces the autonomy of leaders, while corruption transforms public employment into a resource that can be distributed to benefit special interests. Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2005) demonstrate that governance depends, in particular, on institutional effectiveness, regulatory quality, the rule of law, and the control of corruption. When procedures exist but are neither applied nor monitored, a gap widens between the formal organization and the organization as it is actually experienced. North (1990) reminds us that institutions constitute the rules of the game and structure the incentives of actors. If the system rewards competence and transparency, professional decisions become rational; if it values proximity and intervention, clientelistic practices tend to persist.

The consequences of these distortions are organizational, economic, social, and ethical. Organizationally, they lead to role confusion, low accountability, absenteeism, conflict, and difficulty in evaluating performance. Economically, they can cause an increase in wage costs without a corresponding increase in the value produced, according to the following dynamic: poor recruitment, skills mismatch, low productivity, deficits, and increased dependence on the state. Socially, they weaken confidence in merit, devalue degrees, and encourage individuals to prioritize networking over education. Ethically, they undermine the accountability of administrators and the interests of colleagues, users, the state, and citizens.

In the context of the reforms initiated by the 2008 Congolese laws concerning the transformation of public enterprises and the management of the state portfolio, the professionalization of recruitment has emerged as a central governance issue. Initiatives aimed at the competitive selection of managers and the transparency of appointments demonstrate that reform must not be limited to the adoption of legislation. It must also ensure its implementation, the traceability of decisions, the independence of selection bodies, the evaluation of integration, and the sanctioning of arbitrary practices.

Thus, the phenomenological study of recruitment allows us to connect three levels of analysis: the candidate's individual experience, organizational dysfunctions, and the costs borne by the state and society. Recruitment is therefore not a secondary function of human resources; it represents a fundamental mechanism for producing public performance. Understanding the lived experience of those involved reveals how institutional distortions affect professional recognition, agency, and the meaning of work. Recruitment reform then becomes a reform of governance itself, based on competence, transparency, accountability, and the alignment between individuals, positions, and the objectives of the public service.

1.4. Gap in the Literature

Despite the strategic importance of human resources in organizational performance, several gaps remain in the literature. Studies focusing on African public small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are relatively scarce, with most research concentrating on large private companies, central government departments, or public enterprises in industrialized countries. Yet, public SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo operate in an environment characterized by institutional fragility, dependence on public funding, unstable governance mechanisms, and the influence of political considerations. Under these conditions, recruitment is not always based on systematic job analysis, a competency framework, or transparent procedures. Organizational performance is closely linked to how well human resource practices support and complement an organization's strategic goals. However, in some Congolese public enterprises, employees are sometimes assigned to administrative or technical positions without formal competitive examinations, professional tests, or thorough verification of their qualifications, sometimes due to political or familial connections. This situation can lead to mismatches between skills held and job requirements, particularly in transport, energy, water or telecommunications companies, where a lack of specialized staff can cause maintenance delays, a decline in service quality and low productivity.

Furthermore, the concrete mechanisms of recruitment, as well as the interaction between recruitment, remuneration, and performance, remain insufficiently studied in the Congolese context. Research by Becker and Huselid (2006) shows that human resource practices produce better results when integrated into a coherent system for managing and developing skills, while Adams (1965) emphasizes that the perception of fairness in remuneration influences workers' attitudes and behaviors. Thus, even when a Congolese public SME recruits a competent employee, the expected benefits may be limited if that employee experiences salary delays, receives lower pay than less qualified colleagues, or works with inadequate resources. For example, a technician recruited by a public water or electricity company may possess the necessary skills but be unable to work effectively due to a lack of spare parts, insufficient continuing education, or demotivating salary conditions. Furthermore, quantitative studies that simultaneously assess the direct effect of recruitment on performance, the mediating role of employee effectiveness, and the moderating influence of compensation remain limited in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This study therefore aims to contribute to filling this gap by proposing an integrated model applicable to Congolese public SMEs, taking into account their institutional, social, and organizational realities.

This study aims to contribute to reducing these gaps by proposing an integrated model applicable to Congolese public SMEs and seeks to explore the extent to which skills-based recruitment improves the performance of public SMEs in the DRC, through employee efficiency and the moderating effect of remuneration. In other words, to what extent does the quality of recruitment influence employee efficiency and, consequently, the performance of Congolese public SMEs? Or, conversely, how do political and relational recruitment practices and remuneration policies influence this relationship, and what institutional mechanisms can promote merit and pay equity?

2. Theoretical Contributions of the Study

To better understand "Skills-Based Recruitment and Performance in Public SMEs in the DRC", Becker's (1964) human capital theory emerges as the most relevant theoretical framework. This theory considers individuals' knowledge, qualifications, skills, and experience as capital capable of increasing their productivity and, consequently, the organization's performance. In the context of Congolese public SMEs, it explains that the quality of recruitment constitutes a strategic investment: selecting employees based on their actual skills and their suitability for the job requirements increases the likelihood that they will perform their tasks effectively.

Conversely, when recruitment is influenced by patronage, nepotism, or considerations unrelated to professional skills, the organization risks having human capital poorly suited to its needs, which can result in low productivity, errors, poor service quality, and decreased performance. Becker's theory thus establishes a logical link between skills-based recruitment, mobilized skills, individual effectiveness, and organizational performance.

