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THE IMPACT OF HRM PRACTICES ON SERVICE QUALITY IN CUSTOMER-FACING BUSINESSES

Abstract: This research analyses the impact of HRM practices on service quality in customer-facing businesses. A systematic review was conducted using Google Scholar as the search engine, and search terms such as "HRM practices", "Service quality", and "Customer-facing business" were used to identify relevant papers. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were documented using the PRISMA flow diagram, and a total of 30 papers were included in the review. The findings indicate that HR practices focused on equipping employees with social skills in customer-facing encounters have a positive impact on customer perceptions of quality and satisfaction. However, certain HR and external factors may moderate this relationship. These trends were observed across all sectors of organisations. The study also found that the majority of papers were published between 2009-2014, with a recent increase in publications. The UK and the USA are the top countries as data sources, and most papers were research-based and used survey methods. Limited use of theories was also observed in the included reviews. The research also attempts to use the average number of citations per year as a measure of paper quality, acknowledging certain limitations in this approach. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of HRM practices in improving service quality in customer-facing businesses and the need for more research in this area.

Keywords: HRM Practices, Service Quality, Customer-Facing Businesses, Review

1. Introduction

HRM practices can impact customer-facing businesses in many ways. It can positively impact customer perceptions of service quality and indirectly affect service quality through employee behaviour. For example, recognising employee achievements can help boost the organisation's internal culture and motivate people to become more customer-oriented. Other ways to positively influence service quality are-

- HR practices can improve the commitment and involvement of employees in their interactions with customers.
- HRM practices can prevent discrimination and harassment and ensure compliance with labour laws and regulations for a better public image that influences customers favourably.

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• Practices like training and development can enhance the skills of employees with customers effectively, especially, when addressing service failures.

Results of various studies show that HR practices impact customer perceptions of service quality both directly and indirectly through service behaviours (e.g., Tsaur & Lin, 2004; Jackson Jr & Sirianni, 2009; Sukwadi, 2015). This indicates service behaviour mediates the relationship between HRM and quality of services.

Numerous papers have been published on how HR practices impact service quality in employee-customer encounters. This paper aims to undertake a systematic review of the literature on the topic.

2. Methods

For a simple direct identification of the relevant papers, Google Scholar was used as the search engine. Search terms used were: "HRM practices", "Service quality", and "Customer-facing business". Papers in which all these search terms co-occurred were only identified. For the selection of papers from the identified ones, the PRISMA flow diagram was used with the inclusion and exclusion criteria as follows.

Inclusion criteria-
1. Full texts.
2. Abstracts, if they contain relevant information.
3. Published in English.

Exclusion criteria-
1. Abstracts not containing relevant information.
2. Published in languages other than English.
3. Dissertations and theses.
4. Books and book sections.
5. Papers of low standards.

The above process yielded 30 papers for this review. These are discussed in the following sections. Some quantitative analyses of the papers are also provided as tables and charts.
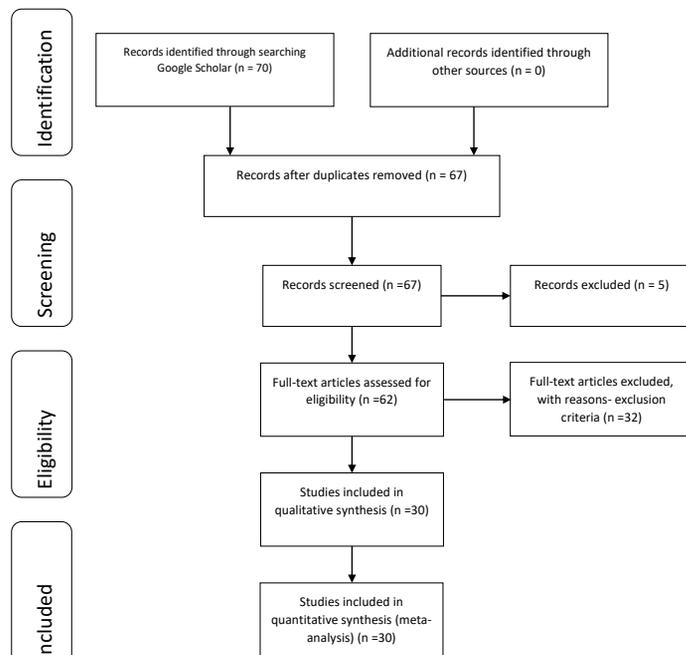

Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart

3. Results

3.1 Google General

In a conceptual paper, Jackson Jr and Sirianni (2009) observed that HR practices directed towards the career development of employees can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. Career development activities consisted of mentoring, job enrichment, coaching, training programs, job rotation, and tuition assistance. On the other hand, low pay and low job status need not necessarily be related to low skills; thus, the need for training and development of such employees does not arise.

