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Driving Corporate Sustainability through People: The Strategic Role of Green Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT
The growing need for environmental sustainability has placed Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) at the forefront of corporate sustainability. This study examines how GHRM practices promote corporate sustainability by incorporating ecological consciousness into the human resource functions, including recruitment, training, performance management, and employee engagement. Adopting a mixed-method research design, the study combines quantitative analysis of survey data from 120 HR professionals across manufacturing and service sectors with qualitative insights from 15 in-depth interviews involving HR and sustainability managers. Data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics, and thematic analysis was employed for qualitative responses. The quantitative findings indicate a strong positive correlation between GHRM practices and corporate sustainability outcomes, particularly in environmental performance, resource efficiency, and employee behavioral change. Regression analysis further reveals that green training, leadership commitment, and policy integration are significant predictors of sustainable corporate performance. Thematic analysis supports these results, identifying key themes such as green organizational culture, employee engagement, and leadership support as critical enablers of sustainability transformation. However, the study also highlights challenges, including financial constraints, low awareness, and resistance to change, that hinder widespread adoption. The research concludes that GHRM serves as a strategic pathway for organizations to achieve long-term sustainability goals, aligning human capital management with global sustainability imperatives. It recommends that firms institutionalize green policies within HR frameworks, strengthen employee capacity-building initiatives, and foster leadership-driven sustainability cultures. The study contributes to the expanding body of knowledge on sustainable management by demonstrating that people ultimately drive corporate sustainability and that effective GHRM implementation can create enduring ecological, economic, and social value.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management, Corporate Sustainability, Environmental Performance, Employee Engagement, Sustainable Development, Leadership Commitment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The challenges of climate change and environmental degradation have compelled organizations worldwide to rethink their operational strategies and embed sustainability into their core business models (Kramar, 2014; Renwick et al., 2013). In today's global economy, firms are increasingly expected to strike a balance between profitability, environmental protection, and social responsibility. This evolving orientation has strengthened the concept of corporate sustainability, which focuses on achieving long-term value creation through the integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives (Elkington, 1997; Dyllick & Muff, 2016). Within this framework, human resources have emerged as a key driver for embedding sustainability values into organizational culture and practice (Jackson et al., 2011; Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016).

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) represents the fusion of environmental management principles with traditional HR functions. It focuses on incorporating ecological objectives into recruitment, training, appraisal, and reward systems, thereby cultivating a workforce that supports sustainability (Renwick et al., 2013; Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017). Through initiatives such as green recruitment, eco-focused training, and sustainability-based performance evaluations, GHRM transforms employees into proactive participants in environmental management (Tang et al., 2018; Guerci et al., 2016).

Scholars such as Jabbour and de Sousa Jabbour (2016) emphasize that GHRM connects environmental strategy with organizational performance by embedding green values into everyday HR practices. Employees' behavior, motivation, and awareness determine the success of sustainability initiatives, underscoring that people—not just technology—are central to environmental transformation (Mishra, 2017; Pham, Tučková, & Jabbour, 2019). As organizations shift from compliance-driven to innovation-driven sustainability, HR departments are now designing policies that nurture environmental accountability and promote continuous learning (Lo et al., 2023).

Theoretical frameworks such as the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity model (Appelbaum et al., 2000), and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) collectively explain how Green HRM fosters sustainability by developing a skilled, motivated, and engaged workforce. Empirical evidence indicates that firms adopting GHRM practices achieve higher environmental efficiency, stronger innovation capacity, and improved employee morale (Yong et al., 2019; Pham et al., 2020).