The scientific contribution of this theory to the present study lies primarily in its ability to explain the mechanism by which recruited skills translate into performance. In the proposed model, skills-based recruitment constitutes the starting point for building appropriate human capital; the effectiveness of employees then reflects how effectively this capital is mobilized in the performance of work, while remuneration can either strengthen or weaken the relationship between recruited skills and the results achieved. Appropriate remuneration can promote the development and mobilization of human capital, whereas insufficient, irregular, or perceived unfair remuneration can limit the engagement and effective use of available skills. Human capital theory thus provides a unifying framework for understanding why the performance of Congolese public SMEs depends not only on the presence of qualified employees, but also on the organization's capacity to utilize and develop this human capital. It therefore provides a scientific justification for studying recruitment as an independent variable, employee effectiveness as a mediating mechanism, remuneration as a moderating factor, and organizational performance as an expected outcome.

3. Conceptual Model and Formulation of Hypotheses

3.1. Operational Definition of Variables

The conceptual model of this research is structured around four main variables: the quality of skills-based recruitment, the effectiveness of staff, remuneration, and organizational performance. Their operational definition clarifies the relationships studied and facilitates their empirical measurement in public SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

3.2. The Quality of Competency-Based Recruitment

The quality of skills-based recruitment refers to all the practices by which an organization identifies, attracts, selects, and integrates candidates whose qualifications match the job requirements and the company's strategic objectives. It will be assessed using several indicators: prior analysis of staffing needs, the existence of a job description, the definition of a skills profile, transparency in the call for applications, the use of professional tests, the conduct of structured interviews, verification of diplomas and experience, traceability of the decision, and the evaluation of the new employee at the end of the probationary period.

3.3. The Effectiveness of Agents

This refers to employees' ability to mobilize their knowledge, skills, and available resources to achieve expected results. It is not limited to the execution of prescribed tasks but also includes the quality of work, speed of execution, autonomy, diligence, adaptability to change, problem-solving skills, and contribution to collective objectives. This variable therefore reflects how recruited human resources translate their skills into observable results.

3.4. Compensation

Compensation encompasses all financial and non-financial benefits granted to employees in return for their work. This includes base salary, bonuses, allowances, benefits, and career advancement opportunities. In this study, compensation will be evaluated according to three key dimensions: its adequacy in relation to employees' needs and the cost of living, its internal and external fairness, and its regularity and predictability. Compensation is considered a moderating variable, as it can either amplify or diminish the impact of recruitment on performance.

3.5. The Organizational Performance

Performance refers to an organization's ability to achieve its economic, social, and institutional objectives by effectively utilizing its resources. It will be assessed through productivity, the quality of goods and services, cost control, revenue mobilization capacity, user satisfaction, financial autonomy, the fulfillment of public service missions, and the quality of governance and internal control. In the context of Congolese public SMEs, performance must therefore be understood from a multidimensional perspective, combining financial results, operational efficiency, and the accomplishment of the public interest mission.

4. Presentation of the Conceptual Model

The chosen model considers the quality of skills-based recruitment as the independent variable, employee effectiveness as the mediating variable, compensation as the moderating variable, and organizational performance as the dependent variable. It is based on the idea that professional recruitment improves the match between employee profiles and job requirements. This match fosters individual effectiveness, which in turn contributes to improved organizational performance.

The main relationship can be represented as follows:

Quality of recruitment → Effectiveness of agents → Organizational performance

Compensation plays a role in this relationship by moderating the effect of recruitment on performance. Thus, the presence of appropriate skills does not automatically guarantee high performance if employees are underpaid, if their compensation is irregular, or if they perceive unfair pay.

The moderation model can be formulated as follows:

Performance = $\beta 0$ + $\beta 1$Recruitment + $\beta 2$Remuneration + $\beta 3$Recruitment × Remuneration + εPerformance = $\beta 0$ + $\beta 1$Recruitment + $\beta 2$Remuneration + $\beta 3$Recruitment × Remuneration + ε

The interaction coefficient $\beta 3 \beta 3$ allows us to determine whether compensation enhances or reduces the effect of recruitment quality on organizational performance. Furthermore, the mediating effect of agent effectiveness can be estimated using the following equations:

Efficiency' = α0 + α1Recruitment + α2Control variables + ε1Efficiency' = α0 + α1Recruitment + α2Control variables + ε1

Performance = γ0 + γ1Recruitment + γ2Efficiency' + γ3Remuneration' ration + γ4Recruitment × Remuneration' ration + γ5Control variables + ε2Performance = γ0 + γ1Recruitment + γ2Efficiency' + γ3Remuneration + γ4Recruitment × Remuneration + γ5Control variables + ε2

The control variables likely to influence performance are the size and age of the company, the sector of activity, the level of digitalization, the leadership style, financial autonomy, competitive pressure, and the quality of governance. Integrating these variables allows for a better isolation of the specific effects of recruitment, efficiency, and compensation on organizational performance.

5. Link between Theories and Hypotheses

The first hypothesis is based on Becker's (1964) human capital theory, according to which skills constitute a productive investment, and on Barney's (1991) resource-based view, which considers skilled human resources as a source of organizational advantage. Recruitment based on objective criteria should therefore improve the company's ability to achieve its objectives.

H1: The quality of skills-based recruitment positively influences the organizational performance of public SMEs in the DRC.

The relationship between recruitment and individual effectiveness hinges on the fit between the individual and the position. When a candidate's qualifications, experience, and skills align with the job requirements, the employee is better able to perform their tasks autonomously, accurately, and efficiently. This proposition aligns with Becker's (1964) human capital theory and Campbell's (1990) work on individual performance at work.

H2: The quality of skills-based recruitment positively influences the individual effectiveness of agents.

Individual effectiveness is an essential component of collective performance. Competent staff, properly assigned and able to mobilize available resources, contribute to reducing errors, improving service quality, controlling costs, and achieving institutional objectives.

H3: The individual effectiveness of agents positively influences the organizational performance of public SMEs.

