Innovations

Green Human Resource Management and Sustainable Quality: A Mediating Role of Innovative Technology of SMEs in Ondo State

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate the relationship between Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and Sustainable Quality (SQ) in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study also examines the mediating role of Innovative Technology (IT) in the relationship between GHRM and SQ. A cross-sectional survey research design was used with a population of 2,363 from SMEDAN 2017. The sample size for this study comprised 341 SMEs located in Ondo State, using a simple random sampling technique. The instrument used was a structured questionnaire, validated with a reliability coefficient of 0.742. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM – SMART-Pls4) to test the formulated hypotheses. The regression results of the study revealed that the recruitment process explains about 71% of the variance in sustainable quality, while the direct effect of green rewards on sustainable quality was relatively low at 9%. However, training and development showed that the joint effect of GHRM accounts for 40% of the variance in sustainable quality, with all hypotheses being accepted. The study provides practical insights for SMEs in Ondo State, suggesting that they can leverage innovative technology to enhance their sustainable quality.*
Keywords: Green, HRM, Sustainable Quality, Innovative Technology and SMEs

Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are essential in driving economic growth and employment generation globally. In recent years, the rapid spreads in technology have significantly impacted the way SMEs operate and compete in the market. Innovative technologies have emerged as powerful tools that can transform SMEs, enabling them to enhance productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness. Technology has become an integral part of modern business operations, and its adoption is no longer a choice but a necessity for SMEs aiming for sustainability and growth. According to a report by the World Bank (2020) established that leveraging technology seems to help SMEs streamline processes, reach new markets, reduce costs, and improve overall performance. Innovative technology solutions such as cloud computing, data analytics, Internet

of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and digital marketing tools have revolutionized how SMEs manage their operations, interact with customers, and make strategic decisions. These technologies empower SMEs to compete with larger enterprises on a level playing field by providing access to sophisticated tools and resources at affordable costs.

There are myriad of challenges bedeviling the adoption and implementation of innovative technology for SMEs. These include initial investment costs, cybersecurity concerns, digital skills gaps, and resistance to change. However, overcoming these challenges presents opportunities for SMEs to innovate, collaborate with technology providers, upskill employees, and leverage digital ecosystems for sustainability (Dutta et al., 2021). Sustainability has gained prominence across various industries, including SMEs. Therefore, sustainable quality encompasses not only the products or services offered by SMEs but also their operational practices, supply chain management, and environmental impact. These goes beyond traditional quality management approaches by incorporating environmental, social, and economic considerations into business practices. The absence of sustainable quality could result in limited resources, lack of awareness, and resistance to change, which may hinder adoption. However, these challenges also present opportunities for SMEs to innovate, collaborate, and differentiate themselves in the market by embracing sustainability as a core value (Chen & Hu, 2021).

Therefore, green human resource management (GHRM) has emerged as a strategic approach that integrates environmental sustainability principles into human resource practices and policies within organizations. The concept of GHRM in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable business practices, enhancing employee engagement, and contributing to environmental conservation. The term GHRM could also be described as the integration of environmental sustainability goals and practices into various HR functions such as recruitment, training, performance management, employee engagement, and organizational culture (Renwick et al., 2020). This involves promoting eco-friendly behaviours, reducing carbon footprints, and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility among employees.

Creating a sustainable quality and environmental responsibility by integrating green HRM practices into the daily operations of SMEs through innovative technology in the region could promote eco-friendly behaviours, encourage resource conservation, and lead by example at all organizational levels (Bartlett & Wearing, 2018). In this context, innovative technology plays a mediating role in facilitating the adoption and implementation of GHRM practices and sustainable quality initiatives. These motivate the researchers to examine how green human resource management influences the sustainable quality of SMEs in Ondo State, Nigeria. The quest is to answer how the recruitment process enhances the sustainable quality of SMEs. Does a green reward affect the sustainable quality of

SMEs in Ondo State? How do training and development affect the sustainability quality of SMEs in Ondo State? This review aims to assist researchers in the field of human resource management, particularly in green human resource management, by offering an in-depth explanation of green HRM and related concepts that are currently lacking in the available literature. Additionally, the study seeks to highlight the importance of green HRM in modern organizations.

