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A Matter of Trust: A Social Exchange Perspective on the Effect of High-Performance Work Systems on Buxiban English Teachers

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Abstract Based on the social exchange theory, this study explores the relations between high-performance work systems (HPWS) and three employees' positive outcomes: strength use, job satisfaction, and job performance. This study collected 139 valid responses through Google online forms, and a quantitative approach was employed to analyze the data. Survey participants come from ten different countries, and slightly more than half of the respondents are Taiwanese. After analyzing 139 valid responses, the results reveal no direct effects of HPWS on strength use and job performance, respectively, but there is a positive association of HPWS with job satisfaction. When trust plays an underlying mechanism, HPWS is positively related to strength use, job satisfaction, and job performance, respectively. The study provides insight for English Buxiban owners, supervisors, and teachers to delve into high-performance work practices and inform that trust matters.

Keywords Social exchange theory; High-performance work systems (HPWS); Trust; Strength use; Job performance; Job satisfaction

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1. Introduction

With modernization and globalization in a rapidly changing environment, people in East Asian countries start learning English in the preschool educational phase. In a rapidly changing working environment, owners of Buxiban (after-school learning programs) know the importance of carrying out human resource (HR) practices to enhance organizational performance and care for Buxiban teachers' well-being. To our knowledge, little research pays attention to human resource management (HRM) in Buxibans. Much of the classic HRM literature has focused on improving employees' attitudes and behaviors, such as job satisfaction (e.g., Alothmany et al., 2023), organizational citizenship behaviors, and task performance (e.g., Edgar et al., 2021), in the eyes of organizations (e.g., Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). On the other hand, from employee perceptions of HR practices, high-performance work systems (HPWS) can assist organizations in improving individual job performance (e.g., Chang & Chen, 2011). HPWS has been shown to improve employee outcomes, such as commitment (e.g., Kim et al., 2024), engagement (e.g., Beltrán-Martín et al., 2023), job satisfaction (e.g., Alothmany et al., 2023), employee job performance (e.g., Wang & Chen, 2022), job involvement (e.g., Chen & Chen, 2023), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (e.g., Liu & Lin, 2021), and to decrease turnover intentions (e.g., Xi et al., 2021).

As the supplementary education industry in Taiwan is growing, there is a need for HRM systems to manage Buxiban teachers, a group of knowledge-based human capital. However, in Buxibans, little attention has been paid to HRM systems since Buxiban teachers usually go to workplaces when they have classes rather than full-time employees who attend work regularly. Thus, in this study, we utilized an inductive approach to propose a set of bundled HR practices (skill-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices; Jiang et al., 2012) to enhance Buxiban English teachers' overall teaching performance. Hence, under such unique employment, does the application of HPWS activate Buxiban English teachers' job performance, job satisfaction, and strength use? If yes, how? Hence, this study explores how HPWS results in Buxiban English teachers' job (teaching) performance, satisfaction, and strength use and the critical drivers to facilitate the effectiveness of HPWS implementation.

HPWS comprises a precise recruitment and selection process, incentive compensation systems based on performance, development and training activities, and commitment to employee involvement (Chuang et al., 2016). Thus, HPWS can create value for Buxibans by promoting knowledge delivery and enhancing job performance, job satisfaction, and strength use among Buxiban English teachers. Accordingly, this study adopts the social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964) as the overarching theoretical perspective to elucidate how trust builds up the exchanges between Buxiban owners and English teachers. SET assumes that all relationships among human beings are built on the equivalent value exchange (i.e., behavior, affection, products, and communications; Blau, 1964). In line with the assumptions, we proposed that trust entails the social and economic exchanges to influence employee working attitudes (e.g., Min et al., 2020) and behaviors.

Also, we suggest that trust plays a critical role in transmitting the effects of HPWS on Buxiban English teachers' job performance, job satisfaction, and strength use. Job performance is the work-related indicator of doing a job. Job satisfaction is defined by Hoppock (1935) as the combination of mental, physical, and environmental elements, making people genuinely think they are satisfied with their job. Therefore, job satisfaction is a profound feeling related to external and internal factors that satisfy the worker. Linley and Harrington (2006) defined strengths as the nature of humans to behave, think, and feel to pursue valued outcomes through optimal working and performing.