However, the intangible aspects of service skills are difficult to recognise. Job complexity and task discretion can be used as the starting point for service skills recognition. Usually, social skills are not rewarded as much as technical skills (Korczynski, 2005). It is enough to recognise their service skills in HR departments.

Deliberate service sabotage by employees due to wrong or failed HR practices was highlighted by Harris and Ogbonna (2009) in a discussion paper. Service sabotage negatively affected customer satisfaction, firm growth, and profitability. Four primary categories of service sabotage were recognised as thrill seekers, apathetic, customer revengers, and money grabbers. To counteract this issue, suggestions were made to gather information and utilise current data to determine the proportion and manner of sabotage, hire competent service personnel, train and incentivise employees, improve and give more authority to employees, establish a service-oriented environment, and implement more effective monitoring methods and protocols.

3.2 Stores

According to Chuang and Liao (2010), HR practices combining the concerns for customers and concerns for employes will enhance the market performance of high-performance work systems. A survey of 133 Taiwanese stores was conducted in two phases to obtain these results.

3.3 Healthcare sector

From a review of the literature, Mohamed and Hameed (2015) noted that effective HR practices had a strong impact on healthcare quality and improved staff performance. The effective management of HRM practices to promote satisfaction among both customers and frontline employees involves meticulous hiring, thorough and effective training, carefully crafted support structures, empowering employees, fostering a culture of collaboration, implementing suitable performance evaluation methods, providing incentives and acknowledging achievements, and cultivating a service-oriented environment. According to Tomar and Dhiman (2013), a high-involvement work system (HIWS) was observed through semi-structured interviews with 22 doctors and 22 nurses. The study found that the focus was on exceptional hospitality and patient amenities rather than solely on medical treatment, resulting in patient satisfaction based on the quality of facilities rather than the medical care itself. The authors also found that HR practices, such as standardised nursing tasks, performance appraisals, communication methods, and compensation schemes, impact the level of service offered in a hospital. Some issues related to various HR practices were raised by doctors and nurses during the interview. Thus, healthcare has now focused on customer relationships and management (CRM). The most important CRM components to improve service quality were identified by Wang (2013) from the analysis of survey data from 481 residents of 45 Taiwanese nursing homes. The perceived service quality positively influenced resident satisfaction. CRM helped nursing homes improve resident satisfaction by improving physical environment quality (PEQ) and

interaction quality (IQ).

Using a review of the literature, Elarabi and Johari (2014) found that in the case of Malaysian healthcare organisations, HR practices can lead to patient satisfaction through their effect on improvement in healthcare quality. Periodic training and monitoring are the two important HR practices in this respect. The job satisfaction of employees through periodic training as an HR practice can lead to patient satisfaction as was reported by Najam, et al. (2020) from a survey of 228 dyads of paramedical staff and patients in Pakistan. Thus, employee satisfaction becomes a mediating factor for the relationship between HR practices and patient satisfaction. Procedural justice also impacts job satisfaction as a moderator. The importance of selecting and training customer-facing employees for emotional intelligence was also stressed by Bardzil and Slaski (2003) using a review of the literature. However, the authors did not relate it to patient satisfaction.

The results of a survey of 417 employees of Jordanian private hospitals by Aboalganam, et al. (2024 showed a positive correlation between total quality management (TQM) and service quality and between service quality and customer retention, depending on the degree of service quality. The customer complaint handling mechanisms played a very important role in reducing the negative effects of poor services affecting customer retention. These results demonstrate the need for HR practices to enable employees to handle customer complaints skillfully and enhance customer satisfaction.

