

The Role of Employment Policies in Improving Performance in the Healthcare Sector

AHMED SUWAILEM ALSHARARI*

***Health Services and Hospitals Management**

MAJED SABEAH ALSHARARI**

**** Male Nursing Assistant**

TALAL ABDULLAH ALSHARARI ***

***** Male Nursing Assistant**

NAWAF MOHAMMED ALSHARARI****

****** Male Nursing Assistant**

HAMOUD FURAYJ ALSHARARI*****

******* Male Nursing Technician**

ABDULRAHMAN SALEH ALSHARARI*****

******* Male Nursing Technician**

Dr./ Eman Mohamed ELNopy Mohamed*****

******* Bachelor of Pharmacy (Pharm D -Clinical)**

Abstract- The healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia has experienced significant growth and development in recent years, driven by the government's Vision 2030 initiative and ongoing reforms aimed at improving healthcare quality and accessibility. Employment policies play a critical role in enhancing the performance of healthcare institutions by ensuring effective human resource management, attracting skilled professionals, and promoting employee motivation and satisfaction. This study examines the impact of various employment policies—including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and employee retention strategies—on the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare services in Saudi Arabia. Through a review of recent literature, official reports, and case studies from major Saudi hospitals, the research highlights how well-structured employment policies contribute to higher productivity, improved patient care, and reduced staff turnover. The findings indicate that clear policies, equitable treatment, continuous professional development, and incentive systems are essential for optimizing workforce performance in the healthcare sector. The study concludes by recommending that Saudi healthcare organizations adopt comprehensive employment policies aligned with strategic objectives to ensure sustainable performance improvement and the achievement of national health goals.

Keywords: Employment Policies, Healthcare Sector, Performance Improvement, Human Resource Management, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction:

The healthcare sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) represents one of the fastest-growing components of the national economy and a central pillar of Vision 2030, which prioritizes a sustainable, high-quality health system geared toward improved outcomes for citizens and residents alike. Rapid workforce expansion — with more than 134,000 new healthcare jobs created in 2024 alone — underscores both opportunity and challenge in aligning human resource policies with performance goals.

Employment policies in healthcare refer to the formal strategies, regulations, and practices that govern the recruitment, retention, training, compensation, and performance management of healthcare workers. These policies are essential not just to staffing levels, but also to workforce motivation, competency development, and the overall quality of service delivery. Because Saudi Arabia faces a persistent reliance on expatriate healthcare workers, employment policy reform has become a strategic instrument for both national capacity building and organizational performance enhancement.

This chapter reviews key theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and Saudi-specific evidence on how employment policies influence healthcare performance, with an emphasis on nationalization (Saudization), human resource management strategies, and their effects on both individual and organizational outcomes.

2. Theoretical Framework:

2.1 Definitions of Core Concepts:

Employment Policies:

Employment policies encompass formal rules and practices that shape the management of human resources. They include recruitment and selection procedures, compensation and benefits frameworks, training and development programs, performance evaluations, and retention strategies. Effective employment policies are known to influence both individual and organizational performance within service sectors such as healthcare.

Healthcare Performance:

Healthcare performance refers to the extent to which health institutions achieve objectives related to efficiency, quality of care, patient satisfaction, and clinical outcomes. Performance is influenced by workforce competencies, motivation, work environment, and leadership — all of which interact with employment policy design. Scholars argue that employment policies directly impact organizational effectiveness through workforce stability and productivity. (Armstrong, 2014; Boxall & Purcell, 2011)

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives Linking Employment Policies to Performance:

Human Resource Management Theory:

Human resource management theory posits that strategic alignment between workforce policies and organizational goals leads to higher job performance and institutional effectiveness. In healthcare, this theory emphasizes how recruitment, training, rewards, and performance appraisal systems foster skilled, motivated employees capable of meeting clinical and administrative goals.

Motivation Theories:

Classic theories of motivation — such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory — contribute to understanding why employees perform differently under varying policy environments. Competitive compensation, opportunities for professional growth, and supportive work conditions address both physiological and psychological needs, thus enhancing employee satisfaction and performance.

Policy Implementation Theories:

Policy implementation frameworks explain how policy design, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement affect outcomes. In the Saudi context, the implementation of Saudization targets requires substantial organizational adjustments across private and public health facilities, influencing workforce composition and performance dynamics.

