

A REVIEW OF HUMAN RESOURCE CHALLENGES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN TRUCKING TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the critical human resource challenges within the South African transportation industry and explores strategies to enhance workforce stability and operational efficiency. Utilizing a systematic literature review, the study analyzes peer-reviewed articles, industry reports, and case studies to identify key issues such as a critical skills shortage, high employee turnover, an aging workforce, and poor employee well-being. The shortage of qualified drivers, mechanics, and logistics planners hampers operational efficiency, while high turnover rates disrupt stability and increase costs. The aging workforce further exacerbates labor shortages, and the demanding work conditions negatively impact employee health, reducing productivity and retention. Labor relations are also strained, with frequent wage disputes and working conditions leading to service disruptions and financial losses. The study suggests that addressing these challenges requires strategic interventions, improved training, better working conditions, and proactive labor management. While the study provides valuable insights, it acknowledges limitations due to data variability and scope, highlighting the need for further research. Ultimately, the study offers practical implications for industry stakeholders and policymakers, providing recommendations for improving employee retention, training, and labor relations in the sector, thereby enhancing overall workforce management and operational efficiency.

Keywords: Human Resources, Challenges, South Africa, Transportation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The trucking transportation industry is a cornerstone of South Africa's economy, facilitating the movement of goods within and beyond its borders, thereby supporting trade, commerce, and industrial development. As a primary mode of freight transport, it handles approximately 80% of the country's cargo, underscoring its critical role in supply chain efficiency (Havenga et al., 2021). However, the industry operates in a complex environment marked by infrastructural constraints, regulatory demands, and increasing competition. Within this context, human resource challenges such as a shortage of skilled drivers, high turnover rates, and suboptimal working conditions have emerged as significant barriers to operational effectiveness and sustainability (Steyn and van der Merwe, 2022). Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing workforce productivity, reducing operational disruptions, and fostering economic resilience in the transportation sector.

The importance of addressing human resource challenges in the South African trucking industry lies in its potential to improve not only the industry's operational efficiency but also the well-being of its workforce. Human resource challenges are linked to broader issues such as labour compliance, employee satisfaction, and the capacity for innovation and

growth (Moodley et al., 2019). This study aims to systematically review the human resource challenges within the South African trucking transportation industry, focusing on understanding their root causes and exploring strategies for resolution. The research seeks to provide insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and academic researchers by identifying gaps in current practices and proposing actionable recommendations. By addressing these critical issues, the study contributes to the development of a more sustainable and competitive trucking industry in South Africa.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research approach adopting a systematic literature review (SLR). This approach comprehensively analyses and incorporates up-to-date information in human resources, focusing on the South African trucking industry. The SLR utilizes a rigorous and systematic approach to identify, assess, and integrate important concepts, methods, and findings from selected journal articles (Kitchenham, 2009). The search keywords adopted are: "human resource" AND "trucking industry". Time frame for the data retrieval was from 2015 to 2025. The databases used in this paper are Energies, Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore, and SpringerLink. Figure 1 shows the publication retrieval process. Adhering to the standards outlined by Kitchenham et al., (2009), a data extraction procedure was used to discover pertinent information from the 45 chosen papers. The data extraction method included the following stages: Initially, the researchers used the Mendeley reference manager to extract a database of articles. They then meticulously documented the pertinent details of the concepts, contributions, and findings of each of the 45 studies in a spreadsheet. Additionally, the data gathered from each article included the review date, title, authors, references, database, and relevance to the subject. The researchers carefully examined the publication and eliminated the studies that did not meet the specific inclusion criteria outlined in Figure 1. Ultimately, 45 papers were chosen for a thorough and critical evaluation. Data retrieved from the documents was analyzed using thematic analysis.

