

EFFECT OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES AND JOB SECURITY ON
EMPLOYEES' WORK PERFORMANCE

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DEDICATION

*I dedicate this dissertation to the soul of my Parents may Allah rest their soul in
eternal peace and dwell them supreme paradise*

*To my beloved wife “Wafaa” for her patience, encouragement and support, I
will never forget her effort... and my beautiful daughters and son; Rana, Rawan,
Dima, Leyan and Husam*

*To my brothers and sister; Ayesh, Abdulkarim, Adel, and Ameera
It can never express my appreciation to my entire family and friends for their
support, sacrifices, and prayers during this painful journey*

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have empirically confirmed that a positive relationship exists between human resource practices and employees' work performance. However, most previous studies have been conducted in the context of large organizations in developed countries where economic and political conditions are relatively stable as compared to underdeveloped or developing countries. Prior studies have reported a significant relationship between human resource practices and individual work performance. However, the need to investigate the effect of job security on the relationship between human resource practices and employees' work performance is eminent as it remains unclear and still requires more theoretical and empirical inquiries. Hence, the objectives of this study are, first, to examine the effect of selected human resource practices (i.e. training, job definition, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensation) on individual work performance and, second, to investigate the mediating role of job security on the relationship between human resource practices and employees' work performance in Palestinian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This study was based on the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) theory, which shows that a selected set of best practices can generate added value to employees' performance. A cross-sectional survey was used to collect data from employees working in the industrial sector in Palestine. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test the conceptual model empirically and statistically. It was found that, training, performance appraisal, employee participation and compensation have positive significant relationship with individual work performance. However, job definition has non-significant relationship with individual work performance. The results also revealed that job security mediates the relationship between compensation, employee participation, performance appraisal and training with individual work performance. Thus, this study recommends that the small and medium-sized enterprises in the industrial sectors in Palestine should pay more attention to the effective implementation of human resource practices and provide a higher degree of security in the job so as to increase employees' performance, which in turn will increase the firm's performance. Finally, by considering and investigating selected human resource practices, the result could be less comprehensive and valuable. Therefore, for future research, this study recommends examining the compound human resource practices and their influence on the employees' performance through the mediation effect of job security.

ABSTRAK

Banyak kajian secara empirikal mengesahkan bahawa hubungan positif wujud antara amalan sumber manusia dengan prestasi kerja pekerja. Walau bagaimanapun, kebanyakan kajian terdahulu telah dilakukan dalam konteks organisasi besar di negara maju yang mana keadaan ekonomi dan politik relatifnya stabil berbanding dengan negara-negara yang kurang maju atau sedang membangun. Kajian terdahulu telah melaporkan hubungan yang signifikan antara amalan sumber manusia dengan prestasi kerja individu. Walau bagaimanapun, keperluan untuk mengkaji kesan keselamatan kerja ke atas hubungan antara amalan sumber manusia dan prestasi kerja individu adalah sangat ketara kerana ia masih belum jelas dan masih memerlukan penyelidikan yang lebih teoretikal dan empirikal. Oleh itu, tujuan kajian ini adalah, pertama untuk mengkaji kesan amalan sumber manusia terpilih (iaitu latihan, definisi pekerjaan, penilaian prestasi, penyertaan pekerja, dan pampasan) ke atas prestasi kerja individu, dan Kedua, untuk menyiasat peranan pengantara keselamatan kerja ke atas hubungan antara amalan sumber manusia dengan prestasi kerja pekerja di syarikat kecil dan sederhana (PKS) di Palestin. Kajian ini adalah berdasarkan teori *Ability-Motivation-Opportunity* (AMO), yang menunjukkan bahawa satu set amalan terbaik terpilih dapat menghasilkan nilai tambah kepada prestasi pekerja. Satu tinjauan keratan rentas telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data daripada pekerja di sektor perindustrian di Palestin. *Model Persamcian Berstruktur* (SEM) digunakan untuk menguji model konsep secara empirikal dan statistik. Dalam kajian ini, didapati bahawa latihan, penilaian prestasi, penyertaan pekerja dan pampasan mempunyai hubungan signifikan positif dengan prestasi kerja individu. Namun, definisi pekerjaan mempunyai hubungan yang tidak signifikan dengan prestasi kerja individu. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa keselamatan kerja menjadi perantara ke atas hubungan antara pampasan, penyertaan pekerja, penilaian prestasi latihan dengan prestasi kerja individu. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini mengesyorkan agar syarikat kecil dan sederhana dalam sektor perindustrian di Palestin iebih memberi perhatian kepada pelaksanaan amalan sumber manusia yang berkesan dan menyediakan tahap keselamatan dalam pekerjaan yang lebih tinggi agar dapat meningkatkan prestasi pekerja dan seterusnya meningkatkan juga prestasi syarikat. Akhir sekali, dengan mempertimbangkan dan menyiasat amalan sumber manusia terpilih, hasilnya mungkin kurang menyeluruh dan bernilai. Oleh itu, untuk penyelidikan yang akan datang, kajian ini mengesyorkan untuk mengkaji amalan sumber manusia yang dikompaun dan pengaruhnya ke atas prestasi pekerja melalui kesan pengantaraan keselamatan kerja.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HRM	-	Human Resources Management
HRP	-	Human Resources Practices
EWP	-	Individual Work Performance
SMEs	-	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
JS	-	Job security
AMO	-	Ability-Motivation-Opportunity
AVE	-	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	-	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CMB	-	Common Method Bias
CR	-	Composite Reliability
EFA	-	Exploratory Factor Analysis
HTMT	-	The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations
SEM	-	Structural Equation Modelling
SmartPLS	-	Smart Partial Least Squares
SPSS	-	Statistical Package for Social Science
PFI	-	Palestinian Federation Industries
PCBS	-	The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
VIF	-	Variance Inflation Factor
AVE	-	Average Variance Extracted

