

# Reasons For Underinvestment In Non-Standard Workers' Training: Views Of Managers

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Article Received: 16-11-2024, Article Accepted: 30-11-2024

## Abstract

This research sought to explore reasons why the case global firm in Zimbabwe underinvests in non-standard workers' training. Eleven research participants, who were purposively sampled, took part in this qualitative research. One on one, semi-structured interviews was used to gather data from the research participants. The study found a number of reasons that induce the case global organization in Zimbabwe to underinvest in non-standard workers' training. The four main reasons identified by a majority of research participants include the high supply of skilled workers, skills poaching, high training costs and high labor turnover. However, a few research participants pointed out that the case firm underinvests in non-standard workers' work-related training because of time constraints. The current study recommends that the case organization should offer training to non-standard workers whenever a skill gap exist and invest more in specific training than general training. The study also suggests that supervisors at the global firm in Zimbabwe should enter into an agreement with the workers that compel them to reimburse a fraction of the training expenses if they leave the organization within a predetermined time frame. Finally, the study suggests that non-standard workers should contribute financially to their training in order to increase employer's motivation to fund their general and specific training.

**Keywords:** General Training, Non-Standard Workers, Specific Training, Training, Underinvestment.

## 1. Introduction

Rapid technological advancements and global competition have changed the work environment worldwide by increasing demand for new skills and rendering other skills outdated (Juliadi, 2023; Sidhu et al., 2024). Organizations are being forced by the aforementioned harsh realities to fund employee

training so as to prevent skill obsolescence, which has a detrimental impact on the organization's ability to compete globally (Gouda, 2022). Supporting the above is Svetozarovova (2024), who argues that funding staff training is now considered as a key strategy by organizations to achieve competitive edge over competitors in this dynamic environment. Many studies have shown that training is crucial in improving workers' productivity which goes a long way in giving an organization an edge over its competitors (Daher & Ziade, 2024; Sidhu et al., 2024; Juliadi, 2023; Khan et al., 2021). Additionally, fresh research by Safrida and Syah (2024) showed that employers invest in training to improve employee productivity and quality of work. In a similar vein, Mustafa and Lleshi (2024) argue that employee training enables workers to improve their abilities and employability, thus reducing labor market exclusion due to skills obsolescence. Despite overwhelming evidence on the merits of training to both the organization and its workers (Kumar et al., 2023; Safrida & Syah, 2024; Hidayati, 2023), little explanation is given on the reasons why some organizations underinvest in employee training. A study by Sheehan (2014) showed a substantial decline in employee training, particularly those under non-standard work arrangements. The case global firm in Zimbabwe is likewise investing less in non-standard workers' work-related training. Supporting evidence came from the case organization's 2024 human resource training and development report, which showed a sharp decrease in employee training funding. McTier and McGregor (2018) argues that limited training opportunities is known for hampering skills development, thwarting career prospects and put workers at risk of unemployment in a highly dynamic environment. It is noteworthy that several research have shown a sharp decrease in funding of non-standard workers' training and no concrete justification was provided for this significant drop (Daher & Ziade, 2024; Safrida & Syah, 2024). It is also significant to note that topics on employee training have been extensively studied (Sidhu et al., 2024; Hidayat & Aziz, 2022; Juliadi, 2023), but there are still unanswered questions on the reasons why organizations are now underinvesting in non-standard workers' training. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify the reasons why the case global firm in Zimbabwe underinvests in non-standard workers' training.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section presents human capital theory, types of training and reasons why organizations underinvest in employee training.

### **2.1. Becker (1964)'s Human Capital Theory**

The human capital theory states that the type of training that an employer offers depends on the market structure in which a labor market functions. General and specific training are the

two forms of training that Becker (1964) identified. General training upgrades employees' skills which increase worker's productivity, market value and is applicable in all firms (Tennant, 2018). The aforementioned means that general training increases skills poaching externality, if workers are not offered marginal wage after training (Olesen & O'Neill, 2021). Human capital theory further provides that due to skills poaching in a perfectly competitive labor market, organizations underinvest in employee training and development. Specific training denotes improving firm-specific skills which improves worker's productivity in the organization in which the training occurs (Loewenstein & Spletzer, 2019). The employer can appropriate the profits from the training investment since skills learned from specific training are applicable to the current task and cannot be transferred to other organizations (Zwick, 2015). In summary, Spletzer (2019) argues that in a perfectly competitive labor market, general training should be financed by workers, and specific training should be paid by the employer.