3. Saudi Arabia's Healthcare Workforce Policies:

3.1 Saudization in Healthcare:

Saudization — the policy of increasing the participation of Saudi nationals in the workforce — has become a cornerstone of healthcare employment policy. The Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, together with the Ministry of Health, initiated phased Saudization requirements for key healthcare professions, targeting workforce localization in fields such as therapeutic nutrition (80 %), physiotherapy (80 %), medical laboratories (70 %), and radiology (65 %). Minimum wage thresholds (e.g., SAR 7,000 for specialists and SAR 5,000 for technicians) were also introduced as incentives for national participation.

The rationale for these policies is multifold: reducing reliance on expatriate workers, building local competencies, and improving workforce stability — all of which are linked to performance goals under Vision 2030. However, despite policy mandates, empirical evidence suggests low baseline Saudization rates in many health facilities, highlighting gaps between policy ambition and actual workforce transformation.

3.2 Workforce Growth and Sector Strategy:

The Saudi healthcare sector has experienced robust workforce growth: in 2024, the total number of healthcare practitioners increased by approximately 24 % compared to the previous year, adding an average of 367 new hires per day. This surge reflects strategic investment in infrastructure expansion, increased capacity, and an emphasis on human capital development as part of economic diversification efforts.

4. Empirical Evidence on Employment Policies and Performance in Saudi Healthcare:

4.1 Workforce Composition and Skills:

Elsheikh et al. (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study of healthcare workers in Najran and found that Saudi nationals comprised only 17 % of the workforce, with a dominance of expatriates in basic healthcare roles. Among Saudi workers, female participation was particularly low despite high overall female representation in the sample. The authors concluded that hiring policies must be strengthened to prioritize national recruitment and capacity development while reserving expatriate hiring for highly skilled or scarce specialties.



4.2 Motivation and Performance:

A descriptive study on motivation policies in the Union of Health Work Committees in Al-Jouf revealed that financial, moral, and social incentives significantly improved employee performance dimensions such as quality, productivity, and responsiveness. The study suggested that motivation policies are crucial levers for enhancing performance, particularly when formal performance appraisal and reward systems are integrated into organizational practice.

4.3 Work Environment and Nurse Performance:

Research on the Saudi healthcare work environment demonstrated that factors such as training opportunities, incentives, technological support, and participative decision-making significantly influence nurse performance in government hospitals. According to the descriptive-analytic survey, variations in environmental conditions explained nearly 90 % of the variance in performance outcomes among nurses, underscoring the importance of policy-driven environmental improvements.

5. Discussion: Policies, Performance, and Strategic Challenges:

The reviewed evidence suggests that employment policies in Saudi Arabia — especially Saudization targets and incentive frameworks — play a substantial role in shaping workforce composition and performance.

However:

- **National workforce development is uneven**, with low baseline localization in many regions and specialties despite policy mandates.

Motivational and work environment factors are critical non-financial determinants of performance, often interacting with policy interventions to produce outcomes.

- **Implementation gaps remain**, partly due to capacity constraints, educational pipelines, and institutional adaptation challenges.

6. Employment Policies and Healthcare Performance: Conceptual Linkages:

Employment policies in healthcare institutions are widely recognized as a core determinant of organizational effectiveness and service quality. In the Saudi healthcare context, these policies serve both operational and strategic purposes, including workforce nationalization, quality assurance, and sustainability under Vision 2030.

7.1 Recruitment and Selection Policies:

Recruitment and selection policies determine the quality and suitability of healthcare professionals entering the system. In Saudi Arabia, recruitment policies are influenced by Saudization targets, professional licensing requirements, and educational capacity.

Several studies indicate that effective recruitment policies improve organizational performance by ensuring competency alignment and reducing turnover. According to Al-Ahmadi (2019), healthcare institutions in Saudi Arabia that adopted structured recruitment systems demonstrated higher staff productivity and improved patient satisfaction indicators.

Furthermore, workforce localization policies have reshaped recruitment strategies, encouraging hospitals to prioritize Saudi nationals while maintaining service quality. However, challenges persist in specialized medical fields where local supply remains limited (Elsheikh et al., 2018).

7.2 Training and Development Policies:

Training and development policies are critical for maintaining clinical competency, technological adaptation, and continuous improvement in healthcare delivery. In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Health has invested heavily in professional development programs aligned with international standards.

Empirical evidence suggests a strong positive relationship between training policies and employee performance. Al-Dossary et al. (2020) found that continuous professional development programs significantly enhanced nurses' clinical performance and adherence to quality standards in Saudi public hospitals.

Moreover, training policies contribute to workforce retention by increasing job satisfaction and career progression opportunities, particularly among Saudi nationals entering the healthcare workforce.