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The main purpose of human resource management (HRM) is to increase employee work performance (EWP). Thus, HRM applies several human resource practices (HRP) to enhance individual performance (Koopmans *et al.*, 2016). In any organization, employees are considered an essential strategic asset. Therefore, employees could be a competitive advantage if their organization provides more attention and invest in developing employees' skills at the workplace (Danish & Usman, 2010; Malik *et al.*, 2010; Zaharie & Osoian, 2013). In the last 25 years, a great interest in research in different disciplines has been devoted to discovering the predictors and effects of employees' performance, precisely, the effect of selected dimensions of human resource practices on employee's performance (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018; Koopmans *et al.*, 2016; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015).

In the competitiveness of the global business, it is increasingly important for any organization to maintain, improve, and enhance employee work performance (Koopmans *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, Tsao *et al.* (2015) indicated that organizations need high performing individuals to meet their goals, to deliver the products and services they specialized in, and finally to achieve competitive advantage. In this regard, Kehoe and Wright (2013) stated that to attain superior organizational outcomes, organizations should managing their employees effectively by responding to rapidly changing and dynamic working environments. Accordingly, several scholars have progressively given much attention to human resource practices as pillars by which managers form the human capital within their firms (Innocenti *et al.*, 2011). Besides, Boselie *et al.* (2005), argued that human resource practices are considered as the main sources of sustainable competitive edge and could lead to better individual and organizational performance. Recently, more attention by researchers and

practitioners has been paid on how human resource practices affect individual employee performance (Alfes *et al.*, 2013; Koopmans *et al.*, 2016; Snape & Redman, 2010; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015). Accordingly, Boxall *et al.* (2016) pointed out that the studies involved in the HRM-performance link should be measured by employees themselves. Thus, this study consults employees in the Palestinian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to examine the extent to which human resource practices applied and their firms and its influence on their performance.

Over the last 25 years, there has been a growing interest in examining the relationship a between human resource practices and organizational performance (e.g, Absar *et al.*, 2010; Aktar *et al.*, 2012; Demortier *et al.*, 2014; Jackson *et al.*, 2014; Messersmith *et al.*, 2011; Obeidat *et al.*, 2016; Singh *et al.*, 2016; Wright *et al.*, 2005). Jointly, these studies propose that human resource practices are positively associated with several organization-level outcome constructs such as financial performance, productivity, sales, innovation and market share. Despite this increasing body of literature, it has been claimed that research stream on the relationship between human resource practices and employee work performance has provided inadequate insight into the effects of human resource practices on individual-level performance (e.g., Alfes *et al.*, 2013; Den Hartog *et al.*, 2013; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Messersmith *et al.*, 2011; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015).

Therefore, the current study examines the effect of human resource practices on employee work performance in the industrial sector at Palestinian SMEs. The researcher has selected human resource practices as independent variables including (training, job definition, performance appraisal, employees' participation, and compensation). The above human resource practices have been selected based on the results of prior studies that these practices have a potential impact on the SME's performance (Teclémichael Tessema & Soeters, 2006; Zheng *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, Carlson *et al.* (2006), suggested five human resource practices that enhance employees' performance in SMEs that are; training and development, performance appraisal, compensation, benefits, and employee motivation and recruitment. Hence, these set of human resource practices have been commonly

adopted by scholars and researchers which in turn might contribute to the growth and success of SMEs in Palestine.

Job security refers to an employee's expectations about the stability and longevity of his or her job in an organization (Davy *et al.*, 1997; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010; Kraimer *et al.*, 2005). There is sufficient evidence from the previous studies demonstrating that job security has a positive relationship with employees' performance (eg., Ahmed *et al.*, 2017; Jimenez & Didona, 2017; Kammeyer-Mueller & Liao, 2006). Therefore, Shore *et al.* (2004) argued that despite the dramatic changes in the business, long-term job security remains ideal for many employees. Hence, the provision of long-term job security from employers is a critical matter (Robinson *et al.*, 1994; Shaw *et al.*, 2009). Many researchers argue that currently, job security is the most important job consideration for employees (Huang *et al.*, 2013; Keim *et al.*, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2015). Thus, employees' implicit job security expectations remain a critical component of the employee-organization exchange relationship (Colquitt *et al.*, 2014; Parks & Schmedemann, 1994; Shore *et al.*, 2004), especially in the current uncertain environment (Keim *et al.*, 2014). This is the justification that employees whose job security is high are more likely to perform well when expected to meet strict job demands. Likewise, if job security is low, employees will practice unequal exchanges with organizations and consequently respond with lower performance (Ashford *et al.*, 1989; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010; Keim *et al.*, 2014; Loi *et al.*, 2011).