Hypotheses

H0:$_1$There is no significant effect between the recruitment process and sustainable quality of SMEs in Ondo State, Nigeria.

H0:$_2$There is no significant relationship between the green reward and sustainable quality of SMEs in Ondo State.

H0:$_3$There is no significant difference between training and development and sustainability quality of SMEs in Ondo State.

Literature Review

The origins of HRM trace back to England in the early 1800s during the craftsmen and apprenticeship era, which then further evolved with the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1800s (Mwita, 2019). Over time, HRM has undergone various developments to meet the changing demands of the business world. A significant catalyst for these developments has been the strategic thinking about how businesses must adapt to change and thrive across different periods (Cania, 2014; Mwita, 2019). In recent years, global concerns about environmental issues have escalated, particularly following the consolidation of the Industrial Revolution that contributed to increased environmental degradation. These concerns have exerted greater pressure on businesses and industries to adopt environmentally friendly practices and products, leading to the development and implementation of green management strategies (Huelgas& Arellano, 2021). Presently, there is a heightened awareness among people about operating in an environmentally responsible manner. They recognize their role within society and the importance of adopting green practices within organizations (Goyal, 2013).

Despite the significance of green human resource management (Green HRM) across various domains, the literature indicates a lack of a comprehensive process framework for Green HRM (Renwick, et al., 2018). It is worth noting that organizations began implementing green HRM practices even before the 1980s, although scholarly works on this topic gained momentum mainly after the 1990s within the field of HRM (Arulrajah&Opatha, 2016). Given that Green HRM is still considered a relatively new and emerging discipline within management, particularly in Human Resource Management literature, there is a pressing need for more scholarly research to bridge this gap and foster a deeper understanding and awareness of the field.

The term Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) remains unfamiliar to many individuals, including experts and academics in the field of HRM (Mwita,

2019). Consequently, there are relatively few scholars who have provided definitive definitions of the concept in existing literature (Arulrajah&Opatha, 2016). However, there is a consensus that Green HRM involves integrating Human Resource Management (HRM) with environmental management issues and promoting environmentally sustainable practices among employees. Uddin and Islam (2015) define Green HRM as encompassing environmentally friendly human resource policies and practices. They emphasize that these practices not only contribute to the organization's financial goals through environmental branding but also protect the environment from potential negative impacts arising from organizational policies and actions.

Majumdar et al. (2021) elaborates on the concept by highlighting the reduction of paperwork in HR functions such as recruitment, training, and performance review as a key aspect of Green HRM. While this aspect is significant, it limits the focus of Green HRM solely to the reduction of paper usage in workplaces. A broader definition of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is proposed by Masri&Jaaron (2017), who describe it as the use of HRM practices to reinforce environmentally sustainable practices and increase employee commitment to environmental sustainability issues. This approach involves incorporating the concerns and values of Environmental Management (EM) into HR initiatives to enhance efficiencies and improve Environmental Performance (EP), ultimately leading to reduced carbon footprints among employees.

Sustainable quality is a concept that integrates the principles of sustainability and quality management within organizations. It involves ensuring that products, services, processes, and systems are not only of high quality but also environmentally sustainable, socially responsible, and economically viable over the long term. This concept encompasses a holistic approach to business operations, considering the impacts of organizational activities on the environment, society, and stakeholders, while also meeting customer expectations and achieving business goals. Sustainable quality is gaining increasing importance in today's business and many researchers have contributed to the understanding and development of the concept of sustainable quality. Schaltegger and Burritt (2018) discuss the importance of integrating sustainability into quality management practices to achieve sustainable development goals. They emphasize the need for organizations to consider environmental and social factors alongside traditional quality metrics. Lindegaard and Kotler (2021) highlight the role of sustainable quality in risk management, arguing that organizations can mitigate risks and enhance resilience by adopting sustainable practices and ensuring high-quality standards across their operations. Moreover, Gao (2020) explores the relationship between sustainable quality practices and cost savings, demonstrating that organizations can achieve financial benefits through resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable procurement practices.