## **2.2. Defining Employee Training**

Training is a structured procedure that makes it easier for employees to acquire the skills, abilities and attitudes that improve their productivity (Rivaldo & Nabella, 2023). Training is defined by Robbins (2018) as work-related learning that attempts to enhance employees' capacity to carry out their responsibilities. According to the description given above, the goal of employee training is to enhance workers' abilities, dispositions, and conduct.

## **2.3 Types of Training**

On-the-job training and off-the-job training are the two primary forms of training (Trávníčková & Maršíková, 2023). An organization's choice of type of training depends on a number of factors, including costs, time constraints, skills gaps, employee credentials, and job descriptions (Milhem et al., 2024; Hajjar & Alkhanaizi, 2018; Cocuľová, 2017).

### **2.3.1 On the Job Training**

On-the-job training is a structured and organized form of training that is conducted at the trainee's place of employment (Van der Klink & Streumer, 2022). Kashif et al. (2022) argue that the aim of on-the-job training is to teach workers particular work techniques. During on-the-job training, trainees are typically supervised by more seasoned employees (Ibrahim, 2020; Hidayat & Aziz, 2022; Streumer, 2022). Ahmed (2020) also argues that on-the-job training allows trainees to be taught while observing the mentor in action. Vengdasamy (2020) contends that on-the-job training is a cost-effective type of training, which allows trainees to learn while they work.

### **2.3.2. Off the Job Training**

The process of acquiring new skills and knowledge off the job, usually at a location other than the employee's workstation, is known as off-the-job training (Pastore & Pompili, 2020). Off-the-job training can be offered through workshops, lectures, face to face tutorials, and group discussions (Ishak & Biongan, 2022). When a number of workers have same training needs and the company has enough funds for training delivery, off-the-job training is a suitable form of training (Rothwell, 2018). Trávníčková and Maršíková (2023) state that off-the-job training is costly, and businesses are advised to budget appropriately when conducting this type of training.

#### **2.4. Reasons for Investing in Employee Training**

There are several reasons why employers offer work related training to their workers. Sung and Choi (2023) argue that training and development enhances management-employee relationship, which lowers workplace conflict. In similar vein, Maršíková and Šlaichová (2019) posit that employee training improves employees' technical know-how and abilities they need to do their jobs safely and competently. Training is also known for producing workers who are willing and competent to perform in ways that meet the demands of their employers (Lorincová & Javorčíková, 2017). It is critical to note that employers offer training if they want to accomplish one or more of the aforementioned goals.

#### **2.5. Reasons for Underinvestment in Employee Training**

Employers are aware that employee training is crucial for maintaining adaptability and competitiveness (Jasson & Govender, 2017). In similar vein, Formanek (2018) makes the case that companies should offer employee training to enhance their skills and boost worker productivity. In addition, Phillips (2018) states that companies who see employee training as an investment rather than a cost are committed to invest in their training and development. On the other hand, some scholars contend that firms underinvest in employee training for a variety of reasons (Murray & Efendioglu, 2017; Tsui et al., 2019; Akinyomi, 2016). Some of the reasons why businesses underinvest in staff training are presented in the next section.

##### **2.5.1. Costs**

The human capital theory provides that the total costs of training depend on the hidden and direct training expenses incurred by the organization, lost worker productivity during training and wage premium for trained workers. In similar vein, Murray and Efendioglu (2017) posit that training costs encompass expenses related to trainers, training materials, infrastructure and productivity lost during training sessions. Furthermore, Bartel (2018) contends that employee training comes with a number of hidden costs which include wage premium for trained workers and high hiring costs if quit rate is

high after training. Firms underfund worker training if the aggregate costs of training are more than the benefits derived from employee training (Van de Wiele, 2017). In similar vein, Lester (2021) argues that high training costs force employers to underinvest in employee training. In addition, Westerman & Donoghue (2018) argues that excessive training costs are one of the major reasons why organizations underinvest in employee training.