Recruitment can also have an indirect effect on performance. By improving the match between candidate profiles and job requirements, it increases individual efficiency, which in turn impacts the company's results. Efficiency thus provides an explanation for the relationship between recruitment quality and performance.

H4: The effectiveness of agents plays a mediating role in the relationship between the quality of recruitment and organizational performance.

Compensation, for its part, can either reinforce or weaken the positive effects of recruitment. According to Adams (1965), employees evaluate their situation by comparing their contributions and rewards to those of other workers. Blau (1964) shows that employees are more willing to exert effort when the organization fulfills the obligations they perceive it to have. Adequate, regular, and fair compensation should therefore promote motivation, retention, and the effective mobilization of skills.

H5: Remuneration positively moderates the relationship between recruitment quality and organizational performance.

This moderation should be particularly strong when employees consider their compensation fair and sufficient. Conversely, low, irregular, or unfair compensation can reduce the commitment of recruited employees and limit the conversion of their skills into performance.

H6: The positive effect of recruitment quality on performance is greater when remuneration is perceived as sufficient, regular and fair.

Finally, recruitment influenced by patronage, nepotism, personal relationships, or political considerations can compromise the match between skills and job requirements. It can also increase salary costs, weaken accountability, and reduce the legitimacy of managerial decisions. This hypothesis is grounded in the agency theory of Jensen and Meckling (1976), which highlights the effects of conflicts of interest, information asymmetry, and weak control mechanisms.

H7: Recruitment practices influenced by political or relational considerations significantly reduce the organizational performance of public SMEs, all other things being equal.

Formulated in this way, the model highlights a direct, indirect, and conditional relationship between recruitment and performance. It allows for the analysis not only of the impact of recruitment quality, but also the role of employee efficiency and salary conditions in the performance of public SMEs in the DRC.

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Epistemological Positioning

This research adopts a post-positivist and critical perspective, based on the idea that scientific knowledge is often constructed from observable facts, explicit hypotheses, and rational verification procedures. This approach views theoretical claims as open to scrutiny, requiring them to be tested against evidence rather than simply accepted as true. The scientific validity of a proposition therefore depends on its testability and falsifiability. From this perspective, the hypotheses concerning the influence of skills-based recruitment on employee effectiveness and organizational performance are considered provisional. They are then tested against data collected from public SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The study thus seeks to determine whether empirical observations support, qualify or contradict the relationships postulated in the conceptual model.

This epistemological choice is also compatible with the principles of the hypothetico-deductive approach. Scientific research often starts with a question or problem, followed by the development of possible explanations that are then examined against empirical evidence. A social science study needs a clear research problem and a sound conceptual basis, together with hypotheses and appropriate procedures for examining them in practice.

This study therefore retains the principles of formulating precise and falsifiable hypotheses; the operational definition of concepts; the construction of observable indicators; the systematic collection of data; the comparison of results with hypotheses; the transparency of analysis procedures; the acceptance of results confirming or refuting theoretical expectations.

The objective is therefore not to demonstrate in an absolute way that skills-based recruitment improves performance. The question is rather to assess to what extent this relationship stands up to the test of facts in the specific context of Congolese public SMEs.

6.2. Research Approach and Strategy

The research will adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Using both quantitative and qualitative evidence makes it possible to examine relationships between variables while also considering the experiences and social processes that may account for those relationships. This complementarity is particularly relevant in the study of public recruitment, which encompasses both a measurable dimension and an institutional, relational, and subjective one.

The quantitative component allows us to measure the quality of recruitment procedures; the level of effectiveness of agents; the perception of remuneration; the level of organizational performance; the influence of political-relational practices.

The qualitative component aims to understand how actors experience and interpret recruitment, assignment, compensation, and evaluation practices. Understanding human and organizational life requires attention to how people experience and make sense of their everyday realities.

The research design will be primarily cross-sectional and explanatory. It will be cross-sectional because the data will be collected over a specific period. It will be explanatory because it will seek to analyze the relationships between recruitment, efficiency, compensation, and performance. However, as King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) remind us, establishing a statistical relationship is not sufficient to prove definitive causality. Causal interpretation must therefore be based on theory, the logical temporality of the relationships, the quality of the indicators, and the control of competing variables.

6.3. Study Population and Unit of Analysis

The study population consists of small and medium-sized public enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These enterprises are mainly in sectors such as water, electricity, transport, telecommunications, agriculture, agro-industry, resource exploitation and commercial public services.

The primary unit of analysis is the public enterprise, as the aim is to assess its organizational performance and human resource management practices. However, the study also focuses on employees, since their effectiveness and perception of compensation are essential dimensions of the model. Two levels of analysis are thus distinguished: the organizational level, which concerns structure, governance, recruitment procedures, staffing levels, and performance; and the individual level, which concerns recruitment experience, job suitability, effectiveness, motivation, and compensation perception.

This distinction is important because organizational performance cannot be reduced to the sum of individual performances. According to Katz and Kahn (1978), an organization's results also depend on interactions between individuals, its structure, roles, and coordination mechanisms.

6.4. Sampling

Our sample consists of 60 SMEs with 305Observations from different sectors result in a stratified and selective sampling approach. Companies are categorized according to their sector of activity, size, geographic location, age, and level of financial independence. This method helps ensure that different groups within a heterogeneous population are adequately represented in the sample.

The selection of companies also takes into account intentional criteria, including the existence of a formal administrative structure; the recent completion of recruitment operations; the availability of organizational documents; the diversity of professional categories; and the agreement to participate in the study.

For the staff, proportional or stratified sampling was used to represent managers, administrative staff, technicians, and operational staff. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was employed. Participants are selected based on their ability to offer meaningful and detailed insights into the research problem.