This research aims to investigate and unfold the black box through trust. To see whether HR practices can enhance positive teacher outcomes, we utilized social exchange theory to depict how HPWS activates Buxiban teachers' job performance, job satisfaction, and strength use. We also investigated the role of trust in the relationship between HPWS and those proposed performance outcomes. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of this research.

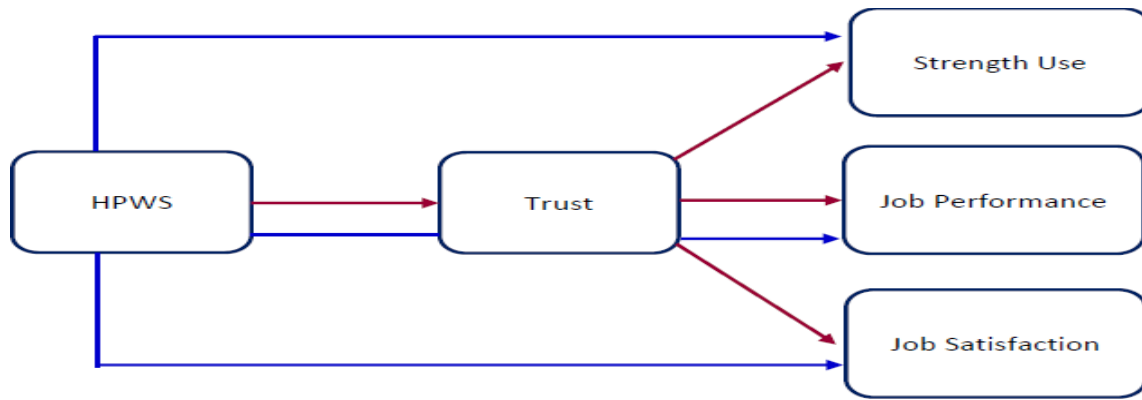


Figure 1. Research Model

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

A previous study (Beltrán-Martín et al., 2008) indicated that HPWS can increase customer service effectiveness. In line with the social exchange perspective, HPWS can generate employees' collective OCB (e.g., Gong et al., 2010). English teachers use their knowledge throughout the working process; their teaching can be said to be a kind of customer service. Similarly, we propose that HPWS may energize teachers to use their strengths in teaching. Skill-enhancing HR practices (recruitment, selection, testing, and training) may assist teachers in developing their teaching strengths. Further, motivation-enhancing HR practices (performance evaluation, payment, bonus, promotion, and career development) stimulate teachers to utilize enhanced strength, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices (information sharing, job design, work teams, or even complaint processes) offer the chance for teachers to demonstrate their strength. In such a way, Buxibans provide HR practices, and teachers give back better teaching performance, showing reciprocating relationships.

Among teaching strengths, this study investigates three teachers' performance outcomes: strength use, job performance, and job satisfaction. Job performance is associated with whether employees can tackle them. HPWS increases labor productivity and job performance (e.g., García-Juan et al., 2023).

English Buxiban teachers' tasks might vary when teaching different classes. As for Buxibans, giving teachers a specific goal or a challenging target might help boost their job performance.

Strength use refers to characteristics where the individual performs their best (Bakker & van Wingerden, 2021). Similarly, we suggest that Buxiban teachers can learn from HR practices to be proactive to increase their strengths. When employees use their strengths at work, they tend to achieve their goals and become more successful because this will provide them with better feedback and reduce task demands (Bakker, 2011). Considering these, using strength allows people to manage tasks more productively. Teaching English at Buxibans is not an exception to this concept, so using strength on a job can lead to extreme outcomes.