### **2.5.2. Labor Turnover**

Heavey et al. (2017) argues that understanding the association between employee training and employee turnover is crucial because it enables businesses to determine whether to invest or underinvest in employee training. Research on the connection between employee turnover and training have produced conflicting results (Forrier & Sels, 2018; Akinyomi, 2016). While some studies found that staff training increases labor turnover, other studies found that it fosters employee retention (Akinyomi, 2016; Greenhalgh & Mavrotas, 2019; Martin, 2020). A study by Moreira et al. (2020) showed that employee training boosts employees' perceptions of organizational support and encourages loyalty, which lowers turnover intentions. Similar views are held by Zheng and Lamond (2017), who posits that employee training programs strengthen workers' bond with the company. Furthermore, Sieben (2017) argues that firm-specific training ties employees to their employers and keeps them from quitting shortly after training. On the other hand, a study by Ismail (2016) revealed that training enhances worker mobility, which may result in a high quit rate. Similarly, Mavrotas (2019) states that workers who get training are more likely to look for work from other organizations. In short, it was observed that there is a direct association between employee training and quit rate, which force employers to underinvest in employee training (Zheng & Lamond, 2017; Akinyomi, 2016; Martin, 2020).

### **2.5.3. Limited Time and Availability of Skilled Workers**

The provision of training programs may be hampered by time constraints and tight work schedules in this competitive business environment (Susomrith & Coetzer, 2017). Similarly, Panagiotak (2023) contends that firms are under pressure to provide results rapidly due to the fast-paced corporate environment, which leaves them with little time for training initiatives. A study by Sambrook (2020) showed that training programs can be time-consuming and require managers and employees to take a considerable amount of time off from their regular work responsibilities. Palmer (2021) also argues that an organization's resolution to fund employee training is informed by the availability of competent workers in the labor market. Sharing the same sentiments is McQuaid and Dutton (2019) who argue that companies may decide to hire people with the necessary experience rather than train new hires if there is high

supply of skilled workers.

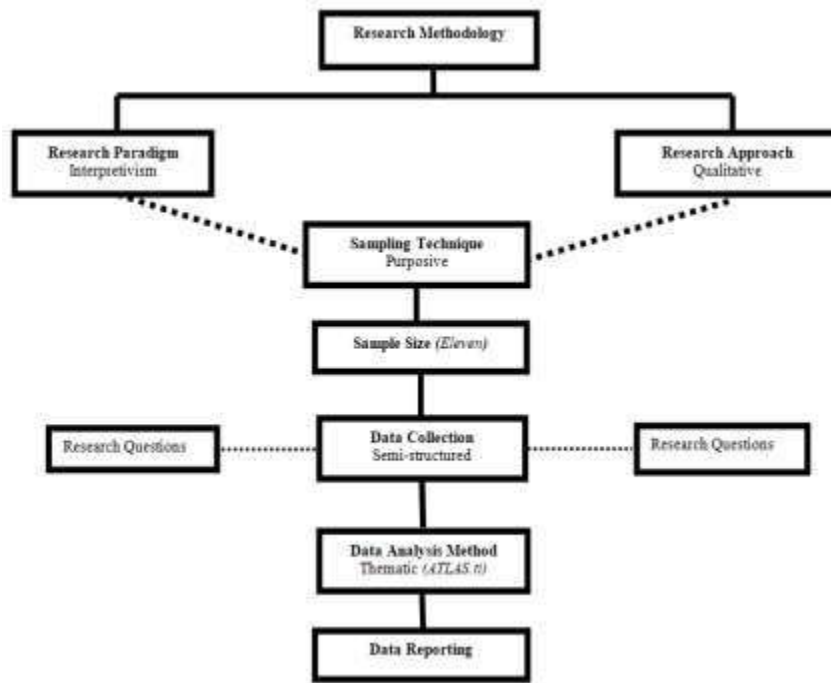
#### **2.5.4. Poaching**

Darvas and Palmer (2021) argue that labor poaching influences organization's decision to invest in employee training or not. Wolter (2022) posits that due to skills poaching and threat of poaching, general training benefits rival organizations. Similarly, Kraak (2023) posits that in an imperfect labor market, raiding firms usually poach trained workers making it difficult for the organization which offers training to enjoy the benefits of training workers. The aforementioned means that incentive to train is diminished by this poaching externality (Panagiotak, 2023). A number of research revealed that organizations under invest in employee training when other firms can poach trained workers (Panagiotak, 2023; Kraak, 2023; Almeida & Robalino, 2022). Similarly, Sheldon (2020) states that poaching and the threat of poaching can force firms to underinvest in employee training out of concern that they will not benefit from such an investment. Panagiotak (2023) also posits that poaching lead to a non-training equilibrium and hampers training investment in transferable skills because part of the benefits accrues to the raiding firm. Another study by Wolter (2022) also revealed that due to skills poaching, training firms only in until marginal costs of training equal vest predicted marginal gains.