Innovative technology plays a pivotal role in society by meeting needs, accomplishing objectives, and addressing challenges faced by adopters. It is directed towards supporting corporate, industrial, economic, and social transformations to enhance the competitive advantage of SMEs firms, ultimately contributing to overall human progress (Coccia, 2019). He further asserts that innovation is not a uniform phenomenon; some innovations disrupt existing competencies, while others refine and enhance them. Different types of innovation necessitate distinct organizational environments and managerial skills. An innovation represents the initial market introduction of a new product or process that significantly departs from previous practices. It emerges from scientific advancements, rendering existing knowledge in that field obsolete. Innovations create new markets, cater to emerging user needs, and often require new distribution channels and post-sale support. Coccia and Watts (2020) assert that new technology stems from the invention of novel products or methods that are transformed into viable innovations in markets. These innovations address user needs, achieve goals, solve problems, and capitalize on significant opportunities, or address critical challenges and environmental threats.

Empirical Review

Das and Dash (2024) assess the impact of green reward and compensation practices on environmental sustainability. Targeting ISO-14001-certified manufacturing organizations aligned with their research objectives, they employed a quantitative, cross-sectional and purposive sampling technique to gather data from 235 managers. A meticulously designed questionnaire facilitated the comprehensive evaluation of the research process. Data analysis was performed using SPSS. The study findings underscore the significance of green rewards in enabling environmentally conscious organizations to achieve efficient resource utilization while advancing environmental conservation efforts. Urgency is emphasized in fostering eco-friendly competencies among employees to implement eco-efficient organizational practices. However, the study's generalizability is constrained by its limited sample size and geographical scope. To remain competitive in global markets and cater to international clientele, progressive manufacturers must embrace a consistent green management ethos. Equally crucial is the formulation of environmental policies by government bodies mandating the adoption of pro-environmental corporate practices and their impact assessment.

Alharbi (2020) explored the influence of green human resource management practices (GHRMP) on an organization's sustainability within the context of the resource-based view discipline. The study conducted a survey encompassing healthcare services and manufacturing organizations in Saudi Arabia, with applicability extending to hotels as well. Non-probability chain sampling was employed, and a total of 136 completed questionnaires were included in the analysis. The study utilized descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean,

standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and measurement and structural models. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS 25 and AMOS-SEM 18. The findings of the study indicated a positive and significant impact of GHRMP on sustainability. This underscores the potential of GHRMP to provide organizations with a crucial competitive advantage in today's fiercely competitive global environment. The research findings have practical implications for Saudi organizations, highlighting the potential benefits of implementing GHRMP to gain a competitive edge.

Tran (2023) conducted a study examining the interplay among green human resource management (GHRM), green leadership, green work engagement, and green organizational culture in an emerging market context. The research specifically focused on investigating the mediating role of green organizational culture in the relationship between GHRM, green leadership, and green work engagement within Vietnam's agricultural products industry. The study gathered data from 380 employees and revealed that both GHRM and green leadership positively influence green work engagement. Additionally, the findings indicated that green organizational culture acts as a mediator in the link between GHRM, green leadership, and green work engagement. These results contribute to enhancing the existing theoretical framework of GHRM by shedding light on how GHRM and green leadership impact green work engagement through the intermediary mechanism of green organizational culture. The research underscores the importance of effectively implementing GHRM strategies, fostering green leadership practices, and cultivating a green organizational culture. These initiatives are crucial in promoting employee engagement in environmentally sustainable work practices, thereby contributing to overall sustainability efforts within organizations.