Some researchers found that HPWS positively relates to job satisfaction (e.g., García-Chas et al., 2016). Job satisfaction refers to the degree of preference of an individual towards their work (Shockley et al., 2015). Vandenberg et al. (1999) argued that HPWS indirectly influences job satisfaction. There are many ways to improve job satisfaction. Having a better working environment is essential to doing so (Copanitsanou et al., 2017). To sum up, we, therefore, propose the following hypotheses:

- H1a. : HPWS is related to employee strength use.
- H1b. : HPWS is related to employee job performance.
- H1c. : HPWS is related to employee job satisfaction.

Mayer et al. (1995) stated that trust is the core of human relationships, including partner relationships, family, business, politics, and medical practices. Trust depends on others from a behavioral perspective. Believing people are going to behave in specific ways is also trust. Trust is an abstract attitude about thinking someone is dependable and feeling secure in a partner's care. Trust can be seen in behaviors and verbal expressions. Trust refers to a person willing to expose oneself to vulnerable situations regardless of having the power to monitor or control the other side. Regarding the role of trust, Macky and Boxall (2007) found that HPWS positively relates to trust in management and

job satisfaction. Furthermore, implementing HPWS is also beneficial for both employees and employers. Trust was said to be the issue of whether an individual will cooperate with their organization (Fawcett et al., 2017). Kwon and Suh (2005) found that trust in HR is the main element for a successful supply chain. Fu et al. (2017) argued that HPWS helps to encourage mutual trust within an effective organization. We, therefore, propose the following hypotheses:

H2. : HPWS is related to trust.

H3a. : Trust is related to employee strength use.

H3b. : Trust is related to employee job performance.

H3c. : Trust is related to employee job satisfaction.

Trust emerges when both parties exchange and is said to be one out of two the most central parts of social exchange theory (SET) by Blau (1964). Dirks (2000) defined trust as anticipation or belief when an individual can depend on others' words and deeds and conceive others to have goodwill toward themselves. Trust can increase the cooperation between two parties (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), making the collaboration process more efficient and reducing supervision costs (Rousseau et al., 1998). Employees trust the boss and the organization based on a give-and-take relationship. Trust will be given as the employees receive the HR practices.

Performance systems build trust between the employer and employees. Companies provide training for employees, allowing them to develop skills and enhance themselves to get a high-paying position. This secures the employee without worrying about losing the job one day. Autonomy is another critical factor that affects satisfaction when conducting HR practices (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). With a higher level of trust, the employer will give more autonomy to its employees and manage to increase their fulfillment and satisfaction with their jobs. Human resources are related to interior motivations such as employee security, training, high-related payment, and practices that build trust, leading to better commitment and attachment (Shaw et al., 1998). To sum up, we, therefore, propose the following hypotheses:

H4a. : Trust mediates the relationship between HPWS and employee strength use.

H4b. : Trust mediates the relationship between HPWS and employee job performance.

H4c. : Trust mediates the relationship between HPWS and employee job satisfaction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and DataCollection

Data for this research was collected from Buxibans in Taiwan. The sample consisted of data from 139 teachers working in Buxiban around Taiwan; 85 teachers are local Taiwanese, and 54 are foreigners from 9 different countries. The online surveys asked teachers about their satisfaction, self-rated performance, strength use, trust toward managing directors, and perception of HR practices. The managing directors of Buxibans helped promote this online survey to each participant in Buxiban. A cover letter was attached to every questionnaire at the beginning to explain the objective of the survey and to assure confidentiality of the response given by the respondent. Furthermore, participating in the survey was also volitional.

3.2 Measures

All of the items were measured with a five-point Likert scale. The scale 1= "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree".

HPWS. Chuang et al.'s (2016) 31 items of HR systems for knowledge-intensive teamwork were used.

Cronbach's alpha was 0.96 for the overall scale.

Trust. The scale compiled by McAllister (1995) was used for the trust. Trust is separated into two categories: emotion-based trust (affected-based) and another is cognition-based trust. The internal consistency coefficient is 0.93.

Strength Use. There are nine items from the job demands-resources questionnaire by Bakker (2014).

Cronbach's alpha was 0.96 for the scale.

Job Performance. Job performance was measured with three items adapted from Farh et al. (1991). The coefficient alpha was 0.94.