3.4 Tourism and hospitality industry

To ensure compatibility between individual employees and the brand, human resources policies should cater to both potential and existing staff members. This approach plays a key role in reducing the persistent issue of social skills deficiencies in service-based organisations. In research conducted by Hurrell and Scholarios (2014) utilising two Scottish hotels as case studies, the focus was on managers and customer-facing employees. One of the hotels reported a significant gap in social skills, while the other had few gaps. Interestingly, the hotel with fewer gaps had a stronger sense of employee identification with the brand, which could be attributed to its recruitment and selection processes being aligned with the brand image. On the other hand, hotels with more gaps in social skills did not prioritise this aspect in their HR practices. As a result, the hotel, with fewer gaps, allowed for more employee involvement in brand socialisation, training, and carrying out the brand values during their work. Social skills gaps among employees are directly related to customer satisfaction. The social skills of employees lead to their positive behaviour towards customers, thus improving service quality. Hence, HR practices need to develop these skills. This was shown by Tsaur and Lin (2004) using survey responses from 203 Taiwanese tourist hotel employees and their 272 customers. HRM practices had a partial direct effect on customer perceptions of service quality and an indirect effect on employees' social skills of service behaviour. Thus, service behaviour only partially mediated the relationship between HR practices and service quality.

Social skills leading to positive service behaviour can be developed among employees if a work-based learning climate exists leading to job satisfaction and customer perception of service quality, as was noted by Al-Madadha, et al. (2021) from a survey of 400 employees of nine five-star Jordania hotels and their 400 customers. Thus, employee job satisfaction mediated the relationship between work-based learning climate and customer perception. Social learning theory was used to explain these results.

The specific HR practices leading to customer satisfaction include hotels hiring competent employees who have language capabilities and good appearance as selection

criteria (as they interact with customers). This requires sophisticated selection methods that are well-established through the HR systems. HR systems should prevent employees from perceiving injustices in the recruitment and selection process and unfairness in promotions. The best practices are driven by collectivism, employment legislation, trade unions, and financial considerations. These HR practices are followed by Chaebol hotels in Seoul and Busan, as reported by Kim and Lee (2023) based on the survey results of 450 employees of this hotel.

The relationship between customer satisfaction and performance was endorsed by the work of Papademetriou, et al. (2023) from a survey of 360 employees and 360 customers of Cypriot in-city hotels (Papademetriou, et al., 2023).

According to a research study conducted by Almasoodi and colleagues (2023), the key difficulties faced by top HR leaders in the hospitality industry in Iraq are the recruitment of qualified individuals, high rates of employee turnover, concerns about employee safety and health, and a lack of adequate training resources. These findings are in line with the principles of strategic HR management, which suggest that gaps in acquiring, incentivising, safeguarding, and enhancing the skills of employees hinder organisational success and goals. The Resource-based view theory was utilised as a theoretical lens for this study.

3.5 Banking and insurance sector

Using secondary data and literature, Shola, et al. (2017) noted a significant relationship between HR management practices and service quality in the Nigerian insurance industry. HRM practices directly affect overall service quality related to customer base, customer retention, overall profit, productivity, and reduction of risks to the customers. Service quality enhances customer satisfaction. Employee service quality is ensured by HR practices regarding

staffing level, overtime, and professional development. This result was obtained by Gelade and Ivery (2003) from a survey of the employees of the UK bank branch director groups (BDG) conducted in three waves to obtain 14390 responses for analysis.

Islamic banks occupy a special position concerning service quality due to employees' interactions with customers. It is more p ominently directed by internal processes. From a survey of 272 Islamic bank employees in Oman, De Bruin, et al. (2021) observed that internal promotion, internal process, and internal purpose enabled employees' perceived ability to deliver service quality. The service quality positively influenced perceived customer satisfaction in Islamic banks.

Based on a detailed content analysis of 37 papers in a systematic literature review, Prasad (2021) observed that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and innovative ability influenced customer perception of service quality of commercial banks in India in the face of mergers with marketing implications of commercial bank mergers, Demographic and behavioural variables and custom r perception of the quality of service of the merging commercial banks in India are related. The HR practices of these banks must give due importance to the segmental differences when formulating their marketing strategies for successful mergers in India's competitive commercial banking scenario.