Das and Dash (2023) investigated the impact of green training and development on organizational productivity. Their research followed a quantitative, cross-sectional approach. Utilizing purposive sampling, data were gathered from 235 managers through a meticulously designed questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. The study findings underscored the critical role of green training in enabling environmentally conscious organizations to achieve their objectives of efficient resource utilization and environmental protection. Urgent action is needed to cultivate eco-friendly competencies among employees to facilitate the implementation of eco-efficient organizational practices. However, the study's findings may be limited in generalizability due to its small sample size and restricted geographical focus. To meet the needs of a global market and remain competitive internationally, forward-thinking manufacturers must adopt a consistent green management philosophy. Additionally, government authorities must develop environmental policies mandating the adoption of pro-environmental corporate practices and measuring their impact.

Aderibigbe, Ahmodu, and Yusuff (2023) conducted an assessment of green human resource management (GHRM) practices concerning environmental sustainability within the Nigerian Oil and Gas industry. The study utilized a survey research design and collected primary data. The target population consisted of 5,725 employees from selected oil and gas exploration and production companies, with a sample size of 400 determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were employed to analyze the data. The findings indicated that green recruitment and selection (x = 3.61) and green performance evaluation (x = 3.83) were the GHRM practices implemented to a significant extent in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry. However, green pay and reward (x = 3.15) were implemented to a moderate extent. The study also revealed a significant overall impact of GHRM practices on environmental sustainability in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry at a probability level of 0.5 (F = 27.55, p < 0.05). Based on these results, the study recommended that the Oil and Gas Industry in Nigeria should implement all aspects of GHRM practices to a greater extent to address their environmental challenges effectively.

Al-Shammari et al. (2022) explore the relationship between green human resource management (GHRM) bundle practices and green innovation and their collective impact on sustainability performance, as assessed by the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) criteria encompassing environmental, social, and economic aspects. A quantitative approach was chosen, involving data collection from 335 small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through a customized survey. The collected data were then analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS. The findings of the study revealed a positive and significant impact of green human resource management bundle practices on the sustainable performance of SMEs. Furthermore, the results indicated that green innovation also had a significant influence on sustainable performance. Interestingly, the study discovered that green innovation partially mediated the relationship between green human resource practices and sustainable performance among SMEs. This suggests that implementing green innovation strategies can be strengthened through the adoption of GHRM practices, consequently enhancing the sustainability of firms. Moreover, the study not only corroborates but also extends the traditional understanding of the interplay between environmental management practices, human resources, innovation, and sustainability. It emphasizes that focusing on environmental management practices within the realms of human resources and innovation can lead to enhanced sustainability outcomes for businesses. In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of integrating GHRM bundle practices and green innovation strategies for achieving sustainable performance, particularly in the context of SMEs in Saudi Arabia. This research contributes valuable insights into how organizations can leverage environmental

management practices to drive innovation and improve overall sustainability across environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design was used with the population of 2,363 from SMEDAN 2017. The sample size for this study comprised 341 SMEs located in Ondo State. The sample techniques used was simple random sampling. The instrument used was structured questionnaire. This questionnaire measures the respondents' perception of GHRM practices, IT adoption, and SQ. The instrument was validated and the reliability revealed a coefficient of 0.742. The method of data analysis used was Structural Equation Modeling (SEM – SMART-Pls4) to test the formulated hypotheses. The model used was adapted from Aribaba and Ahmodu (2022) and the model stated thus: $Y = ß0 + ß1 + ß2 + ß3 + \Sigma it$ …………..(Eqn. 1). The study specified from the above model in the following econometric form:

$SQ = ß0 + ß_1 RP + ß_2 GR + ß_3 TD + \Sigma it$ …………………………………..………………….(Eqn. 2).

$IT = ß0 + ß_1 RP + ß_2 GR + ß_3 TD + \Sigma it$ …………………………………..………………….(Eqn. 3).