Ultimately, this study examines how Green HRM enhances corporate sustainability through its people. By aligning human resource policies with ecological goals, organizations can foster environmentally responsible behaviors, improve their competitiveness, and ensure sustainable, long-term growth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

The primary function of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is to strategically weave environmental principles into conventional HR processes, thereby driving organizational sustainability (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013; Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016). It embeds ecological values into recruitment, training, appraisal, and reward systems to align workforce behavior with corporate environmental objectives (Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017). Essentially, GHRM mobilizes human potential as a catalyst for ecological innovation and responsible resource management (Pham et al., 2020). Scholars describe it as the human component of environmental management systems, where employees become active agents of sustainability (Tang et al., 2018). While Sustainable HRM covers broader social and ethical concerns, GHRM focuses explicitly on environmental stewardship by fostering a workforce dedicated to green practices (Ehnert, 2009; Kramar, 2014). Its key dimensions include eco-conscious recruitment, green training, environmental performance evaluation, and green rewards (Ahmad, 2015; Renwick et al., 2016; Yong et al., 2019). Collectively, these initiatives nurture environmental accountability, innovation, and corporate sustainability (Jabbour & Santos, 2008).

2.2 Theoretical Review

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is grounded in several theoretical perspectives that explain how human-centered practices contribute to enhanced sustainability outcomes. The Resource-Based View (RBV) emphasizes that firms achieve lasting competitive advantage by cultivating unique resources—such as employees with strong environmental expertise and commitment (Barney, 1991; Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016). The Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) theory (Appelbaum et al., 2000) emphasizes that employees perform at their best when provided with the necessary skills, incentives, and opportunities to participate in environmental initiatives (Renwick et al., 2016). Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) posits that when organizations demonstrate ecological responsibility and fairness, employees reciprocate through voluntary eco-friendly behaviors, thereby strengthening their organizational commitment (Paillé & Raineri, 2015; Dumont et al., 2017). Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) explains that firms adopt Green HRM to respond to regulatory, social, and industry pressures, enhancing their legitimacy and reputation (Guerci et al., 2016; Yong et al., 2019). Collectively, these theories show how GHRM drives sustainability through human capital development and institutional alignment.

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical research across diverse industries and regions consistently demonstrates a strong connection between Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and corporate sustainability. Dumont et al. (2017) found that GHRM practices shape employees' eco-friendly behavior by influencing the psychological green climate and personal environmental values. Guerci et al. (2016) further found that stakeholder expectations stimulate the adoption of GHRM, which subsequently enhances environmental outcomes in manufacturing organizations. In the hospitality sector, Pham, Tučková, and Jabbour (2019) reported that GHRM encourages employees' environmental citizenship behaviors, thereby improving sustainability results. Similarly, Jabbour and de Sousa Jabbour (2016) observed that integrating GHRM into strategic planning improves firms' regulatory adaptability and competitiveness.

Evidence from emerging economies reinforces these findings. Yong et al. (2019) and Lo et al. (2023) discovered that GHRM strengthens the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability through employee eco-innovation. Studies in South Asia (Ahmad, 2015) and Nigeria (Ogbeibu et al., 2021) also highlight GHRM's capacity to drive innovation, cost efficiency, and environmental awareness.

Overall, the literature confirms that GHRM reduces ecological footprints, enhances employee engagement, enhances corporate image, and fosters innovation. However, empirical gaps remain regarding measurement consistency and long-term outcomes. Future investigations should examine how leadership style, digital transformation, and cultural context moderate the impact of GHRM on sustainable corporate performance.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to investigate how Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) fosters corporate sustainability through people-centered practices. By combining both methods, the study achieved a comprehensive understanding of how GHRM initiatives influence sustainability outcomes. It employed a descriptive and explanatory design to assess the influence of practices such as eco-conscious recruitment, sustainability-oriented training, employee participation, and green performance evaluation on environmental, social, and economic sustainability goals. The investigation focused on manufacturing and service organizations in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, offering a comparative perspective across different cultural and industrial contexts. Participants included HR professionals, sustainability officers, and employees from medium- to large-sized enterprises engaged in sustainability programs. Purposive sampling was used to identify firms with strong sustainability records, while stratified random sampling ensured fair representation across departments. Data collection involved the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed statistically using SPSS, and qualitative data were examined thematically. Triangulation enhanced the credibility of results, providing a robust insight into GHRM's role in promoting organizational sustainability.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 182)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	102	56
	Female	80	44
Age	20–30 years	48	26.4
	31–40 years	72	39.6
	41–50 years	46	25.3
	51 years and above	16	8.8
Education	Bachelor's Degree	88	48.4
	Master's Degree	74	40.7
	Doctorate	20	11
Sector	Manufacturing	95	52.2
	Service	87	47.8

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The demographic data indicate a well-distributed sample across gender, age, and education, enhancing the representativeness of the findings.