3.6 Airlines industry

Many full-service carriers (FSCs) have established low-cost subsidiaries in response to the challenge of low-cost airlines. In the UK, bmi and British Airways' Go are two successful examples of this strategy. Implementing this low-cost diversification required a different employment system and HRM policies, which were tailored to support the new subsidiary. However, employees and flight crew may not always

react positively to these policies. In light of this, Harvey and Turnbull (2006) examined the subsidiary management's level of control over employment relations, their management approach towards flight crew, and the response of the flight crew to this approach. Compared to the flight crew of bmi, a higher percentage of the Go flight crew were satisfied with pay, access to flight manager, disciplinary procedures, status, job security, relationship between flight crew and management, management of human relations issues, management of industrial relations issues and flight rosters. A higher percentage of the flight crew of bmi were satisfied only with the pension, leave entitlement and sickness benefits. The satisfaction levels of the flight crew of the parent company, British Airways, were much lower for salary, access to flight manager, disciplinary procedures, status, job security, relationship between flight crew and management, management of human relations issues, management of industrial relations issues and flight rosters. However, the sample sizes were only 95 for bmi, and 27 for Go, while it was 395 for British Airways. The small sizes can affect the validity and generalisability of these findings. Continuing with this study, Harvey and Turnbull (2010) reported that for low-cost airlines like Go and easyJet, the HR practices need to aim at low-cost employment systems. This essentially meant lower salaries for flight crews of low-cost airlines compared to the full-service airlines. Low-cost airlines are threatened by their unionised employees walking the low road in their employee relationships, in contrast to the employees of full-service employees walking the high road. Go Airlines was able to implement a distinct HRM style, successfully combining low-cost operations with high-road employment relations. The authors have provided a few comparison tables derived from various surveys to support these findings. The survey results of Go and bmi have already been discussed above. A comparison of nine low-cost and full-service airlines with 996 samples of flight crews showed over 70% of them were satisfied in the case of Go, Thomsonfly, and British Airways. However, British Airways and easyJet were losing their way along the high road.

3.7 Others

Data were collected by Al-Hawary and Abu-Laimon (2013) from 192 managers of Jordanian cellular communication companies. According to the analysis, the factors of leadership, information and analysis, customer focus, continuous improvement, and supplier quality management all had a beneficial impact on the quality of service. Of these, customer focus, and continuous improvement are related to the interaction of employees with customers. The authors stopped short of relating service quality with customer satisfaction.

HR initiatives to develop the social capital of service employees should lead to enhanced skills in their encounters with customers and increase customer satisfaction. This will increase their customer focus. The results of a survey of 4 7 customer-facing employees in South-Eastern US service firms showed these effects (Ellinger, et al., 2013). Social capital theory and the theory of reasoned action were used in this study. However, the relationship between customer satisfaction and performance has not been studied in this paper.

A case study by Butler and Hammer (2020) on QSRco, a fast-food firm employing over 10000 workers in the UK, consisted of 30 interviews, observations, and a back-of-the-house scrutiny of work. The facets of the job tasks performed, like monotony, customer pressures and stigma, were partially offset by broader HR characteristics in a well-established internal labour market and explicit recognition culture, rendering staff broadly satisfied with their work. These effects could lead to increased customer satisfaction and, thus, the profitability of the

company.

Using two in-depth case studies of global engine ring firms in the UK, Johnstone, et al. (2014) showed that even where services were profitable, firms may face various HR challenges, and struggle to exploit their service strategies fully. Addressing such challenges may be a key enabler in delivering integrated product services to combine distinctive engineering and service paradigms. The main part of these case studies was interviews with 18 senior officials of one company and 24 senior officials of the other company.

According to Harter, et al. (2010) employee work perceptions lead to employee retention and further to customer loyalty indicative of customer satisfaction. The methodology consisted of secondary data from 2178 units of 10 organisations and a survey of 141900 employees of these units. Analysis was done at the business unit level. Comparison data across organisations provided in this paper helps to examine the generalisability of the findings across various sectors.

A survey of 220 customer contact employees by Elmadağ and Ellinger (2018) revealed that social recognition reduced job stress while monetary rewards increased it. However, satisfaction with monetary rewards influenced the customer orientation of these employees more than social recognition. Equity theory was used to explain these results. The intriguing result is that monetary rewards increase job stress. There may be some error in the questionnaire items related to it, or the sample size was too low to capture any negative relationship between the two.

The traditional HR problems of call centres are personnel planning, especially under arrival uncertainty, staffing, scheduling, and routing, staffing with sufficient communication skills, shift scheduling, rostering to match the unpredictable call demands, and performance evaluation. According to Aksin, et al. (2007) modern technology can solve many of these

problems. However, some challenges also exist. A review of the literature was conducted by the authors of this paper. Although customer satisfaction is important for the performance of call centres, it does not appear to have been studied adequately.