Whereas, when organizations fulfil their employees' expectations and make employees feel that their jobs are secure, the mutual relationships between organization and employees are established (Colquitt *et al.*, 2014; Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012). Consequently, job security may play a mediating role to explain the relationship between human resource practices and employee work performance. This because job security has become crucial in the employee's list, particularly due to economic pressures (Adebayo & Lucky, 2012; Lucky *et al.*, 2013a). job security issues, such as reduction of expenditure of employees, downsizing, restructuring, use of contractors and outsourcing are considered the main causes of industrial conflict (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2004). Several scholars reported that the success of any business

reflected by human resource practices, for example, job security is a significant issue for the employee. Accordingly, if the employees are provided with a higher degree of job security, then they also show more commitment to the organization, and they can share their knowledge and ideas for improving the productivity (Chan, 2005). However, Hussain and Rehman (2013) argue that despite, job security is a necessary issue for the employee, the employees feel fear that if they get their knowledge for improving productivity then their jobs can be put at risk.

In conclusion, based on reviewing the literature, it is clear that numerous previous studies examined the relationship between human resource practices and employees' performance, but still, there is not a clear-cut relation with inconsistent findings between human resource practices and employee work performance. In addition, several previous studies examined the mediating role of job security and its effect on the relationship with different variables and outcomes, but these studies did not examine if job security mediates the relationship between human resource practices and employee work performance particularly in the context of Palestinian industrial SMEs. Consequently, by testing empirically this relationship, this study contributes to the literature in the field of HRM-Performance link.

1.2 Overview of SMEs in Palestine

Palestine as an emerging “state” with the absence of natural resources, the human factor becomes the only source for economic and social development (Al-Jabari, 2011; Sultan, 2014). The industrial sector has an essential role in the Palestinian economy and is considered one of the most important economic activities in Palestine which contribute to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) about 19.6 percent (PCBS, 2017). According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS, 2017), more than 20,000 registered enterprises in the industrial sector of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in West Bank and the Gaza strip. PCBS (2017) reported that industrial sector employed 30.3 percent of the workforce in Palestine with total (20,325) enterprises in West Bank and Gaza Strip employing 10 employees and above with total number (38,120) employees. According to PFI (2016), 496 fully registered enterprises in the industrial

sector operating in the Gaza Strip that employing 10 employees and above with total (8,928) employees. This sector represented by the Palestinian Federation of Industries (PFI) as an official body.

Almost 99 percent of the industrial firms in Palestine is considered as small and medium-sized enterprises that especially compete based on price, and very few of these enterprises have direct access to foreign markets (Khatib *et al.*, 2013). Despite the high unemployment rate in Palestine records 27.7 percent among labour force with (43.7%) in Gaza Strip compared with (20.5%) in the West Bank in the second quarter (PCBS, 2017), the industrial sector is still one of the main sources of Palestinian economy (Al-Jabari, 2011, 2013; Alfoqahaa, 2018; PIF, 2014; Shafeek, 2016; Sultan *et al.*, 2017), due to its role in providing employment and also to its contribution to the GDP of Palestine. According to the Palestine Investment Fund (PIF, 2014), despite the small size of individual companies, Palestinians SMEs significantly contribute to growth and job creation, the contribution of SMEs to total GDP has increased dramatically from 17 percent in 2010 to over 55 percent in 2014, representing 95% of all operating enterprises, and 85 percent of private-sector employment as is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

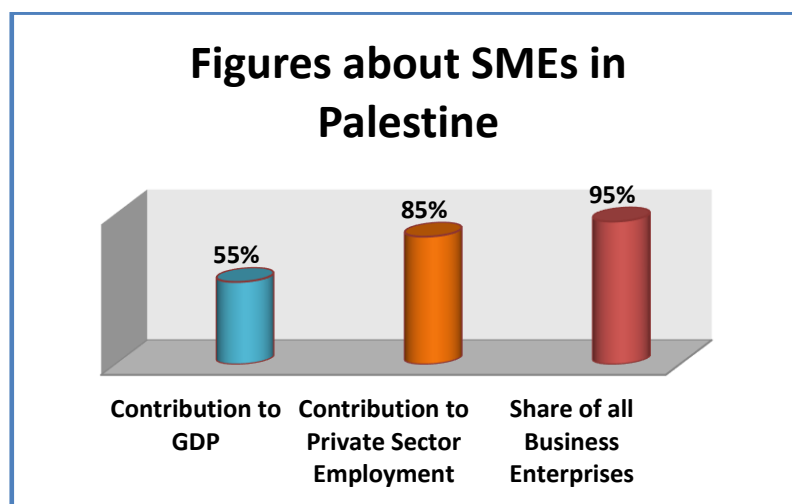


Figure 1.1: Statistics for SMEs in Palestine. (Source: PIF, 2014)

Even though SMEs are an essential element of the Palestinian economy, very little is known about Human resource practices and employees' performance within

the Palestinian SMEs and even less is known and lack of studies demonstrating the effectiveness of human resource practices within SMEs in Palestine (Al-Jabari, 2011, 2013). Accordingly, the current study aims to empirically examine the mediating effect of job security on the relationship between human resource practices and employee work performance of the Palestinian SMEs, as a result, this study contributes to the literature in the field of HRM-performance.