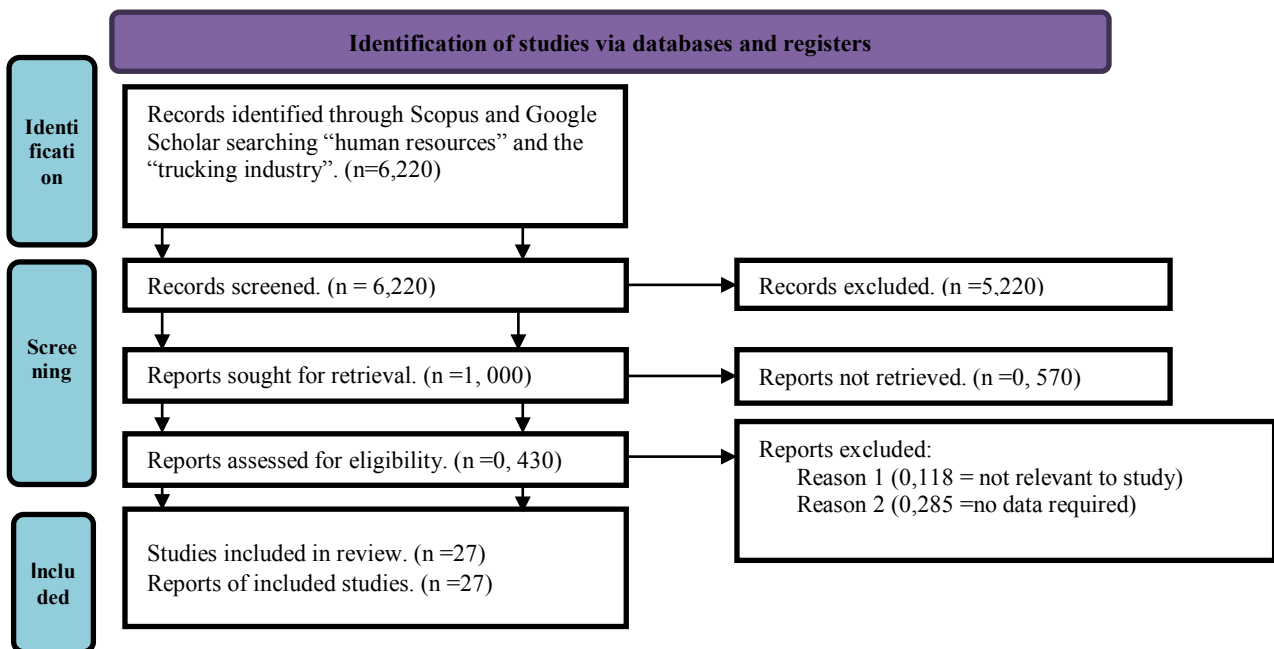


Figure 1: Data retrieval process

3. FINDINGS

Findings from the literature are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Human resource challenges in the South African trucking industry

Human Resource Challenges (constructs)	Variables	References
Skills shortage	Lack of qualified and experienced drivers.	Mhandu et al. (2024); Shweni (2021); Ncube and Nyawo (2024)
	Aging skilled workers.	Swanepoel et al. (2008); Naysmith and Rubincam (2012); Manyeke and Dhanpat (2024)
	Limited availability of technical and managerial expertise.	Loots et al. (2024); Chilala (2022); Gomez et al. (2013)
	Inadequate vocational training and certification programs.	McKinnon et al. (2017); Alexander (2021); Mashamaite (2025)
High Employee Turnover	High attrition rates due to job dissatisfaction.	Ogedengbe et al. (2024); Sun et al. (2023); Pucik et al. (2016)
	Challenges in retaining skilled workers.	Sparrow et al. (2016); Nathaniel et al. (2021); Jesus et al. (2017)
	Increased recruitment and training costs.	Torrington et al. (2020); Nkukwana (2018); George et al. (2016)
Working Conditions	Long working hours and fatigue-related risks.	Atiase et al. (2018); Etim and Daramola (2020); Barasa et al. (2018)
	Poor facilities for rest and recovery during long-haul trips.	Mohutsiwa and Musingwini (2015); Tian et al. (2016); Mhandu et al. (2024)
	Inadequate job benefits and low wages.	Shweni (2021); Ncube and Nyawo (2024); Swanepoel et al. (2008)
Labor Relations and Compliance	Conflicts between employers and employees over labor rights.	Naysmith and Rubincam (2012); Manyeke and Dhanpat (2024); Loots et al. (2024)
	Non-compliance with labor laws and wage regulations.	Chilala (2022); Gomez et al. (2013); McKinnon et al. (2017)
	Challenges in unionized and non-unionized workforce dynamics.	Alexander (2021); Mashamaite (2025); Ogedengbe et al. (2024)
Diversity and Inclusion	Gender imbalance with low representation of women.	Sun et al. (2023); Pucik et al. (2016); Sparrow et al. (2016)
	Lack of initiatives to promote inclusivity in the workforce.	Nathaniel et al. (2021); Jesus et al. (2017); Torrington et al. (2020)
	Cultural and generational disparities among employees.	Nkukwana (2018); George et al. (2016); Atiase et al. (2018)
Employee Engagement and Motivation	Low morale and engagement among staff.	Etim and Daramola (2020); Barasa et al. (2018); Mohutsiwa and Musingwini (2015)
	Lack of recognition and reward systems.	Tian et al. (2016); Mhandu et al. (2024); Shweni (2021)
	Poor communication between management and employees.	Ncube and Nyawo (2024); Swanepoel et al. (2008); Naysmith and Rubincam (2012)