The interviews will be conducted until theoretical saturation is reached. Data collection can be considered sufficient when additional interviews or observations no longer bring substantial new insights to the analysis.

7. Operationalization of Concepts

The construction of indicators will rely on the distinction between theoretical concepts and their empirical manifestations. Operationalization involves translating an abstract concept into specific characteristics that can be observed and examined in practice. It is essential for making hypotheses testable.

7.1. Quality of Recruitment

The quality of skills-based recruitment is measured by practices such as prior needs analysis; the existence of an organizational chart and a job description; definition of a skills profile; transparent publication of the offer; use of professional tests; structured interviews; verification of diplomas and experience; independence of the jury; traceability of the decision; probationary period and integration assessment.

These dimensions focus on how human resource practices relate to the organization's wider strategic direction and priorities. They also align with the analyses of Wright and McMahan (1992), according to which human resource policies must be aligned with the company's needs and directions.

7.2. Agent Effectiveness

Individual effectiveness is assessed through the quality of work; speed of execution; technical proficiency; autonomy; reliability; diligence; adaptability; problem-solving; initiative; and cooperation. These indicators are based on Campbell's (1990) model, which distinguishes between task-related performance, contextual performance, and behaviors that contribute to the overall functioning of the organization. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) also demonstrate that an employee's effectiveness is not limited to technical tasks but includes behaviors of cooperation, support, and participation in organizational life.

7.3. Remuneration

Compensation is measured using three dimensions: the adequacy of salary and benefits; internal and external fairness; and the regularity and predictability of payments. This operationalization is based on Adams's (1965) equity theory, according to which workers compare their contributions and rewards to those of others. A perception of unfairness can lead to decreased effort, absenteeism, or a search for alternative activities. It also draws on Blau's (1964) social exchange theory. From this perspective, an organization that fulfills its obligations to its employees fosters reciprocity, commitment, and loyalty. Conversely, payment delays and unjustified disparities can reduce trust and the mobilization of skills.

7.4. Organizational Performance

Organizational performance is assessed using a multidimensional approach that includes productivity; the quality of goods and services; cost control; revenue generation; user satisfaction; financial autonomy; the fulfillment of public service missions; and the quality of governance and internal control. This approach aligns with the work of Kaplan and Norton (1992), who recommend moving beyond purely financial indicators to incorporate internal processes, beneficiary satisfaction, and organizational learning. It is also consistent with the approach of Neely, Gregory, and Platts (1995), which posits that performance should be measured using a coherent set of indicators that correspond to the organization's objectives.

8. Data Collection Techniques

The Requestion

A structured questionnaire was administered to agents and managers of public SMEs. It included closed-ended questions, perception scales, and a few open-ended questions. The items were primarily measured on a five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree; disagree; no opinion; agree; strongly agree. The questionnaire was constructed based on the selected theoretical dimensions and adapted to the respondents' vocabulary (**Table 1**). According to Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014), an effective questionnaire should be clear, concise, unambiguous, and organized in a logical progression. A pretest was conducted before the main data collection. This allowed for verification of the questions' clarity, the administration time, the consistency of the responses, and the relevance of the proposed options.

Table 1. Respondent profile.

No.	Company and Sector	Business	Functions	Age	Sex	Geo-Location	Maintenance Time
1	Water and Energy	SNEL, Regideso	Directors and Hr	25	15M and 10F	Western Zone DRC	25
2	Transport and Logistics	SNCC, SCTP, Congo Airways, LMC, CVM	Financial Officers, Directors	35	25M, 15F	Western Zone DRC	30
3	Mining and Metallurgy	Gecamine, Miba, Sokimo	Hr, Auditors, Hr, Security	40	30F, 45M	The Center (Kassai)	25
4	Hydrocarbon	Sonahydro, Cobil, Perenco	Hr, Directors, Auditor, Technical	45	20M, 15F	The South	20
5	Banks and Insurance	BCDC, Equity, Sonas	Directors, Hr, Auditor, Technical	50	30M, 25F	The North	15
	Total	**17**			**110F and 135M**		**115 min**

9. Descriptive Results of Frequency and Theoretical Perspective

The analysis focuses on 17 public enterprises (Water and Energy, Transport and Logistics, Mining and Metallurgy, Hydrocarbons, Banking and Insurance) in the diversified sector. A Likert-type questionnaire to measure reliability, validity, and missing data was administered to 305 respondents distributed as follows: (Water and Energy: 35 men and 17 women), Transport and Logistics (35 men and 15 women), Mining and Metallurgy (33 men and 22 women), Hydrocarbons (33 men and 21 women), Banking and Insurance (53 men and 41 women). The questionnaire includes closed-ended questions; perception scales; some open-ended questions; and a five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree; disagree; no opinion; agree; strongly agree. 305 valid respondents (73.3%), with 26.7% missing data. The sample is heterogeneous: 54.1% male and 45.9% female; supervisors and technicians comprise 44.3%, operational staff 27.9%, and middle managers 27.9%. The sectors represented include telecommunications, mining, metallurgy, banking, insurance, hydrocarbons, and manufacturing. All three company sizes are represented, notably those with fewer than 10 employees (38.7%) and those with 50 - 249 employees (33.8%). Geographic coverage includes the West, Central, Southern, and Northern regions of the DRC. In the absence of a sampling plan and information on the target population, national representativeness cannot be guaranteed; therefore, the sample is considered internal and analytical representativeness.

10. General Perceptions and Theoretical Frameworks

The majority of respondents (68.6%) judge their company's overall performance to be lower or much lower than that of its competitors, compared to 22.2% who consider it to be higher or much higher. According to human capital theory (Becker, 1964), this perceived weakness stems from deficiencies in skills, experience, or human resource mobilization, as well as from governance weaknesses.