1.3 Problem Statement

In any organization, employees are considered an essential strategic asset. Therefore, employees could be a competitive advantage if their organization provides more attention and invest in developing employees' skills at the workplace. (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Barney *et al.*, 2001; Danish & Usman, 2010; Kotey & Sharma, 2016; Noe *et al.*, 2006; Zaharie & Osoian, 2013). Employee work performance is defined by Campbell (1990, p. 704) as "behaviours or actions that are relevant to the goals of the organization". Hence, employee work performance focusses on behaviours or actions of employees, rather than the results of these actions. Commonly, the main focus by the researchers of the employee performance's construct has been on task performance (Koopmans *et al.*, 2011), which can be defined as the proficiency with which individuals perform the core substantive or technical tasks central to his or her job (Campbell, 1990, pp. 708-9). Behaviours used to describe task performance often include work quantity and quality, job skills, and job knowledge (e.g, Campbell, 1990c; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). The workers of the organization play a dynamic role in achieving the goals of the organization. Hence, the achievement of the organization is linked with the performance of the employees associated with the organization (Rana *et al.*, 2019).

Employee work performance has been a central topic for scholars over the last three decades (Carpini *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, employee performance is one of the most common variables in organizational behaviour and industrial and organizational psychology research (Motowidlo & Kell, 2012). According to Klepić (2019), the employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation have the most influence on the

firm's success. Similarly, several researchers (e.g, Fu, 2013; Ismail, 2014; Ismail *et al.*, 2015; Koopmans *et al.*, 2016) argued that organizational success is contingent upon employees' skills, knowledge and competencies to execute the organization's strategy and plans. Nevertheless, while a great deal of research has examined the antecedents, relatively little know about the consequences (Jiang *et al.*, 2012).

The research stream of human resource management has suggested that the human resource practices may lead to better performance, and thus they could be realized as sources of sustainable competitive advantage for an individual and organization (Boselie *et al.*, 2005). In recent years, more research has focused on employee-level outcomes to understand the mechanisms and the process between human resource practices and performance (Beijer *et al.*, 2019; Boon *et al.*, 2019; Boxall *et al.*, 2016). This is an important challenge in the field of HR-Performance linkage because employee performance is considered a key factor in the understanding of organizational performance, in other words, without understanding the former, we could not have the latter (Van De Voorde *et al.*, 2012).

Effective human resource practices are generally acknowledged to positively influence employees' performance across several dimensions (Bloom *et al.*, 2012; Cooke *et al.*, 2014; Guest, 2002; Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer, 2007; Zheng *et al.*, 2009). Scholars have fostered the concept that synergies or combination among human resource practices are critical. Whether referred to as bundles, synergies, or configurations, these combinations of human resource practices, rather than individual practices by themselves, lead to improving performance (Delery & Gupta, 2016). This concept is almost accepted in the literature, but some scholars (e.g, Beijer *et al.*, 2019; Boon *et al.*, 2019; Chadwick *et al.*, 2013; Gerhart, 2012; Guerci *et al.*, 2017) stated that there is virtually insufficient empirical work that tested the effect of these combinations, bundles, or synergies on employees' performance. Further, empirical studies about those synergistic effects are scarce, and their results unstable (Guerci *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, much is still not known about the influence of human resource practices and their specific influence on employees' performance (Chen *et al.*, 2016b). In other words, what are the process and mechanism of human resource practices that lead to better employees' performance? Thus, it is still ambiguous which human

resource practices constitute an effective human resource management system and how these practices help improve employees' performance (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2016b; Delery & Gupta, 2016; Guerci *et al.*, 2017; Guest, 2011; Paauwe *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, examining the effect of combinations, bundles, or synergies of human resource practices on employees' performance could be considered as a gap in the body of knowledge. Hence, this study attempts to fill this gap.

Additionally, previous studies confirmed empirically that human resource practices have a significant influence on organizational performance. However, less attention has been paid in exploring the effect of human resource practices and the process in which it can influence employee performance (Chen *et al.*, 2016a; Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2019). In line with this notion, several scholars as Boon *et al.*, (2019), Beijer *et al.* (2019), and Jiang *et al.* (2017) claimed that little studies have investigated the important role of human resource practices or examined the most potential outcomes of human resource practices that influence employees' performance relationship. Therefore, future research needs to bring employee work performance into the investigation of the HR systems (Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, Mahadevan and Mohamed (2014) and Ilyas *et al.* (2016) supported this argument that despite a large volume of human resource practices research and firm-performance, little studies have examined the impact of human resource practices on individual performance, particularly in the developing countries. Hence, the current study focuses on the employees' performance in the industrial sector of Palestinian SMEs which is considered as a new context.