Job Satisfaction. Three Items are selected from the study measuring subjective career success by Shockley et al. (2015). Cronbach's alpha was 0.86 for the scale.

This study concerns common method bias since our data of independent variables, dependent variables, and mediators were collected from identical respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The result has to be lower than 50%, and for this study, it was 37.5%, indicating that common method bias is not a severe problem in this study. We used hierarchical regression analysis and Process Model 4 (Hayes, 2012) to test the hypotheses.

4. Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the study variables' means, standard deviations, and correlations. H1a, 1b, and 1c proposed the relationships between HR practices and three outcome variables. Models 2 and 5 from Table 2 suggest that the effects of HPWS on strength use ($\beta = .78$, n.s.) and job performance ($\beta = .08$, n.s.) are not significant. For job satisfaction, model 8 shows a positive direct relationship between HPWS and job satisfaction ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$). Hence, H1a and H1b are not supported, while H1c is supported. Next, H2 posited that HPWS is related to trust. Model 2 from Table 3 suggests that the relationship between HPWS and trust is positively significant ($\beta = .57$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H2 is supported.

H3a, 3b, and 3c posited that trust is related to three outcome variables. Models 2, 4, and 6 from Table 4 show a significant positive relationship between trust and three outcome variables. Trust is positively related to strength use ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$), job performance ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$). Thus, H3a, 3b, and 3c are supported. Next, H4a, 4b, and 4c posited that trust mediates the relationships between HR practices and three outcome variables. Models 3, 6, and 9 of Table 2 report positive direct relationships of HR practices on creativity, affective commitment, and job satisfaction. Model 3 of Table 4 shows that trust fully mediated the relationship between HPWS and strength use ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). Model 6 of Table 4 shows that trust fully mediated the relationship between HPWS and job performance ($\beta = .37$, $p < .01$). Model 9 of Table 4 shows that trust fully mediated the relationship between HPWS and job satisfaction ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, we conducted process tests to double-check the indirect effect. PROCESS analysis was conducted to ensure the mediating effects of trust with 5000 times of bootstrapping. Three sets of LLCT to ULCI of Table 5 do not cross zero, showing that trust fully mediates the relationship between HPWS and three outcome variables (strength use, job performance, and job satisfaction), respectively. H4a, 4b, and 4c are supported.

5. Discussion

This research aims to investigate and unfold the black box through trust to see if HPWS enhances positive outcomes for teachers. This study finds that job satisfaction increases when applying for HPWS. Furthermore, with trust built, trust advances job satisfaction, job performance, and strength use. The results illustrate that there is only one direct positive effect: HPWS leads to job satisfaction. As trust acts as a mediator, it urges teachers to present their strengths, improves job performance, and increases job satisfaction. Through social

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. HPWS	3.04	0.87	(.96)											
2. Trust	3.68	1.00	.60**	(.93)										
3. Strength use	4.38	0.74	.23**	.41**	(.96)									
4. Job performance	3.99	0.74	.15	.33**	.64**	(.86)								
5. Job satisfaction	3.74	1.07	.38**	.48**	.49**	.48**	(.94)							
6. Gender	1.59	0.49	.13	.16	.19*	.11	.13	-						
7. Age	33.81	10.53	-.04	-.07	-.14	-.35	.04	.01	-					
8. Marriage	1.68	0.59	-.13	-.05	.01	-.02	-.21*	-.03	-.43**	-				
9. Job type	1.49	0.50	.04	.17*	.01	.07	-.02	-.09	-.20*	.21*	-			
10. Tenure	42.11	53.48	.25**	.18*	.14	.08	.14	.08	.46**	-.27**	-.21*	-		
11. Working hours	5.87	2.43	.27**	.04	.21*	.08	.19*	.23**	.14	-.20*	-.60**	.27**	-	
12. Education	2.42	0.65	-.06	-.07	-.19*	-.01	-.06	-.07	.24**	-.01	.08	.15	.00	-

^a *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 N=139

^b Cronbach's alphas appear on the diagonal for multiple-item measures

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direct and Mediating Effects