Where:

SQ = Sustainability Quality (as dependent variable)

IT = Innovative Technology (as a mediating variable)

RP = Recruitment Process

GR = Green Rewards

TD = Training and Development

$ß0$ = intercept

$ß_{1-3}$ = coefficients

Σ_{it} = Stochastic error term

The apriori expectation for the sign: $ß1>0$:$ß2>0$:$ß3>0$. The a priori sign denotes the anticipated sign of a parameter or coefficient within a statistical model or hypothesis established on pre-existing knowledge before the observation of data. This concept aids in developing expectations regarding the relationship between variables in a given model. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.
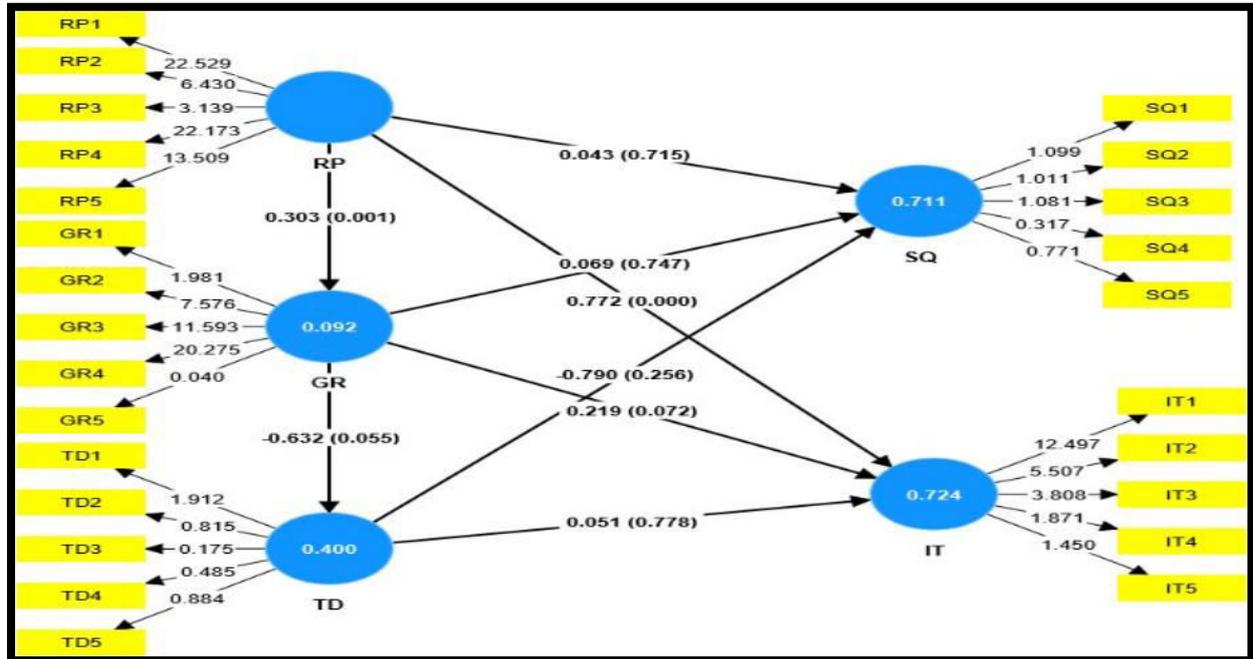
Results
Structural Equation Model

Figure 1: *Structural Equation Model, (2024)*

Table 1: Direct Effect Relationship

Hypotheses	Relationship	N	Path Coefficient1	Path Coefficient2	R^2	P-value	Decision
$H_0:1$	RP - SQ - IT	341	0.043	0.772	0.711	0.715	Not Rejected
$H_0:2$	GR - SQ - IT	341	0.069	0.219	0.092	0.747	Not Rejected
$H_0:3$	TD - SQ - IT	341	-0.790	0.051	0.400	0.256	Not Rejected

Source: *Survey DataComputation (2024). *.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

