

# Assessment of the Relations of Human Resource Management Practices and Player Performance and Well-being in Ethiopian Men's Premier League Clubs.

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## ABSTRACT

There remains a critical empirical data gap regarding how Human Resource Management (HRM) style influences player outcomes, particularly in Ethiopian Premier League (ETHPL) clubs. This study was set to examine the effects of HRM styles on the players' performance and well-being in ETHPL clubs. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, and a total of 242 players were selected using a census sampling technique to participate in the study. Data was collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, which was formulated based on a critical reading of key literature. The collected data were analyzed using multiple regression. The results showed a statistically significant and positive relationship between the existing HRM practices on players' performance ( $B = 0.24$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $t = 2.76$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Although the coefficient is positive ( $B = 0.16$ ,  $\beta = .12$ ), the relationship between performance management and in-field performance is not statistically significant ( $p = .18$ ). Also, the relationship between Health and Safety and player performance was negative and not significant ( $B = -0.03$ ,  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t = -0.35$ ,  $p = .73$ ). Likewise, the analysis showed Compensation and Benefits showed a significant positive effect on in-field performance of the players ( $B = 0.16$ ,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 2.62$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Overall, the findings show that improving HRM systems across all dimensions, addressing weaknesses in performance management and health and safety were needed. The study offered several important implications for future research and policymaking..

**Keywords:** player well-being, player performance, health and safety, training and development, compensation, AMO framework, and Ethiopian football

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## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary professional football, the pursuit of competitive advantage extends far beyond tactical setups to encompass sophisticated Human Resource Management (HRM) systems designed to maximize player potential (Leberman et al., 2021). Football is the most popular sport in Ethiopia, enjoying widespread participation and fan engagement. Despite this, the Ethiopian Premier League (ETHPL) continues to face persistent challenges, including inconsistent team performance, high player turnover, and limited success at regional and international competitions (Garmamo et al., 2023). Many clubs operate with short-term recruitment strategies, ad hoc training programs, and underdeveloped performance management systems. A lack of coherent human resource management (HRM) frameworks contributes to inadequate professional development, insufficient welfare support, and weak

mechanisms for retaining talented players (Bekele, 2023). As a result, clubs face instability within squads, undermining team cohesion and hindering the establishment of competitive football institutions in the country.

Global and regional evidence highlights the critical role of HRM practices in enhancing athletic performance, well-being, and retention. Structured recruitment, systematic training and development, competitive compensation, and supportive organizational climates are associated with higher individual and team performance, reduced turnover, and increased motivation (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Lepak & Snell, 2002; Taylor et al., 2017). In African football, clubs that implement professional HRM approaches tend to maintain more stable squads, produce more consistent competitive outcomes, and foster player development

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capable of performing at the international level (Obukadeta et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, research on Ethiopian Premier League (ETHPL) clubs is rarely available. Few studies point out that resource constraints are the leading problem for underdeveloped support systems, and a focus on only short-term performance (Desalegn, 2019). By and large, empirical research examining the implementation and effectiveness of HRM practices within Ethiopian football remains limited. The absence of such research constrains the ability of clubs and football authorities to adopt evidence-based strategies that can sustainably improve player outcomes and institutional performance.

### **The statement of the problem**

Despite growing attention to the influence of Human Resource Management (HRM) systems on player performance and well-being, no study to date has investigated the HRM practice in Ethiopian Premier League clubs and the relation between this and player performance and well-being directly from the players' perspective and professional experience.

Thus, the main aim of this study is to examine the HRM practices in Ethiopian Premier League clubs as an institution, especially focusing on the key variables of player performance and player well-being. Despite the scope being delimited to only examining the relations of HRM practices vis-à-vis the two key variables, it is believed that it would spotlight important insights for further study and, perhaps, for revisiting the prevalent management practice and people's perceptions about the clubs.

### **Objectives of the study**

To assess the overall impact of HRM practices on players' on-field performance within Ethiopian Premier League clubs.

To identify which HRM practices (Training and Development, Performance Management, Health and Safety, Compensation and Benefits, Technology Integration) significantly influence player performance.

To evaluate the strength and significance of each HRM practice's contribution to performance outcomes.

To examine the collective effect of HRM practices on players' well-being and determine the most influential HRM factors affecting well-being.

To provide practical recommendations for enhancing HRM systems to improve player performance and well-being in Ethiopian football clubs.

To highlight areas requiring strategic improvement, particularly in performance management and health and safety measures.