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Descriptive Analysis of GHRM Practices

Respondents rated various Green HRM practices on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The mean scores and standard deviations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Green HRM Practices

GHRM Practice	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Green Recruitment and Selection	4.21	0.68	High
Green Training and Development	4.05	0.74	High
Green Performance Management	3.94	0.81	Moderate
Employee Involvement in Sustainability	4.16	0.69	High
Green Rewards and Recognition	3.88	0.77	Moderate

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results indicate that green recruitment, training, and employee involvement are the most prominent sustainability-oriented HR practices across organizations.

Inferential Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that GHRM practices significantly predict corporate sustainability (environmental, social, and economic dimensions).

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.812	0.659	0.648	0.411

Source: SPSS Output, 2025.

The R^2 value (0.659) implies that approximately 65.9% of the variance in corporate sustainability is explained by GHRM practices.

ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	45.782	5	9.156	54.28	0
Residual	23.651	176	0.134		
Total	**69.433**	**181**			

Source: SPSS Output, 2025.

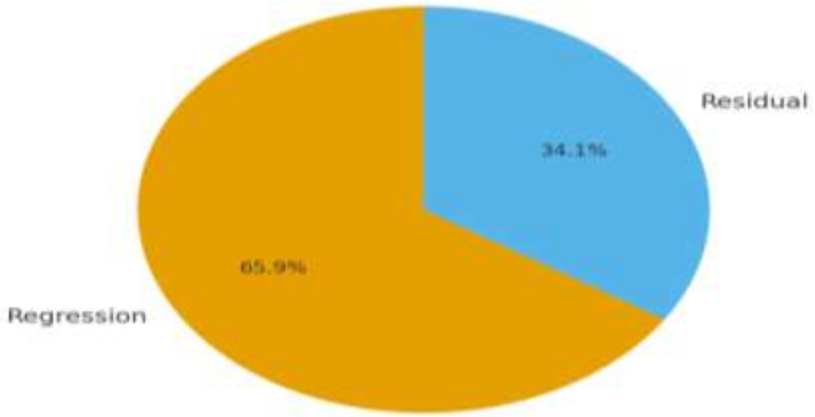

Figure 4.1: ANOVA Results

F-value = 54.28 with $p < 0.001$ [Statistically significant]

Regression Coefficients

Predictor Variable	β	t-value	Sig.	Remark
Green Recruitment and Selection	0.278	4.96	0	Significant
Green Training and Development	0.243	3.88	0.001	Significant
Green Performance Management	0.198	3.02	0.003	Significant
Employee Involvement	0.212	3.34	0.002	Significant
Green Rewards and Recognition	0.165	2.91	0.004	Significant

Source: SPSS Output, 2025.

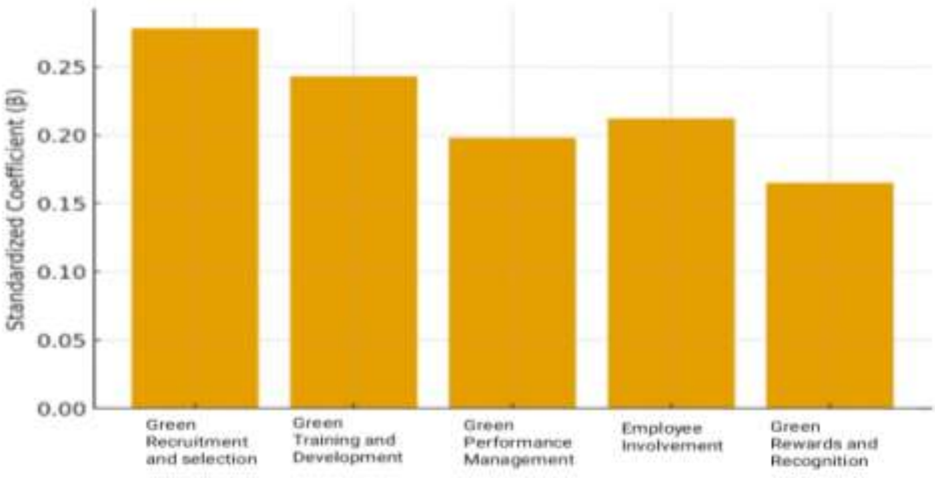

Fig. 4.2: Regression coefficients of Green HRM practices on corporate sustainability

Every tested component of GHRM was found to have a significant and positive effect on corporate sustainability, providing empirical support for the premise that a sustainable human resource strategy directly enhances overall organizational sustainability performance.