### **3. Research Methodology and Design**

This section describes the research design and methodology of the study, including the sampling strategy, research paradigm, research approach, data collection method, and data analysis method, among other things. Figure 1 shows the research methodology and design utilized by the researchers.

#### **Figure 1: Study's Research Methodology and Design**



Source: Researchers' compilation, 2025

### 3.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Research Participants

Research participants who took part in the study were identified by the letters "UT". Characteristics of the research participants are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Research Participants

Pseudonyms	Sex	Age	Work Experience	Academic Qualification	Interview Length
UT1	M	27	3years	Bachelor's degree	11mins
UT2	F	31	4years	Bachelor's degree	12mins
UT3	M	33	5years	Bachelor's degree	11mins
UT4	M	38	6years	Master's degree	13mins
UT5	F	31	2years	Bachelor's degree	12mins
UT6	M	36	4years	Master's degree	14mins
UT7	M	41	7years	Master's degree	15mins
UT8	M	40	5years	Master's degree	13mins
UT9	F	35	3years	Bachelor's degree	10mins
UT10	M	38	4years	Master's degree	12mins
UT11	F	36	3years	Bachelor's degree	13mins

Source: Author's fieldwork

## 4. Findings

The study sought to explore the reasons why the case organizations underinvest in non-standard workers' training. The study's results are shown in the Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Skills Poaching	Trained workers are poached by competitors High skills poaching Employee poaching is high after training
Training Costs	High training costs High hidden costs of training Expensive
Labor Turnover	High quit rate after training Workers quit after training Training influences employer's intention to leave
Availability of Skilled Workers	Plenty of skilled workers available High supply of workers with the needed skills Easy to get skilled workforce from the labor market
Time Constraints	Lack of time for training due to nature of the business Workers employed for short time horizon No time for training

**Source:** Authors' fieldwork

#### 4.1. Response Rate

Table 3 below shows response rate per each theme that emerged from the study

**Table 3:** Response Rate

Theme	Frequency (N=11)
Skills Poaching	9
Training Costs	8
Labor Turnover	7
Availability of Skilled Workers	7
Time Constraints	6

**Source:** Authors' fieldwork

#### 4.2. Theme 1: Skills Poaching

Nine of the eleven research participants indicated that the case organization underinvests in non-standard workers' training because trained workers are poached by their competitors. Table 4 below shows research participants' viewpoints in this respect.

**Table 4:** Research Participants' Quotes on Skills Poaching



Pseudonym	Quotes
UT1	"Once you train your workers, they are poached by our competitors. Given such a challenge there is no need to train them".
UT2	"I don't see any reason for training workers because trained workers are poached by our rivals".
UT3	"Remember we are operating in a perfectly competitive labor market characterized by employee poaching externality. So once you train your workers they are easily poached by other organization".
UT4	"Companies underinvest in work related training because they fear that their trained employees will be poached by competitors after training".
UT5	"It's not a good investment to train workers who are likely to be poached by other organizations during and after training".
UT7	"Employee raiding is the reason my brother".
UT9	"Talent poaching is the reason my friend".
UT10	"It's very risky to train workers in our sector because of talent poaching".
UT11	"Remember trained workers are productive in their future employment, so due to skills poaching externality, the company will not enjoy the benefit of training its workers".

Source: Authors' fieldwork

### 4.3. Theme 2: Training Costs

The research's results show that eight out of the eleven research participants revealed that they underinvest in non-standard workers' training because of high training costs. Their related viewpoints are presented below.

"My brother you need to know that training workers is very expensive and very few companies will make such an investment considering the current economic environment we are operating under" (UT1);

"Work related training increases our operating costs of which for the time being we are fighting to reduce our operating costs" (UT2);

"Considering the level of competition in our sector and the behaviour of our customers we were forced to adopt a cost leadership business strategy. Give such a background; I don't think investing in work related training is a good investment" (UT4);

"Training workers is an expensive investment, and, in most cases, you do not benefit from such an investment due to high labor turnover and skills poaching during and after training"

(UT5);

“Supply of skilled workers from the labor market is high and our hiring costs are less than training costs which makes work related training a poor investment” (UT6);

“Training comes with high hidden costs which makes training a costly investment” (UT8);

“We do not train workers because employee training is expensive” (UT9) and

“Due to high labor turnover and talent poaching, employee training is rendered expensive and risky investment”.

#### 4.4. Theme 3: Labor Turnover

Seven out of the eleven research participants revealed that high labor turnover forced the global firm in Zimbabwe to underinvest in non-standard workers’ training. In this regard, UT1 said:

“Training influences intention to quit. This association makes us reluctant to offer work- related training to non-standard workers”.