To explore the relationship between HRM practices and player performance and well-being, informing policy and management strategies in sports organizations

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Global and regional evidence highlights the critical role of HRM practices in enhancing athletic performance, well-being, and retention. Structured recruitment, systematic

training and development, competitive compensation, and supportive organizational climates are associated with higher individual and team performance, reduced turnover, and increased motivation (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Lepak & Snell, 2002; Taylor et al., 2017). In African football, clubs implementing professional HRM approaches tend to maintain more stable squads, achieve consistent competitive outcomes, and foster player growth capable of performing at international levels (Obukadeta et al., 2020).

Moreover, the effectiveness of HRM interventions is often contingent upon moderating factors such as leadership quality, club culture, and player motivation (Hsiao & Blokhuis, 2018). Even well-designed performance management systems may fail to produce desired outcomes in clubs with weak leadership or misaligned organizational culture. Likewise, players with higher intrinsic motivation are more likely to respond positively to HRM initiatives compared to less motivated players. These moderating factors highlight the importance of investigating not only the direct effects of HRM practices but also the conditions under which they influence performance and well-being.

Various theoretical frameworks or models are suggested by various scholars in order to critically investigate the relations of HRM and players' performance and well-being. Contemporarily, the most popular framework is the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework, which provides a robust perspective for understanding how HRM practices influence performance (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). According to AMO theory, performance is a function of an employee's Ability (A), Motivation (M), and the Opportunity (O) to participate (Appelbaum et al., 2000). In a football context, Training and Development directly enhances players' Ability by building their technical, tactical, and physical capital (Fullagar et al., 2019). Compensation and Benefits are central to Motivation, serving as both a hygiene factor and a lever for incentivizing effort and commitment (Dessler, 2013; Taylor & McGraw, 2006). Health and Safety practices and Technology Integration primarily provide the Opportunity to perform by creating a safe, supportive, and data-informed environment that enables players to apply their skills effectively without undue risk (Gullich et al., 2023; Kellmann & Beckmann, 2018).

In addition, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, Bakker and Demerouti (2017), offers a complementary perspective on well-being, positing that resources like health support and fair compensation buffer against job demands and prevent burnout. While the relation of HRM to performance is well-documented in business literature (Wright & Nishii, 2005), its application to the dual outcomes of performance and well-being in Ethiopian as well as African sports remains understudied (Obukadeta et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, for this study, the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework is adopted because the present small-scale study is delimited to only examining the relations of HRM practices prevalent in the context of the study area vis-à-vis the key variables of player performance

and player well-being. This study assumes that HRM practices contribute to players' Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity, while the AMO Framework also serves as a critical Lens for understanding issues of well-being and sustainable player development.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

The study was conducted in the year 2024/25 from October to June. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to conduct the study in the specific context of Ethiopian Premier League clubs. A cross-sectional survey helps to analyze data from a sample population at a specific moment. Particularly, this design is useful to assess the prevalent HRM practice and the outcomes in terms of the key variables of Player Performance and Player Well-being.

In line with the objective of the study, it provides a snapshot of the clubs' players, along with the two key variables.

**Population and Sampling**

The study targeted all 18 Ethiopian Premier League football clubs participating in the 2024/2025 season, comprising 498 officially registered players. But, only 13 clubs granted permission to participate in the study, while 5 clubs were excluded due to their non-consent. Consequently, the accessible population consisted of 367 registered players from the 13 consenting clubs. Despite attempts were made to involve the entire population through census sampling, only a total of 242 players who properly completed and returned the data collection instrument (questionnaire) were retained as sample participants.

**Table 1: Participant Clubs, Number of Questionnaire Copies Distributed and Returned**

S/NO	Participant Football Clubs	Officially registered Players	Returned Copies	valid for analysis
	Adama Ketema <i>FC</i>	32	17	17
	Arbaminch <i>FC</i>	28	10	10
	Bahir Dar Ketema <i>FC</i>	26	21	21
	Ethiopia Nigd Bank <i>SA</i>	26	21	21
	Dire Dawa Ketema <i>SC</i>	26	12	12
	Wolayita Dica <i>SC</i>	27	24	24
	Ethiopia Bunna <i>SC</i>	28	22	22
	Fasil Kenema <i>FC</i>	27	22	22
	Hadiya Hossana <i>FC</i>	29	25	25
	Mechal <i>SC</i>	27	16	16
	Mekelle Enderta <i>SC</i>	28	10	10
	Suhul Shire <i>FC</i>	35	25	25
	Sidama Bunna <i>SC</i>	28	17	17
	<b>Total</b>	367	<b>242</b>	<b>242</b>

**Ethical Considerations**

The study was reviewed according to *Mekelle University Research Ethics Review Guidelines* and was approved by the Mekelle University Ethical Review Committee. The objective of the study was explained to each participant. All volunteer participants signed written informed consent. Privacy and anonymity of respondents were assured. Personal identifiers were not used. All information was kept confidential.