The structural model depicted in Figure 1 was utilized to examine the hypothesized relationships between the variables. Path coefficients, R-squared (r2) values, and p-values were calculated using a bootstrapping method with a sample size of 341. The R-squared value for the recruitment process was determined to be 0.711, indicating that it explains 71% of the variance in sustainable quality, which appears to be attributed to the combined impact of green HRM on the sustainability of SMEs in Ondo State. However, the R-squared value for the impact of green awards on sustainable quality was only 9%. Consequently, none of the identified pathways demonstrating direct effect relationships were statistically significant in the sample. The regression analysis for training and development revealed that the joint effect of GHRM accounts for 40% of the variance in sustainable quality. Table 1 summarizes the hypothesized

direct effect relationships of the structural model. All hypotheses were accepted, indicating that GHRM has a positive and nonsignificant effect on sustainable quality through innovative technology ($\beta1 = 0.043$; $\beta1 = 0.772$; $p = 0.715 > 0.05$; $\beta2 = 0.069$; $\beta2 = 0.219$; $p = 0.747 > 0.05$; $\beta3 = -0.790$; $\beta3 = 0.051$; $p = 0.256 > 0.05$).

Discussion
The study delves into the relationship between Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), sustainable quality, and the mediating role of innovative technology within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Ondo State. Through a quantitative approach, data from 341 SMEs were analyzed using a structural model to explore the hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal several significant insights. The recruitment process in SMEs significantly contributes to sustainable quality, accounting for 71% of the variance. This underscores the importance of GHRM practices in fostering sustainability within these organizations. Additionally, the study highlights the role of innovative technology as a mediator in this relationship. Thus, the study established positive and no significant relationship the recruitment process and sustainable quality through the innovative technology. Therefore, the study against the finding of Das and Dash (2023) that to meet the needs of a global market and remain competitive internationally, forward-thinking manufacturers must adopt a consistent green management philosophy. Also, Aderibigbe, Ahmodu, and Yusuff (2023) supported that all aspects of GHRM practices to a greater extent should be implemented to address their environmental challenges effectively.

However, despite the positive impact of GHRM on sustainable quality, the direct effect of green rewards on sustainable quality was found to be relatively low at 9%. This suggests that while external recognition through green rewards may enhance sustainability efforts, its influence may be limited compared to internal HRM practices. The finding also aligns with the conclusion of Das and Dash (2024) that for businesses to remain competitive in global markets and cater to international clientele, progressive manufacturers must embrace a consistent green management ethos. Furthermore, the results of training and development indicate that GHRM, in conjunction with innovative technology, accounts for 40% of the variance in sustainable quality. This underscores the significance of leveraging technological advancements to amplify the impact of green HRM practices on sustainability quality within SMEs in Ondo State. Al-Shammari et al. (2022) concluded that the importance of integrating GHRM bundle practices and green innovation strategies for achieving sustainable performance, particularly in the context of SMEs is essential. The study emphasizes the critical role of GHRM in driving sustainable quality within SMEs, with innovative technology serving as a key mediator in this relationship. These findings underscore the importance of integrating green practices into HRM strategies and leveraging technological innovations to enhance sustainability outcomes in the business landscape of Ondo State.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

The study concluded that Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and sustainable quality, with a focus on the mediating role of innovative technology within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Ondo State, yields insignificant perspicuity. The findings underscore the pivotal role of GHRM practices in fostering sustainable business operations and the importance of innovative technology as a mediator in this relationship. It also highlights the substantial impact of the recruitment process, a key component of GHRM, on sustainable quality within SMEs. This emphasizes the critical role that strategic HRM practices play in driving organizational sustainability. Also, the study underscores the potential of innovative technology to augment the effectiveness of GHRM initiatives, thereby enhancing sustainable outcomes in SMEs. However, while the study reveals a positive association between GHRM and sustainable quality, the direct effect of green rewards on sustainability was relatively low. This suggests that the external recognition through rewards contribute to sustainability efforts, internal HRM practices wield a more significant influence on sustainable quality. The implication of the findings suggests that:

1. Policymakers should encourage SMEs in Ondo State to adopt and prioritize GHRM practices, particularly in recruitment and talent management.
2. Recognise the green rewards will incentivize SMEs to pursue sustainability initiatives by offering rewards for environmental stewardship.
3. Integrate sustainable education into academic curricula and vocational training programs to equip future business leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to drive sustainable practices within SMEs.

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