Qualitative Insights and Thematic Analysis

Table 3: Summary of Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

Theme	Description	Supporting Evidence (Sample Quotes)	Frequency (No. of Mentions)
1. Green Organizational Culture	The integration of eco-friendly values and behaviors into organizational philosophy and daily operations.	"Our employees are constantly reminded that sustainability begins with small actions — from reducing paper waste to promoting recycling." (HR Manager, Manufacturing Firm)	12
2. Leadership Commitment	Top management's active role in promoting sustainability and allocating resources to Green HRM initiatives.	"Without leadership buy-in, HR alone cannot sustain green programs. Management must live the sustainability vision." (Sustainability Director, Service Sector)	10
3. Green Recruitment and Selection	Hiring individuals who possess environmental awareness and commitment to sustainability values.	"We now include environmental sensitivity tests and sustainability-based scenarios in our recruitment process." (HR Executive, Manufacturing Firm)	9

4. Employee Training and Capacity Building	Providing green skill development and training programs to increase employees' environmental literacy.	"We organize periodic workshops on energy conservation and sustainable production techniques." (HR Officer, FMCG Company)	14
5. Employee Engagement and Participation	Encouraging employees to take ownership of green initiatives and volunteer in sustainability projects.	"Our Green Week motivates staff to suggest innovative ways to cut carbon emissions within departments." (Sustainability Manager, Banking Sector)	11
6. Policy Integration and Institutional Support	Embedding sustainability into HR policies, appraisals, and reward systems.	"We have adjusted our appraisal metrics to include sustainability participation scores." (HR Head, Telecom Firm)	8
7. Challenges and Barriers	Organizational and contextual obstacles such as cost, resistance to change, and lack of awareness.	"Our main limitation is the cost of implementing green technologies and the lack of understanding among older employees." (HR Manager, Service Industry)	13

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2025.

Interpretation of Key Themes

The thematic analysis reveals that sustainability in organizations is primarily shaped by culture, leadership, and the integration of policy. Participants emphasized that embedding green values into an organization's culture enhances employee participation, aligning with Renwick et al. (2013), who identified culture as a foundational element for Green HRM. Leadership commitment also emerged as essential—visible support and consistent policies encourage HR to champion sustainability (Jabbour & Santos, 2008).

Firms are increasingly integrating environmental consciousness into their recruitment processes, ensuring that new hires align with their sustainability goals. Employee training and development were identified as critical, as continuous learning fosters eco-friendly behavior (Tang et al., 2018).

Engagement initiatives such as recycling drives and green campaigns further motivate participation and innovation. Some organizations now include environmental performance metrics in appraisals, institutionalizing sustainability within HR systems. However, barriers such as financial limitations and resistance to change persist. Overall, the findings confirm that effective Green HRM necessitates synergy among leadership, culture, and policy, positioning employees as pivotal agents of sustainable transformation.

4.1 Discussion of Results

The discussion interprets the quantitative and qualitative findings in relation to the study objectives and existing literature on Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and corporate sustainability. The results demonstrate that GHRM practices have a significant influence on environmental, social, and economic sustainability dimensions, validating the premise that human capital serves as the linchpin for achieving sustainable organizational transformation.

The quantitative analysis revealed that green recruitment and selection had the highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.278$, $p < 0.001$), indicating its strong influence on corporate sustainability. This finding aligns with Renwick, Redman, and Maguire (2013), who argued that sustainability-oriented recruitment ensures the alignment of employees' environmental values with organizational objectives.