**Methods of Data Collection**

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed based on critical reading of key literature (Arnold et al., 2017; Dart, 2014; Gulliver et al., 2012; Meyer, 1990; Pelletier et al., 2013; Reardon et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2015). The questionnaire, which has eight parts, addresses demographic information and HRM practices along the categories of training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, health and safety, and technology integration. A total of 367 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, but 125 were eliminated because some did not return, others skipped some or several items, or did not respond. Finally, all the 242 copies were

returned with full responses and retained as the sample size or participants for the study.

**Statistical Analysis**

To examine the relationships between prevalent HRM practice and the outcomes of the two key variables, player performance and player well-being, multiple regression analyses were conducted, taking into assumption the predictor variables of: training and development, performance management, health and safety, compensation and benefits, and technology integration. Pre-analysis screening was carried out with SPSS 27 to test assumptions of multicollinearity and normality. Multicollinearity was not evidenced among predictor variables, and the data were normally distributed.

**Results and Discussion**

**Regression Analysis: HRM Practices on Player Performance**

The multiple regression analysis examining the combined influence of human resource management practices on player performance was statistically significant,  $F(5,236) = 19.426, p < 0.01$ . The analysis explained 29.2% ( $R^2 = .292$ ) of the variance in player performance, suggesting that almost one-third of the differences in player

outcomes among clubs can be attributed to variations in HRM practices.

**HRM Practices statistical results**

The multiple regression analysis ( $R = .540$ ,  $R^2 = .292$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .277$ ,  $F(5,236) = 19.426$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicates that approximately 29% of the variation in players' on-field

performance is explained by the combined effects of the HRM practices examined. This confirms that HRM functions collectively play a significant role in influencing how players perform in Ethiopian Premier League clubs. However, the strength of influence varies among the different HRM practices, as discussed below.

**Table 1: Multiple Regression results for On-Field Performance**

HRM practices	B	SE	95% CI		B	P
			LL	UL		
Training and Development	0.24	0.09	0.07	0.42	0.19	0.01
Performance management	0.16	.012	-0.08	0.04	0.12	0.18
Health and Safety	-0.03	0.08	-0.19	0.13	-0.03	0.73
Compensation and Benefits	0.16	0.06	0.04	0.27	0.18	0.01
Technology Integration	0.23	0.08	0.07	0.38	0.24	0.001

Model Fit:  $R = .540$ ,  $R^2 = .292$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .277$ ,  $F(5,236) = 19.426$ ,  $p < .001$

**Training and Development**

The results show a statistically significant and positive effect on players' on-field performance ( $B = 0.24$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $t = 2.76$ ,  $p = .01$ ). This suggests that clubs with well-organized training and development programs are more likely to enhance their players' performance. According to Armstrong (2006), continuous training and development are crucial for improving employees' competencies, motivation, and performance outcomes. In the context of sport organizations, effective player development initiatives build both technical and psychological readiness (Taylor & McGraw, 2006). Overall, the Training and Development practice ETHPL can be rated as **excellent**, showing strong implementation and positive outcomes across clubs.

**Performance Management**

Although the coefficient is positive ( $B = 0.16$ ,  $\beta = .12$ ), the relationship is not statistically significant ( $p = .18$ ). This means that performance management systems are present but are not producing a consistent or measurable impact on players' in-field performance. This result may reflect limited participatory evaluation processes or inconsistent application of feedback systems, a challenge also identified by Ratten and Ferreira (2017) in African sport organizations; Aguinis et al. (2011) note that performance management adds value not only through evaluation but through ongoing feedback, goal alignment, and performance coaching. In general, the present study indicates that Performance Management is rated qualitatively as fair, indicating moderate effectiveness requiring better structure and follow-up.

**Health and Safety**

The current study seems to show that the relationship between Health and Safety and player performance is negative and not significant ( $B = -0.03$ ,  $\beta = .03$ ,  $t = -0.35$ ,  $p = .73$ ). This means that current health and safety measures are not effectively contributing to player performance. Maintaining a safe and healthy environment is a basic HRM responsibility that directly affects employee morale and productivity (Arnold et al., 2017; Dessler, 2013). In sports, inadequate medical care, poor injury management, or neglect of psychological support can reduce player readiness and increase performance risk (Reardon & Factor,

2010). The present study seems to show that in the study area, Health and Safety in ETHPL's HRM practice can be qualitatively rated as poor, reflecting an area that requires urgent strategic improvement.