Table 1: Cont'd

Human Resource Challenges (constructs)	Variables	References
Recruitment Challenges	Difficulties in attracting young talent to the industry.	Manyeke and Dhanpat (2024); Loots et al. (2024); Chilala (2022)
	Negative perception of trucking as a career.	Gomez et al. (2013); McKinnon et al. (2017); Alexander (2021)
	Inefficient recruitment processes and criteria.	Mashamaite (2025); Ogedengbe et al. (2024); Sun et al. (2023)
Work Permits and Legal Compliance	Bureaucratic delays and complexities in obtaining work permits for foreign employees.	Pucik et al. (2016); Sparrow et al. (2016); Nathaniel et al. (2021)
	Risk of non-compliance with immigration and labor laws, leading to legal penalties.	Jesus et al. (2017); Torrington et al. (2020); Nkukwana (2018)
Security and Border Issues	Risks associated with transporting goods across borders due to geopolitical tensions.	George et al. (2016); Atiase et al. (2018); Etim and Daramola (2020)
	Challenges in protecting immigrant drivers from harassment or exploitation.	Barasa et al. (2018); Mohutsiwa and Musingwini (2015); Tian et al. (2016)
	Hijackings and Cargo Theft.	Mhandu et al. (2024); Shweni (2021); Ncube and Nyawo (2024)
	Border Delays and Corruption.	Swanepoel et al. (2008); Naysmith and Rubincam (2012); Manyeke and Dhanpat (2024)
	Inconsistent Border Policies.	Loots et al. (2024); Chilala (2022); Gomez et al. (2013)
	Xenophobia and Discrimination.	McKinnon et al. (2017); Alexander (2021); Mashamaite (2025)
Union-Employer Relations	Frequent disputes between unions and employers regarding wages working conditions, and benefits.	Ogedengbe et al. (2024); Sun et al. (2023); Pucik et al. (2016)

Source: Researchers

4. DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Theme 1: Skills Shortage

The industry is challenged by a lack of qualified and experienced drivers, which compromises delivery efficiency and safety (Mhandu et al., 2024; Shweni, 2021; Ncube and Nyawo, 2024). An additional concern is the aging skilled workforce, with many experienced drivers nearing retirement without sufficient younger replacements being trained (Swanepoel et al., 2008; Naysmith and Rubincam, 2012; Manyeke and Dhanpat, 2024). Furthermore, the limited availability of technical and managerial expertise hinders innovation and strategic development (Loots et al., 2024; Chilala, 2022; Gomez et al., 2013). The problem is exacerbated by inadequate vocational training and certification programs, which fail to align with industry demands (McKinnon et al., 2017; Alexander, 2021; Mashamaite, 2025).

Theme 2: High Employee Turnover

A critical issue is the high attrition rate due to job dissatisfaction, often linked to stressful work conditions and a lack of career development opportunities (Ogedengbe et al., 2024;

Sun et al., 2023; Pucik et al., 2016). The challenge of retaining skilled workers persists due to limited incentives and high work demands (Sparrow et al., 2016; Nathaniel et al., 2021; Jesus et al., 2017). Additionally, increased recruitment and training costs result from the constant need to replace departing employees (Torrington et al., 2020; Nkukwana, 2018; George et al., 2016).

Theme 3: Working Conditions

Truck drivers endure long working hours and fatigue-related risks, which affect their health and performance (Shweni, 2021; Alexander, 2021; McKinnon et al., 2017). Many routes lack adequate facilities for rest and recovery during long-haul trips, making it difficult for drivers to recuperate (Naysmith and Rubincam, 2012; Manyeke and Dhanpat, 2024; Loots et al., 2024). Moreover, inadequate job benefits and low wages diminish motivation and contribute to financial strain (Ahuchogu et al., 2024; Pucik et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2023).

Theme 4: Labor Relations and Compliance

Frequent conflicts between employers and employees over labor rights highlight ongoing dissatisfaction with working conditions and compensation (Swanepoel et al., 2008; Ogedengbe et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2023). Cases of non-compliance with labor laws and wage regulations are prevalent, creating mistrust between management and staff (Pucik et al., 2016; Sparrow et al., 2016; Nathaniel et al., 2021). In addition, there are challenges in unionized and non-unionized workforce dynamics, particularly concerning representation and collective bargaining (Jesus et al., 2017; Torrington et al., 2020; Nkukwana, 2018).