7.3 Compensation, Incentives, and Job Satisfaction:

Compensation and incentive policies play a decisive role in motivating healthcare workers and enhancing performance outcomes. In Saudi Arabia, employment policies increasingly emphasize competitive wages, allowances, and non-financial incentives to attract and retain skilled professionals.

A study conducted by Al-Mutairi (2021) revealed that financial incentives and recognition programs positively influenced healthcare workers' commitment and performance levels. The study also highlighted that moral incentives, such as appreciation and professional respect, were equally important in sustaining motivation.

Job satisfaction has been consistently linked to performance in Saudi healthcare settings. Employees who perceived fairness in compensation and promotion policies exhibited higher productivity and lower absenteeism rates (Al-Juhani & Kishk, 2019).

7.4 Work Environment and Organizational Climate:

The healthcare work environment encompasses physical conditions, leadership style, communication patterns, and institutional support. Employment policies that foster a supportive and participatory environment contribute significantly to employee performance.

Research conducted in Saudi government hospitals demonstrated that favorable work environments — supported by clear employment policies — explained a substantial proportion of variance in nurses' performance outcomes (Al-Otaibi et al., 2023). Policies promoting teamwork, workload balance, and occupational safety were identified as key performance drivers.

8. Review of Previous Studies (Saudi Context):

8.1 Studies on Employment Policies and Performance:

Study 1: Al-Ahmadi (2019) examined the impact of human resource policies on organizational performance in Saudi hospitals using a descriptive-analytical approach. The study found that recruitment, training, and performance appraisal policies significantly improved service quality and operational efficiency.

Study 2: Elsheikh et al. (2018) analyzed the healthcare workforce under Saudi Vision 2030 and highlighted the role of employment policies in shaping workforce composition. The study concluded that localization policies positively affect long-term performance but require supportive training and incentive frameworks.

8.2 Studies on Motivation and Job Satisfaction:

Study 3: Al-Mutairi (2021) investigated the relationship between incentive systems and job performance among healthcare employees in Saudi Arabia. Results indicated a strong positive correlation between motivation policies and performance indicators such as productivity and service quality.

Study 4: Al-Juhani and Kishk (2019) explored job satisfaction among healthcare workers and found that transparent employment policies significantly enhanced satisfaction and organizational commitment.

8.3 Studies on Training and Professional Development:

Study 5: Al-Dossary et al. (2020) studied the effect of professional training programs on nurses' performance in Saudi hospitals. The findings confirmed that structured training policies improved clinical competence and reduced medical errors.

9. Synthesis of Literature and Research Gap:

The reviewed literature demonstrates a strong consensus that employment policies significantly influence healthcare performance in Saudi Arabia. Recruitment quality, training effectiveness, compensation fairness, and work environment support emerge as key determinants of performance.

However, several research gaps remain:

- Limited empirical studies integrating **Saudization policies** with **performance outcomes**.
- Insufficient longitudinal research assessing long-term effects of employment policy reforms.
- Lack of comparative studies between public and private healthcare institutions in Saudi Arabia.

These gaps highlight the need for further research to evaluate policy effectiveness within the broader framework of Vision 2030.

10. Conclusion of Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies:

Employment policies represent a strategic mechanism for improving healthcare performance in Saudi Arabia. Theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence confirm that well-designed and effectively implemented policies enhance workforce motivation, competency, and organizational outcomes.

The integration of Saudization, professional development, incentive systems, and supportive work environments forms a comprehensive policy framework capable of driving sustainable performance improvements in the Saudi healthcare sector.

Strategic Employment Policies under Saudi Vision 2030:

Saudi Vision 2030 places human capital development at the center of healthcare system reform. Employment policies are no longer viewed merely as administrative tools, but as strategic mechanisms for improving efficiency, quality of care, and institutional sustainability.

The transformation of the healthcare sector emphasizes:

- Workforce localization (Saudization)
- Performance-based management
- Competency development
- Institutional accountability

According to the Ministry of Health (2022), improving workforce performance is essential for achieving universal access, patient-centered care, and financial sustainability.

11.1 Saudization as a Strategic Employment Policy:

Saudization policies aim to increase the employment of Saudi nationals across healthcare professions. These policies are intended to:

- Reduce dependency on expatriate labor
- Build national expertise
- Enhance workforce stability

However, several studies indicate that Saudization alone does not automatically improve performance unless supported by effective training and incentive systems. Elsheikh et al. (2018) argue that rapid localization without adequate preparation may initially affect service efficiency, particularly in specialized medical fields.