4. Discussion

Some quantitative trends are discussed below.

4.1 Year of publication

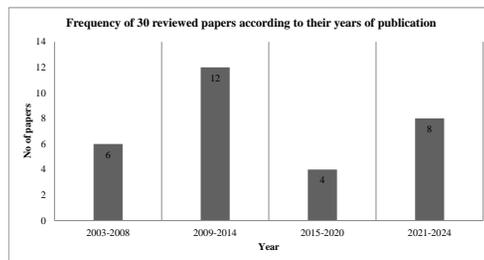The number of papers published in different years is presented in Fig 2.

Figure 2. Frequency of papers according to their years of publication

Out of the 30 papers reviewed, 12 (40%) were published during 2009- 014. However, there is a recent trend of more papers being published during 2021 to 2024, as eight papers were published during this period. The latest review found among the selected papers was by Mohamed and Hameed (2015). It does not mean that no review was published after 2015. Only none of the later reviews were available in the literature search for this paper.

4.2 Countries from where data were collected

The reporting country may be different from the country from where the data were collected. This can happen if different authors are located in different countries and the data were collected only from one or two countries out of these. The data on the

countries from where data were collected has been provided in Fig 3.

As could be seen, out of 30, seven papers collected data from the UK, followed by four fro the USA. Three papers each collected data from Taiwan, Jordan, and India. Thus, about 70% of the data were collected from these five countries. Only one paper collected data from eight countries.
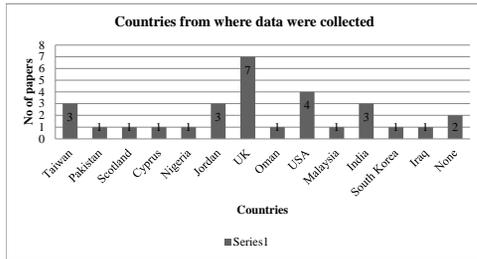

Figure 3. No of papers according to the countries from where the data were collected

4.3 Type of paper

Type of paper refers to whether the paper was a research paper, review of the literature, discussion etc. The frequency of papers according to their types is presented in Fig 4.
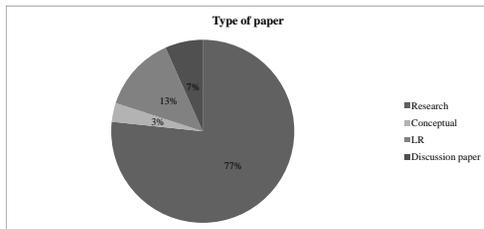

Figure 4. Frequency of papers according to their type

Out of 30, 23 (77%) were research papers and four (13%) were reviews. The dominance of research papers is a good trend, as for a systematic review, research papers are more useful. Reviews will help to collate the knowledge at different periods and a definite paradigm shift may be seen sometimes. In this review, some paradigm shifts were also indicated by some reviews

discussed above. For example, in the case of health care, the shift from doctors and nurses to patient satisfaction was reported. That brings us to the actual method of study.

4.4 Method of data collection

The different methods of data collection used in the 30 reviewed papers are given in Fig 5.
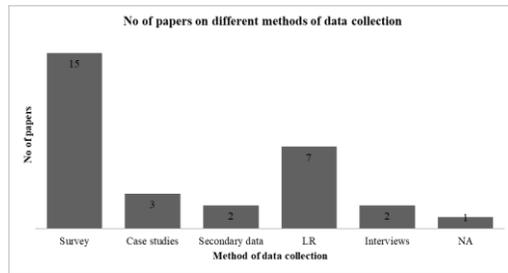

Figure 5. Methods of data collection in the reviewed paper

Out of the 23 research papers (Fig 3), 15 used surveys, three used case studies, two used secondary data, two used interviews and one did not mention the exact data collection method. The remaining seven were reviews.