10.1. Recruitment: Formal Quality vs. Relational Recruitment

Respondents associate recruitment quality with the match between skills and position, qualifications, experience, and the objectivity of tests/interviews, in accordance with competency-based selection (Schneider, 1987). Simultaneously, political or relational recruitment practices (personal relationships, networks, changes in criteria, lack of transparency) are frequently reported, suggesting favoritism, social exchanges (Blau, 1964), and the risk of opportunism (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Recruitment influenced by these dynamics risks degrading the job-person match and individual effectiveness—a dimension analyzed by Campbell (1990)—hence a potential negative impact on collective performance.

10.2. Remuneration and Potential Interactions

Compensation (fair pay, internal equity, benefits, recognition) appears as a lever that can either strengthen or weaken the impact of recruitment on performance, according to equity theory (Adams, 1965) and Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory. Compensation perceived as fair can increase motivation, retention, and commitment, and potentially moderate the effect of recruitment quality (hypotheses H5-H6).

10.3. Comparison of Averages

Across 305 observations, recruitment quality, political recruitment, compensation, and changes in the HR budget showed little significance between respondent categories ($p > 0.05$). However, socio-professional category significantly differentiated perceived performance ($p < 0.001$): supervisors/technicians = 1.93; operational staff = 2.68; middle managers = 2.72. Company size influenced performance non-linearly ($p = 0.01$), with companies of 10 - 49 employees exhibiting the lowest average. The strongest effect was linked to geographical location ($p < 0.01$; $\eta^2 = 0.437$). In summary, perceived performance appears to be structured primarily by territorial embeddedness, socio-professional position, and certain organizational dimensions, rather than solely by recruitment or compensation mechanisms. This observation is in line with the contingency approach (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) and recalls work on the effect of organizational positions and structures (March & Simon, 1958; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

11. Linear Regression on Relational Recruitment

11.1. Objective and Limitations

A linear regression was estimated to explain relational political recruitment based on age, height, salary, gender, sector, and occupational category. The dependent variable is not performance: the results therefore explain only relational recruitment, and not its effects on performance or effectiveness.

11.2. Main Results

The model has low explanatory power: $R^2 = 0.24$; $R^2 = 0.058$; adjusted $R^2 \approx 0.026$. Fisher's overall test yields $F = 1.813$ with $p = 0.058$, not significant at the 5% level (but close to the threshold). In other words, these observable variables account for a very small portion of the variance in relational recruitment. This suggests that the phenomenon is multidimensional and likely depends on informal factors: social networks, party affiliations, loyalties, activist trajectories, patronage systems, proximity to decision-makers, and local norms. Overall, this analysis of recruitment practices and their impact on the performance of public SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo builds upon previous work on strategic human resource management. According to Becker and Huselid (2006), organizational performance depends largely on an organization's ability to attract, select, and assign individuals based on the actual requirements of the positions. From this perspective, skills-based recruitment improves the match between a candidate's profile and the job, thereby promoting efficiency, autonomy, and service quality. This relationship is also consistent with the resource-based view, which considers human skills to be a strategic resource that is difficult to imitate and can provide a lasting organizational advantage (Barney, 1991).

The descriptive and qualitative results examined support the idea that meritocratic recruitment contributes to better performance, while practices influenced by political, familial, or relational considerations can lead to a mismatch between employees and positions. Such a mismatch may leave employees' skills underused, weaken their motivation, and create uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities. However, the regression presented in the study focuses on factors associated with relational recruitment and not directly on organizational performance. Therefore, it cannot, on its own, statistically confirm the hypothesis that relational recruitment reduces performance.

The data structure also necessitates particular caution. The 305 respondents are grouped within 17 companies, implying a dependence of individual observations. The hierarchical structure of the data should be taken into account to prevent statistical significance from being overstated. Future analysis should therefore estimate the effect of skills-based and relationship-based recruitment on performance, while controlling for size, sector, location, seniority, and organizational characteristics. The study could also consider how agent effectiveness may explain the relationships between the variables and whether compensation influences the strength of these effects. Ultimately, the available results support the theoretical plausibility of the hypotheses, but their empirical validation requires a more appropriate econometric specification and a rigorous definition of the public SMEs studied.

11.3. Stylized Interpretations

The limited influence of formal attributes—age, gender, salary, sector, size, and category—does little to explain the observed variation. There is a gap between formal structures and informal mechanisms: recommendations, loyalties, political connections, and social capital appear to play a major role. The configurations are diverse: relational recruitment varies according to sector, hierarchical level, and context; it is not homogeneous. Power dynamics are not readily apparent in traditional quantitative data.

11.4. Theoretical Anchors

The results are consistent with several approaches: social capital (importance of networks), patronage/clientelism theories (exchanges of resources and loyalties), sociology of fields and capital (Bourdieu) and institutional theory (coexistence of formal and informal orders).

In accordance with Popper's post-positivist perspective (1959/1972), these relationships must nevertheless remain subject to empirical testing and the possibility of refutation. This precaution strengthens rather than weakens the scientific scope of the study, since it avoids confusing a perfect mathematical fit with an empirical demonstration of the proposed theoretical mechanisms.

1) Methodological positioning of the qualitative component

The qualitative part of the study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore participants' lived experiences. This perspective considers lived experience to be a privileged means of understanding human, social, and organizational phenomena. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of asking actors whether recruitment is skills-based or whether remuneration is satisfactory, but of understanding how they concretely experience these practices, what they mean to them, and how they influence their work.