Conversely, Al-Hanawi et al. (2020) found that institutions investing in structured onboarding and mentoring programs for Saudi employees experienced improved performance indicators over time.

11.2 Performance Management Policies:

Performance management systems are essential components of employment policies in healthcare organizations. These systems typically include:

- Performance appraisal
- Feedback mechanisms
- Promotion and reward systems

In Saudi healthcare institutions, performance-based evaluation has gained importance, especially following privatization initiatives and public-private partnerships.

A study by Al-Shammari (2021) revealed that healthcare organizations using objective performance indicators (KPIs) reported higher employee accountability and service quality. Performance appraisal policies were also found to enhance transparency and fairness, contributing to increased job satisfaction.

12. Employment Policies and Quality of Healthcare Services:

12.1 Impact on Patient Care Quality:

The quality of healthcare services is directly influenced by workforce performance. Employment policies affect patient outcomes through staff competence, motivation, and continuity of care.

Al-Ahmadi and Roland (2018) found that hospitals with comprehensive HR policies demonstrated:

- Lower patient waiting times
- Improved clinical outcomes
- Higher patient satisfaction rates

Training and development policies were particularly influential in improving adherence to clinical guidelines and reducing medical errors.

12.2 Employment Stability and Continuity of Care

Employment stability is a critical factor in healthcare performance. High turnover rates disrupt team cohesion and negatively affect patient safety.

Saudi studies indicate that employment policies promoting job security, career advancement, and work-life balance significantly reduce turnover intentions among healthcare workers (Almalki et al., 2017).

Stable employment environments foster long-term relationships between healthcare professionals and patients, contributing to trust and service quality.

13. Comparative Analysis: Public vs. Private Healthcare Sector:

Employment policies differ between public and private healthcare institutions in Saudi Arabia.

Public Sector:

- Strong job security
- Standardized compensation
- Limited performance-based incentives

Private Sector:

- Flexible recruitment
- Performance-linked pay
- Higher turnover rates

Al-Hanawi et al. (2019) found that private hospitals demonstrated higher productivity levels, while public hospitals showed greater workforce stability. The study emphasized the need for hybrid employment policies that balance stability with performance incentives.

14. Challenges Facing Employment Policy Implementation in Saudi Healthcare:

Despite policy advancements, several challenges persist:

14.1 Skills Gap:

Mismatch between educational outcomes and healthcare labor market needs remains a major issue.

14.2 Resistance to Change:

Organizational resistance affects the adoption of new performance-based systems.

14.3 Regional Disparities:

Healthcare facilities in remote regions face recruitment and retention difficulties despite national policies.

14.4 Gender Participation:

Although female participation has increased, cultural and institutional barriers still affect workforce integration (Alghamdi, 2020).

15. International Best Practices and Their Relevance to Saudi Arabia:

International healthcare systems emphasize:

- Continuous professional development
- Evidence-based HR policies
- Integrated performance management

The World Health Organization (2020) recommends aligning employment policies with national health strategies — an approach increasingly adopted in Saudi Arabia.

Benchmarking against OECD countries suggests that Saudi Arabia can further enhance performance by:

- Expanding leadership training
- Strengthening workforce analytics
- Enhancing employee engagement policies

16. Conceptual Model of the Study

Based on the reviewed literature, this study adopts a conceptual model in which:

Independent Variables:

- Recruitment and selection policies
- Training and development
- Compensation and incentives
- Performance appraisal
- Work environment policies

Dependent Variable:

- Healthcare sector performance (efficiency, quality, patient satisfaction)

Moderating Variables:

- Saudization policies
- Organizational culture

This model reflects the dynamic interaction between employment policies and performance outcomes in the Saudi healthcare sector.

17. Summary of Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies:

The theoretical framework and empirical evidence confirm that employment policies play a decisive role in improving healthcare performance in Saudi Arabia. Strategic alignment between policy design and institutional objectives enhances workforce effectiveness and service quality.

The reviewed studies collectively support the argument that:

- Employment policies are critical performance drivers
- Saudization requires complementary HR strategies
- Motivation and work environment significantly influence outcomes

Extended Review of Empirical Studies in the Saudi Healthcare Sector:

19.1 Studies on Human Resource Planning and Workforce Performance

Human resource planning (HRP) is a foundational element of employment policies, particularly in healthcare systems experiencing rapid expansion such as Saudi Arabia. HRP focuses on forecasting workforce needs, aligning staffing levels with service demand, and ensuring the availability of appropriate skills.