In addition, little is known of human resource practices within the Palestinian SMEs (Al-Jabari, 2013). As a result, the human resource practices-performance link in Palestine is considered 'under-researched'. An intensive review of the literature of human resource practices and employees' performance of SMEs in Palestine, also shows that their empirical research in the Palestinian context examining the relationship between human resource practices and employees' performance is still lacking. Only certain topics related to human resource practices are studied upon in Palestinian organizations. For example, Al-Jabari (2011) just explored the nature of human resource practices at the family business in Palestine. Another study by Al-

Madhoun and Analoui, (2003, 2006) examined the management-training programmes provided by the Palestinian SMEs located in Gaza Strip on the of managers' performance of SMEs. Whereas Sabella and Analoui (2015) explored the nature and extent of management development and training in Palestinian telecommunication organizations. Al-Oksh (2007) investigated the incentive and rewards system and its effects on improving job performance in the Palestinian Ministries. Additionally, Abu-zayd, (2008) tested the status of developing human recourse in the working banks in Palestine. Furthermore, Abu-sultan and Habil (2011) assessed only the compensation practices in the Palestinian public sector. Al-Jabari (2013) examined the factors that affect human resource practices in SMEs, public organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs). Thus, it is safe to say that none of the above empirical studies examined the relationship between a combination or synergies of selected human resource practices with employees' performance. Hence, the goal of this study is to create a better understanding of the human resource practices-performance relationship in the Palestinian SMEs.

Furthermore, this study also focuses on SMEs since human resources in SMEs, because of their size, seek the main support in a competitive struggle on a localised as well as a globalised market in the uniqueness of human resources and their quality and motivation. (Ismail *et al.*, 2015; Klepić, 2019; Seidu, 2011). Thus, it becomes imperative for SMEs to create strategies that would enhance the performance of their employees (Klepić, 2019). In comparison to large organisations, SMEs are confronted with far more issues threatening their survival. Keeping an SME operational therefore means that employee performance is of critical importance (Allen *et al.*, 2013).

Besides, SMEs are considered as the main source of employment and support for industry especially in developing countries and economies like Palestine (Abuznaid, 2014; Ahmad & Ramadan, 2018; Analoui & Al-Madhoun, 2017; Sultan *et al.*, 2017). Despite a few empirical studies carried out in multi-industry individual-level have linked human resource practices to enhance the employee work performance of SMEs, this stream of human resource practices research has been inadequately researched, remains ambiguous, still under-developed and need more empirical research (Belsito & Reutzel, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2016a; Jiang *et al.*, 2012; Li

et al., 2019; Mulolli *et al.*, 2015; Sheehan, 2014; Singh *et al.*, 2020; Wu *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the ambiguity of this relationship still exists and need for a better understanding of the human resource-performance link in the SMEs (Banks & Kepes, 2015). Therefore, this is one of the research gap that this study attempts to fill in.

This study also focused on task performance dimension as the significant dimension of employee work performance within the context of the industrial sector at Palestinian SMEs. According to Motowidlo and Kell (2012), task performance refers to the category of behaviours or actions necessary to complete duties and tasks which include providing products or services by the organization. Since majority of Palestinian SMEs in the industrial sector are family-owned businesses, more focus are given on the financial revenues by putting the goal of survival and keeping the business in the priority and less attention are being paid to improve employees' performance (Sultan *et al.*, 2017). Besides, only a minority of Palestinian SMEs are established by experienced entrepreneurs. This could potentially mean a threat to their survival caused by a lack of experience, competence, and proper managerial knowledge (Analoui & Al-Madhoun, 2017). Therefore, Al-Jabari (2011) pointed out that Palestinian SMEs should give more attention to task performance as the proficiency with which employee performs their main job tasks.

In the last 25 years, an increasing extent research attention has been given on how human resource practices affect employee work performance (Alfes *et al.*, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2016a; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Snape & Redman, 2010). These results indicated that the relationship of the independent variable has a significant influence on both the dependent variable and mediating variable, and likewise mediating variable has an influence on the dependent variable. However, it remains difficult to establish the effectiveness of interventions, the mechanism or the process, procedures and strategies to maintain, optimize employee work performance (Beijer *et al.*, 2019; Boon *et al.*, 2019; Chadwick *et al.*, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2016a; Gerhart, 2012; Guerci *et al.*, 2017; Jiang *et al.*, 2017).