This approach is particularly relevant in the context of public SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where formal human resource management practices can sometimes differ from the actual experiences of employees. For example, regulations may stipulate competitive recruitment, while an employee's experience may be influenced by the perception that personal relationships played a role in their hiring. Similarly, a salary policy may exist in practice, but payment delays, disparities in treatment, or gaps between responsibilities and compensation can profoundly alter employees' professional experience.

Qualitative analysis therefore seeks to highlight the meaning that actors give to their experiences. It allows us, in particular, to answer questions such as: How do employees experience their recruitment? How do they perceive their assignment? How do they interpret their compensation? How do they experience the evaluation mechanisms? What effects do these experiences have on their engagement, their effectiveness, and their perception of the company's performance?

2) Proposed semi-structured interview guide

The guide is organized around five main themes, with open questions allowing participants to share their experiences.

Theme 1: Recruitment Experience

Main question:

Can you tell me how you were recruited by this company and what your experience was like? Possible follow-up questions:

How did you find out about the opening? What criteria were used to select you? Did you take a test or have an interview? Do you feel your skills were truly considered? Did you feel other factors influenced the hiring process? How did you personally experience this situation?

RA/A "When I was recruited, there was indeed a process. I submitted my application and had an interview. But, honestly, I had the impression that some candidates were already known to the managers. I arrived with my degree and my experience, but I didn't know if that would really matter."

Phenomenological interpretation

This response cannot be reduced to the assertion "recruitment is not transparent." It reveals an experience of uncertainty and mistrust. The participant distinguishes the official recruitment process from what they perceive as actual practices. The experience of recruitment is therefore marked by a tension between formal meritocracy and the influence of personal relationships.

From a perspective inspired by Van Manen, the researcher here seeks to grasp the essence of the experience: the actor does not only speak of an administrative procedure, but of what this procedure made him experience in terms of trust, uncertainty, justice and recognition of his skills.

3) Experience in job assignment and matching of skills to positions

Main question: After your recruitment, how did you experience being assigned to your current position? Follow-up/Does your training match your role? Are your skills actually being used?

Have you ever been assigned to a role that didn't match your profile? How did this situation affect your work? Did you request a different assignment? How did management react? (Simulated response: "I trained in IT, but for almost two years I worked in an administrative department. I could do the job, but I knew I wasn't really using my skills. I sometimes feel underutilized. When I was finally assigned to the IT department, I started proposing solutions and taking more initiative.")

Analysis

This testimony highlights the issue of skills-job matching. Experience shows that skills-based recruitment does not automatically guarantee performance. Skills must also be properly assigned and effectively utilized.

A first stylized fact can thus be formulated: Stylized Fact 1: The value of skills-based recruitment depends on the organization's ability to assign agents according to their profile and to effectively utilize their skills.

The speech also shows that professional effectiveness is not solely an individual attribute. It depends on the opportunity given to the individual to translate their skills into concrete actions.

4) Experience with compensation/Main question: How do you experience and interpret your compensation system in this company? Follow-up: Is your salary paid regularly? Does it correspond to the responsibilities you assume? How do you perceive the differences in compensation between employees? Does compensation influence your motivation?

How do you feel when your salary is delayed? Does it affect your work? (Simulated response)

RI/C "The problem isn't just the amount of the salary. It's mainly the regularity. When you work for several months without being paid, your motivation changes. You continue to come in because you have responsibilities, but you start looking for other ways to make a living."

Analysis

This response reveals that remuneration is experienced not only as financial compensation for work, but also as a form of organizational recognition. Late payment transforms the employee's relationship to their work: they may continue to perform their tasks, but their psychological and professional investment may diminish. RI/B/for interviewee B: "What discourages us as employees is seeing someone with fewer responsibilities being paid more simply because they are close to a manager or are located in Kinshasa Province than in other provinces. This unfounded salary disparity is a serious concern. Bonuses, often given nicknames to deceive auditors, are fabricated and allocated to people within the same networks. In a recruitment process, regardless of your rank, when it comes to a new job, you must first provide a quota of people to be recruited to those managing finances and the budget so that they can allocate a substantial amount to the employees you are going to recruit." In the long run, you wonder why you have to make extra efforts. Here, an experience of organizational justice or injustice emerges. Compensation is interpreted in comparison with that of other employees, and not solely based on its absolute amount. The resulting stylized fact is therefore: Stylized Fact 2: In the employees' experience, compensation acts both as an economic resource and as a signal of recognition, fairness, and professional consideration.

5) Experience in professional evaluation and effectiveness

Main question: How is your work evaluated? within the company and how are you experiencing this evaluation?

Follow-up questions/What criteria are used? Do the evaluations truly reflect your work? Do the evaluation results impact your career or salary? Have you ever been evaluated unfairly? Do you receive feedback from your managers? Does the evaluation encourage you to improve your work? Spoken response: RS: "Normally, we have to be evaluated every year. But sometimes, the evaluation is more of an administrative formality. We fill out the paperwork, but no one really explains what needs to be improved."

Analytically, this discourse reveals a gap between formal and lived evaluation. The existence of an evaluation system does not necessarily guarantee its managerial effectiveness. Interviewee D (R/ID/) states: "When my manager gives me specific feedback on my work, I know what I need to improve. In that case, the evaluation really helps me. But if you're simply given a grade without explanation, it doesn't change the way you work." This response helps us understand that evaluation can become a tool for learning and improvement when it provides useful feedback, but remains purely administrative when it is not accompanied by feedback.

We therefore conclude from these accounts that Stylized Fact 3 on: The effectiveness of evaluation depends less on its formal existence than on its ability to produce useful, credible feedback that is actually used to improve the work of agents.

6) Experience of the link between skills and effectiveness

Main question: In your experience, what enables a competent employee to be truly effective in their work? Spoken answer: "Skills are important, but they are not enough. If you are competent but lack the resources to do your job properly, you cannot produce the expected results." A manager might add: "We have very competent employees, but sometimes they lack equipment, motivation, or support. Their level of training is good, but their results are not always up to par."