Al-Sharif et al. (2020) examined HR planning practices in Saudi public hospitals and found a statistically significant relationship between effective workforce planning and operational efficiency. Hospitals with structured HRP frameworks demonstrated lower staff shortages, improved shift coverage, and reduced burnout among healthcare workers.

The study emphasized that employment policies lacking long-term workforce planning often lead to inefficiencies, even when recruitment targets are met.

19.2 Studies on Leadership Policies and Performance Outcomes:

Leadership development policies are increasingly recognized as critical components of employment policy frameworks. In Saudi healthcare institutions, leadership competency has been linked to both employee engagement and patient outcomes.

According to Almutairi and Shamsan (2021), transformational leadership styles supported by formal leadership training policies positively influenced nurses' job performance and organizational commitment.

The study concluded that leadership policies indirectly enhance healthcare performance by fostering motivation, trust, and effective communication.

19.3 Studies on Employee Engagement and Retention:

Employee engagement policies aim to enhance emotional and professional attachment to the organization. In healthcare settings, engagement is closely tied to retention and service quality.

A cross-sectional study conducted by Albalawi et al. (2022) across multiple Saudi hospitals revealed that engagement-focused employment policies — such as participatory decision-making and recognition programs — significantly reduced turnover intentions among healthcare professionals.

The findings suggest that retention is not solely driven by financial incentives but also by inclusive and supportive policy environments.

20. Employment Policies and Healthcare Performance Indicators

20.1 Efficiency and Productivity:

Efficiency in healthcare refers to optimal use of human and material resources to deliver services. Employment policies affect efficiency through staffing models, workload distribution, and skill utilization.

Research by Al-Hanawi et al. (2021) demonstrated that hospitals implementing performance-based staffing policies achieved higher productivity rates and reduced overtime costs. The study highlighted that aligning employment policies with performance metrics enhances both cost-efficiency and service delivery.

20.2 Patient Satisfaction:

Patient satisfaction is a key performance indicator reflecting service quality, communication, and continuity of care. Employment policies influence satisfaction through workforce behavior and stability.

A survey-based study by Alqahtani et al. (2019) found that patient satisfaction scores were significantly higher in Saudi hospitals where employment policies emphasized training in communication skills and patient-centered care.

20.3 Quality and Safety Outcomes:

Healthcare quality and patient safety are directly linked to workforce competence and compliance with standards. Employment policies governing training, supervision, and evaluation play a critical role in minimizing clinical errors.

Al-Dossary et al. (2020) reported that hospitals with mandatory continuous education policies recorded fewer adverse events and higher compliance with clinical protocols.

21. Proposed Research Hypotheses:

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Employment policies have a statistically significant positive effect on healthcare sector performance in Saudi Arabia.

H2: Recruitment and selection policies positively influence healthcare employee performance.

H3: Training and development policies significantly improve service quality and clinical outcomes.

H4: Compensation and incentive policies positively affect job satisfaction and employee productivity.

H5: Work environment policies have a significant impact on healthcare performance.

H6: Saudization policies moderate the relationship between employment policies and healthcare performance.

22. Conceptual Contribution of the Study:

This study contributes to existing literature by:

- Integrating **employment policy dimensions** with **performance indicators** in the Saudi healthcare sector.
- Examining **Saudization as a moderating variable**, rather than a standalone policy.
- Providing a **context-specific framework** aligned with Saudi Vision 2030.

Unlike previous studies that focused on isolated HR practices, this research adopts a comprehensive policy-based perspective.

23. Implications for Policy and Practice:

23.1 Policy Implications

The findings from the literature suggest that policymakers should:

- Align Saudization targets with education and training capacity
- Promote performance-based employment systems
- Strengthen leadership and engagement policies

23.2 Managerial Implications:

Healthcare managers should:

- Implement transparent appraisal systems
- Invest in continuous professional development
- Foster supportive and inclusive work environments

24. Limitations of Existing Literature:

Despite extensive research, existing studies show several limitations:

- Predominant use of cross-sectional designs
- Limited private-sector representation
- Insufficient focus on long-term policy impact

These limitations justify the need for further empirical investigation.

25. Chapter Summary:

This chapter reviewed theoretical foundations and empirical studies related to employment policies and healthcare performance in Saudi Arabia. The analysis confirms that employment policies are central to workforce effectiveness, service quality, and organizational sustainability.

The chapter establishes a strong foundation for the subsequent research methodology and empirical analysis.

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