Based on the findings of the previous studies that examined the relationship between the human resource practices and employee work performance, it is notably

found that these findings have widely reported consistent significant results between human resource practices and employee work performance. For example, many prior studies have found that human resource practices have a significant relationship with employee performance (e.g. Ismail *et al.*, 2019; Jibrin-Bidaa *et al.*, 2018; Mira *et al.*, 2019; Ngwenya & Aigbavboa, 2017; Sarker, 2017). In addition, previous studies have also reported a significant relationship between human resource practices and job security (e.g., Chan, 2005; Gramm & Schnell, 2013; Haskel & Martin, 1993, 2001; Hussain & Rehman, 2013; Imna & Hassan, 2015; Krueger, 1988; Noe *et al.*, 2013; Smith, 1999). Likewise, a significant relationship between job security and employee work performance was also found (e.g, Ahmed *et al.*, 2017; Amaechi *et al.*, 2015; Ma *et al.*, 2016; Newman *et al.*, 2019; Sanyal *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, this study introduced job security as an intervention mediator variable to explain the mechanism or the process to enhance the relationship between human resource practices and employee work performance in the industrial sector of Palestinian SMEs. In other words, it explains how or why there is a correlation between human resource practices and employee work performance. This mediator job security can be a potential mechanism or the process by which human resources practices can produce an influence on employee work performance.

Job security has become an important area of research for scholars due to the critical economic conditions and shifting job requirements because of the wide usage of information technology, downsizing, and restructuring within the organizations (Wang *et al.*, 2014). For example, Lucky *et al.* (2013a) stated that the concept of job security started gaining attractiveness in recent periods as a result of economic pressures on organizations. Thus, job security has become the dominant factor among the employee priority list (Hill, 2011). Moreover, Noe *et al.* (2013) detected that job security is one of the primary job features influencing the attractiveness of a new job to potential employees. In the Palestinian context, Kanafani (2012) pointed out that job security is considered one of the factors that affect both the Palestinian firms as well as employees for several reasons: the unstable economic and political situation in Palestine since the Palestinian economy remains underdeveloped. Further, labour market suffers from lack of job security for those outside the public sector; this is due to the severe blockade that has been imposed by the Israeli occupation on the Gaza Strip since 2007, which in turn, few industrial firms of Palestinian SMEs have access

to the external markets. This causes decreasing the jobs offered by the SMEs which are considered as a continual threat for both who have temporary and permanent jobs (Abuznaid, 2014; Khoury & Analoui, 2010; Sabri, 2010). Hence, job security is considered an important variable, particularly within the industrial sector of Palestinian SMEs.

Moreover, the intensive reviewing of the literature, showed that, despite many previous studies examined the mediating role of job security and its effect on the relationship with different variables and outcomes (e.g., Beltrán-Martín & Bou-Llugar, 2018; Huang *et al.*, 2010; Latorre *et al.*, 2016; Ma *et al.*, 2016; Ouyang *et al.*, 2015; Tabiu *et al.*, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2016), none of these studies examined the mediating effect of job security on the relationship between human resource practices and employee work performance. Besides, despite the large volume of studies examined the relationship between human resource practices and performance at the employee level, the important reason behind this relationship (the mechanism, the process) remains unclear and needs further investigation (Alfes *et al.*, 2013; Guest, 2011; Katou, 2015; Knies & Leisink, 2014). Additionally, Patel and Cardon (2010b) claimed that although many empirical studies carried out to explain the mechanism or mediating processes of the relationship between human resource practices and employees' performance at the SMEs are not well understood. Accordingly, this study attempts to bridge the apparent empirical research gap in knowledge.

In conclusion, the current study examined the mediating role of job security on the relationship between human resource practices and employee's performance. The findings of the study will help the decision-makers in the industrial sector of Palestinian SMEs in adopting job security as a mediator and human resource practices as the independent variable that influences employee work performance as the dependent variable. The results would provide sufficient information about the effect of human resource practices on employee work performance through job security. This study can impact on managers who attempt to design a solid job security mechanism to improve the performance of employees in the industrial sector of Palestinian SMEs.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the problem statement discussed, the research questions for this study are:

1. What is the relationship between human resource practices (i.e. training, job definition, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensation) and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs?
2. To what extent do the relationship between training, job definition, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensation influence job security of Palestinian SMEs?
3. To what extent do the relationship between job security affects the employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs?
4. Does job security mediate the relationship between human resource practices and employee work performance (i.e. task performance) of Palestinian SMEs?

1.5 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between human resource practices namely training, job definition, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensation, employee work performance, and the mediating role of job security on this relationship in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Palestine. The objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the influence of human resource practices namely training, job definition, performance appraisal, employee participation and compensation on employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.

2. To investigate the relationship between training, job definition, performance appraisal, employee participation and compensation and job security of Palestinian SMEs.
3. To examine the relationship between job security and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
4. To examine the mediating effect of job security on the relationship between Human resource practices dimensions and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.

1.6 Research Hypothesis

Based on the purpose and objectives of the study, it is mainly hypothesized that:

- H1:** There is a positive relationship between training and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H2:** There is a positive relationship between job definition and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H3:** There is a positive relationship between compensation and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H4:** There is a positive relationship between performance appraisal and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H5:** There is a positive relationship between employee participation and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H6:** There is a positive relationship between training and job security of Palestinian SMEs.
- H7:** There is a positive relationship between performance appraisal and job security of Palestinian SMEs.
- H8:** There is a positive relationship between job definition and job security of Palestinian SMEs.
- H9:** There is a positive relationship between employee participation and job security of Palestinian SMEs.