Sharing the same viewpoints is UT3, who argued: “Training increases workers’ chances of getting employment from our competitors”.

Similarly, UT6 remarked:

“Work related training increases workers’ intentions to leave the organization”.

Additionally, UT7 argued: “In most cases, workers quit after receiving training, so given such a backdrop there is no need to train workers”.

The above arguments continued with UT8, UT10 and UT11. Their sentiments points to the fact that training increases occupational mobility and labor turnover.

#### 4.5. Theme 4: Availability of Skilled Workers

Availability of skilled workers came as another reason why the case organization underinvests in training of non-standard workers. Table 5 below shows research participants’ quotes in this regard.

**Table 5:** Research Participants’ Viewpoints on Availability of Skilled Workers

Pseudonym	Research Participants’ Quotes
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UT2	"Skilled workers are all over my brother".
UT3	"I don't see any reason for training workers if you can get workers with the necessary skills from the labor market".
UT4	"Plenty of workers with the required skills so there is no need for training them".
UT5	"Supply of skilled workers is high".
UT6	"There is no need for training because skilled workers are available".
UT8	"Workers with the much-needed skills are locally available".
UT9	"It's easy to get skilled workers from the labor market".

**Source:** Author's fieldwork

#### **4.6. Theme 5: Time Constraints**

The research results confirm that six out of the eleven research participants pointed out that the case firm does not provide training to non-standard workers because of time constraints. Their related sentiments are presented below.

"We do not have time to conduct employee training due to the nature of our business. We try our level best to employ workers with the necessary skills" (UT1);

"Training requires managers' time which in most cases is limited" (UT3);

"Managers are always under pressure with work related issues so there is no time for employee training" (UT5);

"We do not have time for training workers" (UT7);

"Time is the stumbling block my brother" (UT9) and

"Remember non-standard workers are employed for a short period time, so we cannot invest much on their training" (UT11).

### **5. Discussion of the Study's Results**

The following section discusses the study's results.

#### **5.1 Skills Poaching**

Skill poaching was identified as one of the reasons why the case organization does not provide training to non-standard workers. Presented below are some of the research participants' viewpoints in this regard.

“I don’t see any reason for training workers because trained workers are poached by our rivals.”(UT2).

“Remember we are operating in a perfectly competitive labor market characterized by employee poaching externality” (UT3).

“Companies underinvest in work related training because they fear employee are poached after training”. (UT4).

“It’s not a good investment to train workers who are likely to be poached by other organizations during and after training”(UT5).The aforementioned quotes are corroborated by Sheldon (2020), who claims that poaching and the possibility of poaching can compel businesses to underinvest in staff training because they fear that the training investment will not be profitable. Similarly, Panagiotak (2023) asserts that skills poaching results in a non-training equilibrium and hinders training investment in transferable skills. In addition, a study by Wolter (2022) showed that due to skills poaching, training firms only invest until the marginal costs of training equal the expected marginal profits.

## **5.2 Training Costs**

Eight of the eleven research participants revealed that high training costs force the case organization to invest less on non-standard workers’ training. In this regard, UT4 argued: “Considering the level of competition in our sector and the behaviour of our customers we were forced to adopt a cost leadership business strategy. Given such a background; I don’t think investing in work related training is a good investment”. Sharing the same sentiments is, UT5, who has this to say; “Training workers is an expensive investment and in most cases you do not benefit from such an investment due to high labor turnover and skills poaching during and after training”. The aforementioned opinions are supported by Murray and Efendioglu (2017), who claim that training costs influence employer’s training decisions. They added that training costs include costs of training materials, trainers, and lost productivity during training sessions. Similarly, Van de Wiele (2017) argues that if the total cost of staff training is large, then businesses underinvest in employee training. Additionally, Westerman & Donoghue (2018) contend that high training costs force many businesses to underinvest in staff training.