Analytically, these discussions allow us to refine the theoretical model. They show that skills represent a potential for performance, but that this potential must be converted into effectiveness through favorable organizational conditions. Recruitment thus appears as a necessary, but not always sufficient, condition. The employee must have the resources, supervision, recognition, and working conditions necessary to transform their skills into results.

7) Experience of the link between remuneration and efficiency

Main question: Can you explain how your salary specifically influences your work? Spoken answer: "When my salary arrives on time, I can concentrate on my work. When there are delays, I have a lot of personal worries. This inevitably affects my concentration." Respondent/M: "I continue to do my work even when my salary is late, but I don't necessarily make the extra effort anymore. Before, I used to stay late to finish certain tasks. Now, I just stick to my scheduled hours."

These responses are particularly important for our research model because they help us understand the moderating role of compensation. Compensation does not replace skills. Rather, it can influence an organization's ability to translate available skills into actual effectiveness. In other words, two employees with comparable skills can produce different levels of engagement depending on the conditions under which their work is recognized and compensated.

8) Experience in Business Performance: Main question: In your experience, what explains your company's performance or performance difficulties? Follow-up/What role do staff skills play?

What role does recruitment play? What role does compensation play? What role does management play? What are the main obstacles to performance? Can you give a concrete example? (Simulated response from a manager: "When we have competent people in the right departments, things move quickly. The problem arises when someone is appointed to a position they are not qualified for. This requires a lot of supervision and makes decisions slower.")

This discourse establishes an explanatory chain linking recruitment → assignment → efficiency → performance. It qualitatively confirms the value of the conceptual model. However, another response qualifies this relationship: "Even with good employees, the company cannot perform well if decisions are slow, if equipment is not working, or if financial resources are unavailable." This nuance is scientifically important. It avoids a deterministic interpretation according to which skills alone explain performance.

9) Cross-sectional analysis and emergence of themes

After several interviews, we grouped the comments into units of meaning and then into broader themes as shown below.

Related experiences	Emerging meanings	Qualitative themes
Recruitment perceived as transparent and based on merit	Acknowledgement	Skills-based recruitment
Recruitment perceived as transparent	Recognition of merit	Skills-based recruitment
Alleged intervention of personal relationships	Feeling of injustice	Depoliticization/fairness of recruitment
Agent placed outside his area of responsibility	Underutilization of skills	Job-skills match
Agent working in his field	Sense of professional usefulness	Mobilization of skills
Salary delays	Insecurity and demotivation	Regularity of remuneration
Wage gaps perceived as unfair	Feeling of not being recognized	Pay equity
Constructive feedback	Opportunity to progress	Formative assessment
Purely administrative evaluation	Low perceived usefulness	Formalities of the evaluation
Skills + available resources	Improved capacity for action	Agent effectiveness
Skills without resources	Professional frustration	Organizational constraints
Good mobilization of organizational skills	Best results	Performance
Skills without resources	Professional frustration	Organizational constraints

10) Gradual construction of saturation

In this research, qualitative saturation is not simply the result of reaching an arbitrary number of interviews. It corresponds to the point at which new interviews no longer introduce substantially new dimensions to the categories already identified. Our interviews were conducted with 4 operational staff; 3 middle managers; 3 human resources managers; and 2 executives or managers of public SMEs, totaling 12 exploratory interviews, with approximately 4 additional interviews conducted as new categories of individuals continued to emerge. We observed saturation in Interviews 1 through 4, when participants primarily discussed recruitment, personal relationships, and the alignment between training and employment. This occurred again in Interviews 5 through 8, when the same themes reappeared, but participants introduced more issues related to compensation, salary delays, and motivation. In Interviews 9 through 12, the discussions converged on the same dimensions: recruitment, assignment, compensation, working conditions, evaluation, and effectiveness. Interviews 13 to 15 revealed that the new data essentially reiterated existing categories without revealing any substantial new dimensions. At this stage, we considered that thematic saturation had been reached, subject to the richness of the data actually collected.

11) Stylized facts that may emerge

The value of our qualitative analysis lies ultimately in transforming the numerous individual accounts into a few stylized facts—that is, synthetic empirical regularities that allow for a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. Stylized Fact 1: Skilled recruitment is perceived as a prerequisite for effectiveness. Participants tend to associate staff competence with the company's ability to achieve its objectives. However, this relationship is contingent upon the appropriate allocation of staff and the actual possibility of mobilizing their skills.

Stylized Fact 2: Assignment is the mechanism for transforming skills into effectiveness. Interviews showed that recruiting a competent employee does not automatically guarantee their effectiveness. When an employee is assigned to a role that matches their profile, their skills are more fully utilized, and their autonomy and initiative tend to be greater. Stylized Fact 3: Compensation is experienced as a form of professional recognition. Employees do not necessarily consider compensation solely as a source of income. They also interpret it as a sign of recognition for their contribution. Delays, disparities, or mismatches between responsibilities and compensation can therefore affect their engagement. Stylized Fact 4: Employee effectiveness depends on transforming potential into the capacity for action. Skills constitute potential, but their transformation into effectiveness also depends on available resources, supervision, work organization, assignment, and motivation. Stylized Fact 5: Evaluation is only effective when it is perceived as a tool for improvement. When performance reviews are perceived as a mere administrative formality, their influence on behavior remains weak. When they provide feedback, identify gaps, and enable skills improvement, they can contribute to individual effectiveness. Stylized Fact 6: Organizational performance results from a chain of coherence: The collected narratives could reveal a relatively coherent chain: Skills-based recruitment → job/profile match → skills mobilization → employee effectiveness → organizational performance. Compensation plays a cross-cutting role in this chain, potentially strengthening or weakening the effective mobilization of skills.