4.5 Theories used

The number of papers using different theories is presented in Fig 6. More than one theory was used in some papers. Henc the total number is higher than 30.
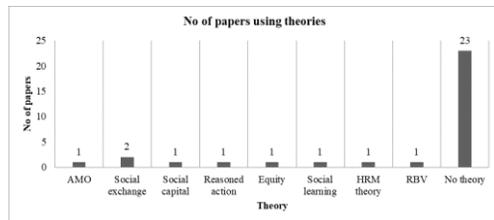

Figure 6. Theories used in the reviewed papers

It may be intriguing that as many as 23 out of 30 papers did not mention any theory. The

three social theories (exchange, capital, and learning) were used in four papers. Other theories were used in one paper each. The total of 32 indicates that two papers used more than one theory. These papers were those of Ellinger, et al. (2013) using social capital theory and theory of reasoned action and (Najam, et al., 2020) using AMO and social exchange theory. It seems when considering the interaction of employees with customers, social theories are the most appropriate theories to apply.

4.6 Quality of papers

One disadvantage of using Google Scholar to select papers for reviews is that no details of the quality of papers, like impact factor or ranking based on some standards, are available. Only the number of citations of the paper are available. Assuming that if more authors cite a particular paper, it reflects the quality, the number of citations was used as an index of quality in this review. To account for different years of publication, the average citations per year was worked out using 2024 minus the year of publication to divide the number of citations. One paper of 2024 (Aboalganam, et al., 2024) did not have this number, so its average is zero.

Using the above bases of calculations, the number of papers for different ranges of the estimated av rage citations per year has been given in Fig 7 in the decreasing order of values along with cumulative percentage.
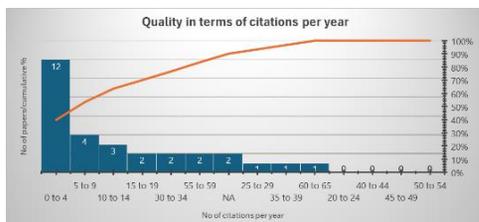

Figure 7. Quality in terms of citations per year

The highest number of papers (19 out of 30) were for the citation indices in the range of 0

to 14. There was only one paper (Aksin, et al., 2007) with the highest range value of 65. Already, it was cited by many others as having the advantage of 17 years. There were two papers in the 55 to 59 range, those of Jackson Jr and Sirianni (2009) and Chuang and Liao (2010). For these papers, the fact that many citations spread over 14 to 15 years was also an advantage. Considering these results, it may be difficult to accept average citations per year as an index of paper quality. Out of the three with citation averages of 50 to 65, only one was a research paper. The survey sample size of 133 cannot be considered as adequate. Such limitations will not be accounted for by the average citations per year method of quality assessment.

5. Conclusion

This paper reviewed 30 papers published on the impact of HRM practices on service quality in customer-facing businesses. HR practices leading to equipping the employe s with social skills in customer-facing encounters were implemented by many organisations. These strategies reflected in the increased customer perceptions of quality leading to high levels of satisfact on. A few HR and external factors mediate or moderate the relationship between employee social skills and customer perceptions of quality/satisfaction. These trends were observed across all sectors of organisations.

A majority of the papers were published between 2009 and 2014, although there has been a recent increase in the number of papers published. Among the data source countries, the UK and the USA dominated. Most papers were research papers and used surveys. Most papers did not mention the use of any theories. An attempt has been made to use the average number of citations per year as an index of the quality of papers when Google Scholar is used to select papers for reviews. This is based on certain assumptions. There are many limitations in accepting this index as an indication of the

quality of papers.

5.1 Some critical observations of the reviewed papers

Three papers used less than 200 as the sample size in their surveys. This can affect their validity and gener lisability. Only 13 countries accounted for 30 papers. This leaves many countries with no research on this area. No paper was using mixed methods (surveys and interviews). any papers might be of poor quality.

5.2 Scope for future research

The above critical observations lead to scope for future research. Future research should estimate the minimum sample size required for the population under study and ensure at least this sample size. There should many more research from countries from where no or very little research has been done. Comparison across different types or sectors of organisations and between organisations

in different countries will be new research areas. Future research should increasingly use mixed methods.

5.3 Limitations of this review

Instead of using databases, using Google Scholar has the advantage of identifying many papers within a few pages of the search engine. For example, searching seven pages of Google Scholar yielded 30 papers for this review. The limitation of this method in assessing the quality of papers has already been discussed. However, it may be possible to use other standards of quality like Cochran's or Joanna Briggs, along with Google Scholar, as the search engine. This will be tested in the next review paper.

No meta-analysis was possible, as even in the papers reporting data analysis, the variables and their units were not always the same. Some sort of standardisation may be helpful here.

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