## **5.3. Labor Turnover**

Seven of the eleven research participants identified high quit rate as one of the reasons that force the case organization to limit work related training opportunities offered to non-standard workers. UT6 remarked: “Work related training increases workers’ intentions to leave the organization”. Similarly, UT7 argued: “In most cases, workers quit after

receiving training, so given such a backdrop there is no need to train workers". Supporting the above sentiments is a study by Ismail (2016), which showed that training increases worker mobility, which may result in a high quit rate. Similarly, a study by Martin (2020) showed a direct association between employee training and quit rate of trained workers. Additionally, Mavrotas (2019) states that workers who receive training are more likely to look for work from other organizations. Contrarily, the study's results contradict Moreira et al. (2020)'s study results which showed that employee training fosters employee loyalty, which in turn reduces the likelihood of turnover. Zheng and Lamond (2017) share similar opinions, arguing that employee training initiatives improve employees' relationships with the organization. Sieben (2017) further contends that firm-specific training strengthens the bond between workers and their employers and prevents them from leaving the company soon after the training concludes.

#### **5.4. Availability of Skilled Workers**

The fourth reason identified by research participants that force the case organisation to underinvest in non-standard workers' training is the availability of skilled workers in the labor market. In this regard, UT3 said: "I don't see any reason for training workers if you can get workers with the necessary skills from the labor market". Similarly, UT4 argued: "Plenty of workers with the required skills so there is no need to invest much on employee training". The quotes from the participants above are supported by the theory of labor supply. According to the theory of labor supply, companies hire workers with the necessary skills and capabilities if they are locally available, hence there is no reason to provide training. Palmer (2021) agrees, stating that the availability of skilled workers in the labor market influences an organization's decision to fund employee training. Furthermore, McQuaid and Dutton (2019) contend that if there is a high supply of experienced workers, businesses may choose to recruit those with the requisite expertise rather than training new personnel.

#### **5.5. Time Constraints**

Time constraint was also identified as a reason why the global firm in Zimbabwe underinvests in non-standard workers' training. Presented below are some of the research participants' viewpoints in this regard.

"We do not have time to conduct work related training due to the nature of our business. We try our level best to employ workers with the necessary skills" (UT1);

"Work related training requires managers' time which in most cases is scarce" (UT3) and

"Managers are always under pressure with work related issues so there is no time for work-related training" (UT5). The research participants' viewpoints are supported by Panagiotak (2023), who contends that firms are under pressure to provide

results rapidly due to the fast-paced corporate environment, which leaves them with little time for training initiatives. In similar vein, Susomrith and Coetzer (2017) argue that provision of training programs may be hampered by time constraints and tight work schedules in this competitive business environment. In addition, a study by Sambrook (2020) showed that training programs can be time-consuming and require managers and employees to take a considerable amount of time off from their regular work responsibilities.

## **6. Contribution of the Study**

This study explores reasons why firms underinvest in work-related training of non-standard employees. From a methodological perspective, it appears that most training and development studies have employed the positivist research paradigm. The interpretivism research philosophy used in this study contributes methodologically by offering a thorough examination of the reasons why the case organization underinvests in non-standard workers' training. Practically, this study provides new information on the reasons why organizations underinvest in non-standard workers' training, which can be used by organization, workers and policymakers. Human resource professionals benefit from this study because they become aware of how and when to offer work related training to their workers. This study is also useful to workers because they become aware that in order to enhance the employer's desire to invest in their training and development, they must make some financial contribution towards their training. This research's results also contribute to the available data and serve as a foundation for potential research.

## **7. Limitations**

This study had its own limitations. Firstly, it is difficult to generalize the study's findings because the study was restricted to one global firm in Zimbabwe. It is also crucial to remember that the interpretivist ideology used in this research had its own flaws. If the researchers had applied both positivism and interpretivism as research philosophies, the aforementioned possible shortcomings might have been lessened. Future researchers should consider using mixed research when conducting similar study. Additionally, it is recommended that a study of this kind be carried out in Zimbabwe's small and medium-sized businesses, where the investment in staff training is at its lowest.

## **8. Conclusion**

The current research findings confirm that the global firm in Zimbabwe underinvests in non-standard workers' training owing to a variety of reasons. The four main reasons identified by a majority of research participants in this regard include availability of skilled personnel, skills poaching, high training costs and high labor turnover. Only a few research participants

pointed out that the case organization underinvests in non-standard workers' training because of time constraints. The current study recommends that the case organization should offer training to on-standard workers whenever a skills gap exist and make the training more firm specific than general. The study also suggests that supervisors at the global firm in Zimbabwe should enforce an agreement requiring workers to reimburse part of the training costs if they leave the organization within a pre-determined timeframe. Finally, the study suggests that non-standard workers should contribute financially to their training in order to increase employer's willingness to invest in their general and specific training.

### **Acknowledgements**

We express our gratitude to all participants who took part in this study.

### **Author's Contributions**

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

### **Funding**

This research was funded by the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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