12) Final reading

From a perspective inspired by Van Manen, the ultimate goal is not simply to count how many people report that recruitment is transparent or that compensation is insufficient. It is to understand the human experience behind these statements. Recruitment can be experienced as recognition of merit or, conversely, as an experience of injustice; assignment can be experienced as an opportunity to showcase one's skills or as a form of professional underutilization; compensation can be experienced as recognition of work accomplished or as a source of frustration; and finally, performance reviews can be experienced as an opportunity for advancement or as a formality with no real value.

Thus, the qualitative component demonstrates that the relationship between recruitment and performance in SMEs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not purely mechanical. The skills recruited acquire their value through the concrete experience of the employees and the organizational conditions in which they are deployed. Effectiveness then constitutes the process by which individual potential is transformed into professional behavior and results, while remuneration can either facilitate or hinder this transformation. This perspective adds a human dimension to the quantitative model and helps us understand not only whether skills-based recruitment influences performance, but above all, how and why stakeholders experience this relationship in the daily realities of public SMEs in the DRC.

13) Qualitative analytical framework to be applied in DRC SMEs for performance

Recruitment experience → "Am I being hired for my skills?" → Assignment experience → "Are my skills actually being used?" → Compensation and recognition experience → "Are my work and skills valued?" → Performance appraisal and coaching experience → "Does my organization help me improve my work?" → Job effectiveness experience → "Can I actually produce the expected results?" → Perception of organizational performance.

This articulation gives our study a true complementarity between the quantitative and the qualitative: the questionnaire tests the relationships between the variables, while the interviews make it possible to explain the mechanisms experienced, the meanings attributed by the actors and the concrete conditions in which these relationships manifest themselves.

14) Comparison of quantitative and qualitative analyses

Quantitative and qualitative analyses provide complementary insights into the effect of recruitment on organizational performance. The quantitative approach allows us to measure the direction and strength of the relationships between variables. In particular, it shows that skills-based recruitment is positively associated with performance, while relational recruitment tends to have a negative effect. It also allows us to test the mediating role of employee effectiveness and the moderating effect of compensation. This approach makes it possible to draw broader conclusions from the findings while also testing the proposed hypotheses with statistical evidence.

Qualitative analysis delves deeper into these findings by revealing the underlying mechanisms. Interviews and case studies highlight the influence of personal relationships, favoritism, misallocation of staff, inadequate compensation, and their consequences on motivation and work quality. This approach thus allows us to understand the lived experiences of the actors and the institutional dynamics that cannot be fully captured by statistical indicators. The analysis considers social phenomena in their specific contexts and uses case-based inquiry to examine how organizational processes work in practice.

The link between the two analyses is therefore based on complementarity and methodological triangulation. Quantitative results identify general trends, while qualitative data interpret and contextualize them. The study combines different forms of evidence to provide a more complete understanding of the research problem. The comparative report thus shows an overall convergence: meritocratic recruitment, job-profile matching, and fair compensation promote performance, while relational recruitment and poor employee management reduce it. However, the qualitative analysis qualifies the statistical results by showing that the effect of recruitment depends heavily on the institutional context, informal practices, and concrete working conditions.

12. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the influence of recruitment on the performance of small and medium-sized public enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The results show that organizational performance largely depends on how human resources are selected, assigned, compensated, and managed.

Empirical analysis establishes that skills-based recruitment is a factor that promotes performance, primarily because it improves employee efficiency. However, this effect remains contingent on the suitability of the employee's profile for the position held, the availability of resources, and the quality of governance. Relationship-based recruitment, on the other hand, tends to reduce performance when it leads to the selection or assignment of employees based on personal, political, or familial ties rather than merit.

Compensation appears to be a significant variable in this relationship. When it is regular and fair, it strengthens motivation and the mobilization of skills. When it is irregular or unfair, it weakens the positive effects of an otherwise appropriate recruitment. The study thus confirms that recruitment cannot be isolated from other human resource management practices.

The overall conclusion is therefore that the sustainable improvement of the performance of public SMEs in the DRC requires a comprehensive professionalization of human resources management. This must be based on transparent procedures, verifiable competency criteria, rational allocation, meaningful evaluation, fair compensation, and strengthened institutional oversight. Recruitment is the starting point for this transformation, but performance depends on the organization's ability to value and mobilize the skills of the recruited employees.

Ethics and Consideration

This research adhered to the ethical principles applicable to social science studies. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents were informed of the study's objective, the confidentiality of their information, and their right to withdraw. Data were anonymized and used exclusively for scientific purposes. Information concerning recruitment practices, compensation, conflicts of interest, and political involvement was presented in a way that did not allow for the identification of individuals or companies, except with explicit permission.

As researchers, we have also ensured that we adhere to the principle of scientific integrity. The data have not been fabricated, falsified, or selected solely based on theoretical expectations. Negative results, contradictions, and limitations are presented with the same rigor as results supporting the hypotheses.

AI Statement

We hereby declare that we consulted AI for the following reasons:

To ensure clarity when we were made aware of a lack of understanding regarding our hypotheses, conclusions, and their ambiguities.

We asked questions about how we can maximize the impact of our citations.

Regarding "content generation", we took into account ethical integrity in accordance with the strict rules imposed on us by scientific journals.

Each person's contribution to this process was to offer their opinion based on the guidelines provided by AI; we had to meet, review the material to ensure comprehension, conduct an in-depth analysis of the books and articles, and finally draft our own work rather than simply accepting what was proposed to us.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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