**Compensation and Benefits**

The results of this study show that the Compensation and Benefits in ETHPL's HRM practice exert a significant positive effect on in-field performance of the players ( $B = 0.16$ ,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 2.62$ ,  $p = .01$ ). What this means is that when players perceive fair and motivating pay structures, bonuses, and benefits, their performance improves. This agrees with Gerhart and Milkovich (1990), who argue that effective compensation systems serve as powerful motivational drivers and enhance employee engagement and retention. In the sports setting, fair pay and incentives can strengthen players' psychological commitment and effort (Taylor et al., 2015). In general, as regards Compensation and Benefits, the HRM practice can be rated as good, indicating meaningful influence on player motivation and productivity.

**Technology Integration**

Technology Integration is one of the features of good HRM practices. Accordingly, to examine this in the ETHPL clubs was one of the objectives of this study. The results exhibit a strong and highly significant positive relations with the players' performance ( $B = 0.23$ ,  $\beta = .24$ ,  $t = 2.91$ ,  $p = .00$ ). This finding suggests that clubs that adopt modern technologies—such as performance analysis systems, GPS tracking, fitness monitoring devices, and digital communication tools—gain a distinct competitive advantage in player development and performance management. As Ratten (2019) emphasizes, technological innovation in sports enhances efficiency, decision-making, and competitive outcomes. In the current study, Technology Integration in ETHPL's HRM practice can safely be rated as excellent, reflecting high effectiveness and strong association with improved on-field results.

**Multiple Linear Regression results for Well-Being**

The variables predicting player well-being were also statistically significant,  $F(5,236) = 108.523$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , explaining 69.7% ( $R^2 = .697$ ) of the variance in well-being scores. This suggests that HRM practices collectively have

a very strong influence on players' physical, psychological, and social well-being within their clubs.

**Table 2: Multiple Regression results for Player Well-being**

HRM practices	B	SE	95% CI		B	P
			LL	UL		
Training and Development	0.17	0.07	0.04	0.29	0.12	0.01
Performance management	0.12	0.09	-0.05	0.30	0.08	0.16
Health and Safety	0.50	0.06	0.38	0.61	0.47	0.001
Compensation and Benefits	0.18	0.04	0.09	0.26	0.18	0.001
Technology Integration	0.20	0.06	0.09	0.31	0.18	0.001

Model Fit: R = .835, R<sup>2</sup> = .697, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .690, F(5,236) = 108.523, p < .001

From the Human resource practices, Health and Safety ( $\beta = .465, p < .001$ ) was the most powerful determinant of player well-being, followed by Compensation and Benefits ( $\beta = .180, p < .001$ ), Technology Integration ( $\beta = .183, p = .001$ ), and Training and Development ( $\beta = .115, p = .011$ ). These findings indicate that well-being is most enhanced when players perceive a safe working environment, fair compensation, continuous development opportunities, and effective use of modern technology to support their training and communication.

In contrast, Performance Management ( $\beta = .079, p = .164$ ) was not a significant predictor, implying that evaluation systems alone, without supportive structures, do not directly enhance well-being. The high R<sup>2</sup> (0.697) underscores that nearly 70% of the variation in well-being is explained by the prevalent HRM practices.

In a nutshell, the results show that health and safety, fair compensation, and modern technological integration are essential pillars for ensuring holistic player well-being and sustained motivation within professional clubs. The regression analyses demonstrate that HRM practices have a significant and multidimensional impact on performance outcomes across Ethiopian Premier League clubs.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Overall, the findings show that improving HRM systems across all dimensions, addressing weaknesses in performance management and health and safety, can significantly improve on-field performance and sustainability of professional football clubs in Ethiopia.

The study has important implications for future research, club managers, and policymakers. Managers should integrate GPS tracking, video analytics, and injury prevention technologies into regular training programs. Ensure transparent, performance-linked, and equitable reward systems to enhance player well-being and performance. Policymakers should establish minimum HRM standards as part of club licensing requirements and facilitate partnerships with universities for data-driven talent development and performance research.

Finally, it is noteworthy that this study is not without limitations. The first limitation is that the data source was only from Premier League clubs. The second limitation is that the research used player perception for in-field performance, which might bias the data to some extent. Therefore, future researchers should explore further the

effects of HRM practices on player performance trends using gender dynamics in HRM effectiveness across men's and women's leagues.

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