- H10:** There is a positive relationship between compensation and job security of Palestinian SMEs.
- H11:** There is a positive relationship between job security and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H12:** Job security mediates the relationship between compensation and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H13:** Job security mediates the relationship between job definition and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H14:** Job security mediates the relationship between employee participation and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H15:** Job security mediates the relationship between performance appraisal and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.
- H16:** Job security mediates the relationship between training and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the sense that it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the effect of human resource practices on employee work performance. At the same time, it also provides practical contributions for owners, HR managers and governmental and non-governmental regulatory authorities of Palestinian SMEs. regarding human resource practices implementation, and its relationship with employee's performance.

1.7.1 Theoretical Significance

In terms of the contribution to the body of knowledge, this research study tried to bridge three significant gaps recognized in the human resource practices-performance literature. These gaps include the theoretical, contextual and empirical gaps related to the extant literature on human resource practices-performance. From a theoretical point of view, the study covers several aspects by recognizing the potential

interests related to human resource practices, job security, and employee work performance. It further contributes to the body of knowledge on the role of job security as mediators in improving the employees' performance.

Previously, based on the literature, human resource practices have a direct effect on employee work performance. Somehow, from this study, it was found that relationships reflect a causal effect in which human resource practices influence employee work performance indirectly through job security as a mediator. In other words, this study had found that human resource practices influence job security then propagates casually to employee work performance through job security as a mediator. The mediating effect of job security represents the mechanism by which human resource practices transfer its effect to employee work performance. This finding was considered new in the area of human resource practice-performance link and provide important theoretical implication to employees' performance context. Thus, fulfil the theoretical gap in this area. Another theoretical significance, this study identified a theoretical gap in knowledge by examining the relationship between each dimension of human resource practices variable with job security. This is an indicator that this area of research still relatively infancy and needs further empirical investigation. Which means, this indication is another contribution to the body of knowledge.

By applying the Ability, Motivation, Opportunity (AMO) theory in this study, it is argued that a well-trained and skilled employee will perform better, and a motivated employee will be ready to do an extra effort. Which means, if the work environment does not provide adequate opportunities, both abilities and motivation might become meaningless. However, many other factors could influence the positive effects of human resource practices, not only contextual factors but also individual beliefs, personal relationships, might affect the implementation of these practices and the subsequent outcomes (Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). For this reason, the researcher found that the effectiveness of the AMO theory might perfectly fit in any situation and even in conflict and unstable country like Palestine which is another contribution to the body of knowledge. Finally, this study also attempts to fill a contextual gap, by presenting a developing country (Palestine) since this study is based on a sample of employees of SMEs in the industrial sector in Palestine. Thus, it

contributes to the HRM-performance literature by extending the empirical evidence of the effects of human resource practices on employees' performance to a new context.

1.7.2 Practical Significance

In terms of the contribution to managerial implications, the findings from this study are beneficial to management practice as they help SMEs' owners, HR managers and practitioners in the study context to inspire the effective implementation of human resource practices by enhancing the employees' job security as they will lead to improving the employees' performance. Thus, the top management of Palestinian SMEs could maximize the benefits of human resource practices by investing in implementing effective human resource practices through providing the executive managers with sufficient financial resources and adequate capabilities and skills to develop an effective training and development and compensation system, which in turn reflects in improving employees' performance. Besides, providing employees with the necessary skills and knowledge, adequately rewarded for their behaviour and the possibilities necessary to enable the desired behaviour.

Additionally, this study provided a comprehensive insight to the policymakers and regulatory organizations in Palestine (e.g., Ministry of National Economy, General Union of Palestinian Industries, Palestine Chamber of Commerce and General Federation of Trade Unions of Palestine). The researcher suggests that the top management, HR managers, firm's owners and practitioners should cooperate to develop effective human resource practices and redesign their human resource practices within the SMEs at the individual level to achieve and improve employees' performance with careful consideration to the internal and external factors especially in unstable countries like Palestine. Furthermore, the proposed research framework of this study provides managers and practitioners with important insight on the significant role of human resource practices and AMO theory in an organization that would improve the employees' performance, which in turn lead to the effective achievement of organizational objectives.

1.8 Scope of the Study

The current study focused on human resource practices and employee work performance of Palestinian SMEs. It also attempts to measure on human resource practices and employee work performance from the perspectives of lower employees and head of departments within the SMEs operating in the Gaza Strip, Palestine to gain a better understanding of this relationship at the individual level, not an organizational level. The population of the current study consisted of lower employees and head of departments drawn from the industrial sector of the Palestinian SMEs.

The individual human resource practices factors for this study are training, job definition, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensation. While the employee work performance variable including mainly task performance. Additionally, this study examined the mediating effect of job security on the relationship between human resource practices and employee work performance of SMEs in Palestine.

1.9 Conceptual and Operational Definitions

An operational definition primarily refers to how a researcher operationalizes study variables based on valid dimensions or items. The basic purpose of operational definitions is not about creating new concepts, but rather it focuses on the processes of operationalization and validation of specific concept based on its dimension and items (Flannelly *et al.*, 2014). Hence, definitions of the relevant variables used in this study are essential to get a clear description of the terms used throughout this thesis, as many terms found throughout this study are defined and explained in the context in which they have been used. Moreover, for clarification and possible empirical testing, specific operational definitions have been provided for the major variables used in this study.