		Strength use		Job performance				Job satisfaction		
	Model	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Control variables										
	Gender	.11	.11	.06	.08	.07	.04	.08	.06	.02
	Age	-.19	-.17	-.15	-.07	-.06	-.03	-.07	-.01	.01
	Marriage	-.00	.00	.01	-.03	-.02	-.01	-.20	-.16	-.15
	Part/Full time	.20*	.17	.12	.16	.13	.09	.17	.07	.02
	Tenure	.20*	.18	.14	.09	.07	.03	.10	.01	-.03
	Working hours	.27*	.24*	.28**	.13	.10	.13	.22	.10	.14
	Education	-.18*	-.18*	-.16*	-.01	-.00	.00	-.07	-.04	-.02
Independent variable										
	HPWS		.78	-.15		.08	-1.33		.31**	.07
Mediator										
	Trust			.41***			.37**			.41***
	R ²	.17	.17	.27	.04	.04	.12	.10	.18	.28
	F	3.87**	3.48**	5.51***	.78	.77	2.09*	2.21*	3.62**	5.71***
	ΔR ²	.17	.00	.10	.04	.00	.08	.10	.07	.10
	ΔF	3.87**	.75	18.11***	.78	.67	12.18**	2.21*	12.16**	18.53***

^a *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for HPWS to Mediator Trust

		Trust	
		Model 1	Model 2
Control variables			
	Gender	.12	.103
	Age	-.17	-.062
	Marriage	-.08	-.011
	Full/Part time	.29**	.115
	Tenure	.27**	.113
	Working hours	.12	-.094
	Education	-.08	-.039
Independent variable			
	HPWS		.57***
	R ²	.14	.40
	F	3.25**	11.03***
	ΔR^2	.14	.25
	ΔF	3.25**	55.96***

^a *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Mediator (Trust) to Three Dependent Variables

		Strength use		Job performance		Job satisfaction	
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Control variables							
	Gender	.08	.09	.12	.10	.10	.09
	Age	-.02	-.11	-.06	-.15	-.09	-.14
	Marriage	-.05	-.08	-.39	-.07	.05	.00
	Full/Part time	.16	.23*	.15	.26*	.18	.22*
	Tenure	.13	.20*	.16	.25**	.12	.23**
	Working hours	-.05	.03	.02	.09	-.05	.29
	Education	.01	-.02	-.06	-.08	-.04	-.05
Mediator							
	Trust		.34***		.27**		.43***
	R ²	.16	.24	.11	.22	.22	.27
	F	27.64***	5.22***	16.66***	4.50**	40.00***	7.5***
	ΔR^2	.17	.07	.11	.11	.23	.09
	ΔF	27.64***	1.8	16.66***	2.57*	40.00***	2.44*

^a *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 5. Mediating Effects: Bootstrapping Analysis (Process Model 4)

Indirect effects	(5000 times)	LLCI	ULCI
HPWS → Trust → Strength use	.06	.08	.32
HPWS → Trust → Job performance	.65	0.5	.30
HPWS → Trust → Job satisfaction	.09	.12	.47

a *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

exchange theory, with trust, teachers are able to devote themselves in exchange for positive working attitudes and behaviors.

In the past, SET has been studied in the tourist, manufacturing, hospital, and hotel industries; extended the SET to a new education industry (Das & Teng, 2002), scholars have also studied SET in education industry regarding organizational citizenship behavior among teachers (Elstad et al., 2011). The result of this study shows that SET can be applied to the English afterschool education (Buxiban) industry. For practical implications, it is essential to generate a way to establish trust between employees and their managing director and how to use the HPWS to meet the goal of building trust, allowing teachers to speak out their wills and opinions, and providing training in order to enhance the skills of the teacher and give them the motivation to become more equipped.

There are still some limitations to this study. Cross-sectional data is used in this study; for a better outcome, time-lagged or longitudinal data can be adopted to ensure the causal relationship is essential. This study has a positive relationship between HPWS and three positive employee outcomes mediated by trust. Trust might not be the only mediator between HPWS and employee positive outcomes; supervisors' managerial style, employee attitude, and company culture can also be added as mediators in future studies.

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