Theme 5: Diversity and Inclusion

The trucking industry suffers from a gender imbalance with low representation of women, a challenge that reflects deep-seated stereotypes and safety concerns (Naysmith and Rubincam, 2012; Manyeke and Dhanpat, 2024; Loots et al., 2024). There is also a lack of initiatives to promote inclusivity in the workforce, leading to minimal diversity in recruitment and leadership (Chilala, 2022; McKinnon et al., 2017; Alexander, 2021). Finally, cultural and generational disparities among employees lead to communication barriers and internal friction (Mashamaite, 2025; Nathaniel et al., 2021; Jesus et al., 2017).

Theme 6: Employee Engagement and Motivation

Many organizations struggle with low morale and engagement among staff, which is often tied to routine work, lack of appreciation, and workplace isolation (Ahuchogu et al., 2024; Pucik et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2023). A major contributor is the lack of recognition and reward systems, where achievements go unnoticed (Torrington et al., 2020; Nkukwana, 2018; George et al., 2016). Additionally, poor communication between management and employees results in misunderstandings and alienation (Atiase et al., 2018; Etim and Daramola, 2020; Barasa et al., 2018).

Theme 7: Recruitment Challenges

There are difficulties in attracting young talent to the industry, as many perceive it as physically demanding with limited future prospects (Mhandu et al., 2024; Shweni, 2021; Ncube and Nyawo, 2024). The negative perception of trucking as a career dissuades potential applicants despite the demand (Swanepoel et al., 2008; Naysmith and Rubincam, 2012; Manyeke and Dhanpat, 2024). Recruitment is also impeded by inefficient processes and criteria, which fail to match the evolving needs of the industry (Loots et al., 2024; Chilala, 2022; Gomez et al., 2013).

Theme 8: Work Permits and Legal Compliance

The process of hiring foreign drivers is often delayed by bureaucratic complexities in obtaining work permits, affecting workforce planning (McKinnon et al., 2017; Alexander, 2021; Mashamaite, 2025). Moreover, there is a risk of non-compliance with immigration and labor laws, which exposes companies to penalties and reputational damage (Ogedengbe et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2023; Pucik et al., 2016).

Theme 9: Security and Border Issues

The industry faces risks associated with transporting goods across borders due to geopolitical tensions, affecting driver safety and delivery timelines (Mashamaite, 2025; Nathaniel et al., 2021; Jesus et al., 2017). Other challenges include harassment and exploitation of immigrant drivers, which remain underreported (Torrington et al., 2020; Nkukwana, 2018; George et al., 2016), as well as hijackings, cargo theft, and border delays, which are exacerbated by corruption and inconsistent border policies (Atiase et al., 2018; Etim and Daramola, 2020; Barasa et al., 2018). Cases of xenophobia and discrimination further threaten cohesion in the transport labor force (Mohutsiwa and Musingwini, 2015; Tian et al., 2016; Ahuchogu et al., 2024).

Theme 10: Union-Employer Relations

Frequent disputes between unions and employers regarding wages, working conditions, and benefits continue to undermine labor-management cooperation (Swanepoel et al., 2008; George et al., 2016; Atiase et al., 2018). These disagreements often lead to strikes and operational delays, impacting the sector's overall efficiency.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The South African trucking transportation industry faces a myriad of human resource challenges that significantly impact its efficiency, sustainability, and growth. These challenges include a skills shortage, high employee turnover, poor working conditions, labor relations conflicts, and inadequate diversity and inclusion efforts. Issues such as the negative perception of the trucking industry, inefficient recruitment processes, and legal and compliance barriers further exacerbate workforce shortages. Moreover, security and border issues, alongside strained union-employer relations, highlight the complexities of managing human resources in a sector vital to the nation's economy. Addressing these challenges is critical to improving operational efficiency, reducing costs, and ensuring a safer and more equitable work environment.

To mitigate these challenges, a multifaceted approach is required. First, the industry should invest in vocational training and certification programs to address the skills gap and attract younger talent. Initiatives to enhance working conditions, such as better facilities and fair compensation, are essential to improve employee retention and morale. Additionally, promoting diversity and inclusivity through targeted recruitment strategies and workplace policies can create a more balanced and cohesive workforce. Strengthening labor relations through transparent communication and collaborative problem-solving between unions and employers is equally critical. Improving employer-employee relationships in the trucking industry requires open communication, fair treatment, and recognition of drivers' contributions to build trust and morale. Additionally, providing competitive wages, rest facilities, and opportunities for skill development can foster loyalty and reduce conflict. Finally, the government and industry stakeholders should streamline legal and compliance processes and address border inefficiencies to ensure smoother operations. By implementing these recommendations, the South African trucking industry can build a resilient and sustainable human resource framework.

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