1.9.1 Human Resource Practices

This study defined human resource practices as a set of practices used by the organization that attracting, developing, motivating and retaining employees to ensure the effective implementation for the survival of the organization (Brewster *et al.*, 2005). This is accomplished through a distinctive set of integrated employment policies, programs and practices, embedded in an organizational and societal context". (Bratton & Gold, 2012, p. 6). In this study, the term human resource practices refer to training, job definition, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensation. as main Human resource practices to develop, motivate and retain employees which in turn lead to improve employees' performance of Palestinian SMEs. The current study measured the human resource practices by using a survey instrument developed by (Singh, 2004).

- A. **Training:** Training refers to a group of formal activities provided for employees within the organization. These activities are considered the factor for improving the current and future performance of employees through the development of the required knowledge and skills (Gao *et al.*, 2011; Rahman *et al.*, 2013). Based on this study, training enabled the ability to learn new knowledge and skills, which lead to improved employees' performance. Training in this study measured using a measurement scale developed by (Singh, 2004).

- B. **Job definition:** Job definition refers to the job description and indicating the extent of clarity with which jobs are defined and also the scope provided to an employee to shape the job. Job definition is an informative documentation of the scope, duties, tasks, responsibilities and working conditions related to the job listing in the organization through the process of job analysis. Job definition also has an up to date job description. In this study, job definition was measured by using a survey instrument developed by (Singh, 2004).

- C. **Performance Appraisal:** In this study, performance appraisal refers to good achievement by employees (Tucker-Lively, 2014). Performance appraisal defines performance appraisal regularly inside the organization. Besides, the organization

asses its workers based on their continuous improvement and appropriate behaviours. Performance appraisal is described as an evaluation of the employees' performance of given tasks and duties. The current study measured performance appraisal using a measurement scale developed by (Singh, 2004).

- D. *Employee Participation:*** Refers to the method of encouraging workers within the organization to play a vital role in activities associated with decision-making and appropriate improvement to achieve the organizational objectives (Ghamsari, 2009). In the current study, employee participation is describing how employees make appropriate decisions and giving suggestion to improve the work within the organization. Besides, it examines how employees' opinions to be heard and valued by the organization which finally lead to rewarding employees for creating innovative suggestions within the organization. This study measured employee participation using a measurement scale developed by (Singh, 2004).
- E. *Compensation:*** Compensation is considered a powerful message to the worker to sustain the needed behaviours in the organization (Tucker-Lively, 2014). This study examines compensation as the association between employees' performance and capabilities with incentive pay which is financial and non-financial, which is useful for employees' motivation, enhance their skills and attitude to continue the previous activities to achieve the organizational goals. The current study measured compensation using a measurement scale developed by (Singh, 2004).

1.9.2 Job Security

In this study, job security refers to the ability of the individual employee to keep the current job, the security of continued employment in the same job with the same employer (Adebayo & Lucky, 2012; Dekker, 2010). This study measured job security using a measurement scale developed by (Kraimer *et al.*, 2005).

1.9.3 Employee Work Performance (EWP)

Employee work performance (EWP) can be defined as “a total of behaviours or actions that are relevant to the goals of the organization.” (Campbell, 1990b, p. 704). Employee work performance focuses on behaviours or actions of employees, rather than the results of these actions. In this study, employee work performance mainly refers to task performance, which can be defined as the proficiency with which individuals perform the core technical tasks central to his or her job (Campbell, 1990b). The current study measured employee work performance mainly task performance using a measurement scale developed by (Koopmans *et al.*, 2016).

1.10 Thesis Organization

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction and background in the study. The problem statement, research objectives and questions, significance of the study, scope and limitations of the study were all highlighted in this chapter. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature about the thesis. The discussions covered the theoretical background to the study of human resource practices and employee work performance and their dimensions, and relationships of human resource practices with employee work performance, human resource practices with job security as a mediator on employee work performance. This chapter also discussed the underpinning theory and the development of hypotheses. Chapter 3 of the thesis provides a detailed explanation of the methodology adopted in the thesis. Detailed explanations on the research philosophy, approach, and design were provided, along with the method of data collection and the statistical tools and techniques employed in conducting the analyses and test of hypothesis in the thesis.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed account of the data, and the analyses carried out in the study. The discussion covered the data cleaning process, descriptive analyses, and the test of measurement and structural models in the PLS-SEM, along with the test of mediation effects with component variables. Chapter 5 provides discussions on the findings of the study. The chapter starts with a general introduction of the research,

followed by discussions on each component of the research findings as they relate to the research hypothesis and the existing literature. The chapter also discussed the contributions of the study, in terms of knowledge, theory, and practice. Limitations of the study along with suggestions for future researches were also provided in the chapter.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1. Jouda, A. A., Ahmad, U. N. U., & Dahleez, K. A. (2016). The Impact of Human Resource Management Practices on Employees Performance: The Case of Islamic University of Gaza in Palestine. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 6(4), 1080-1088.