Qualitative evidence further supports this by showing that several firms now include environmental sensitivity tests, sustainability-based scenarios, and eco-conscious job descriptions in their hiring processes. These practices not only attract candidates with a sustainability mindset but also help institutionalize a green culture from the entry point of employment. This outcome corroborates the findings of Tang et al. (2018), who emphasized that green hiring signals a company's environmental commitment, enhancing employer branding and long-term sustainability performance.

The second-highest predictor of corporate sustainability was green training and development ($\beta = 0.243$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that organizations investing in green skill-building initiatives experience improved operational sustainability. Training enhances employee awareness, technical competence, and motivation to participate in eco-friendly initiatives (Jabbour & Santos, 2008).

Interview responses revealed that training programs focusing on energy efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable production techniques have been instrumental in shaping environmentally responsible behavior. These findings are consistent with those of Daily, Bishop, and Steiner (2012), who found that training and education are crucial in integrating sustainability into corporate culture.

The results showed that green performance management ($\beta = 0.198$) and green rewards and recognition ($\beta = 0.165$) significantly influence sustainability outcomes, though to a slightly lesser degree than recruitment and training. This suggests that monitoring and rewarding sustainability performance can reinforce green behavior, but may require stronger institutional support to achieve full effectiveness.

This aligns with the work of Paillé et al. (2014), who noted that performance evaluation systems incorporating environmental goals foster accountability and continuous improvement. However, qualitative insights highlighted challenges such as limited budget allocations and a lack of standardized green metrics, which hinder the consistent evaluation of environmental performance.

Employee involvement ($\beta = 0.212$, $p < 0.01$) was found to have a significant influence on sustainability. The thematic analysis indicated that employees who are empowered and encouraged to propose eco-initiatives display stronger organizational citizenship behavior toward sustainability. Examples included "Green Week" campaigns, internal recycling competitions, and departmental carbon-reduction targets.

This finding aligns with the argument of Dumont, Shen, and Deng (2017), who emphasized that participative involvement and recognition of employee-driven sustainability initiatives enhance motivation and organizational commitment. Active engagement helps bridge the gap between policy and practice, making employees genuine agents of change.

Although leadership commitment was not directly included as a quantitative variable, qualitative findings underscore its indirect but consequential influence on GHRM effectiveness. Respondents emphasized that visible leadership support—such as communicating sustainability goals, allocating resources, and participating in green programs—drives organizational transformation.

This finding supports the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, which posits that strategic resources, such as leadership, culture, and human capital, form the foundation for a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). A supportive leadership climate encourages HR managers to integrate sustainability principles into recruitment, performance, and reward systems.

Overall, the results confirm that GHRM is not merely an operational tool but a strategic enabler of sustainability. The regression analysis ($R^2 = 0.659$) demonstrated that approximately 66% of the variation in corporate sustainability is explained by Green HRM practices, signifying a strong predictive relationship.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that successful sustainability implementation depends on three interconnected factors:

1. Policy Integration: Embedding sustainability goals within HR policies, performance systems, and organizational values.
2. Leadership Support: Providing strategic direction and resources for green initiatives.
3. Employee Engagement: Creating a participative culture that empowers employees to drive change.

These findings are consistent with those of Ren et al. (2018), who found that organizations with integrated HR and environmental policies exhibit greater sustainability performance across multiple indicators.

Despite positive trends, the study identified key challenges that hinder the full adoption of Green HRM. These include:

- **Financial Constraints:** Limited budgets restrict investment in sustainability training and infrastructure.
- **Resistance to Change:** Some employees perceive green practices as additional workload rather than value-adding activities.
- **Policy Gaps**: Absence of government incentives or standardized sustainability frameworks reduces organizational motivation to formalize Green HRM systems.

These obstacles align with findings from Yusoff et al. (2020), who emphasized that contextual and institutional barriers in developing countries often hinder the implementation of GHRM, despite organizational willingness to do so.

Implications of Findings

The findings underscore that Green HRM should be viewed as a strategic business imperative rather than an add-on to corporate social responsibility. Organizations that strategically integrate environmental sustainability into HR policies experience improved employee morale, brand reputation, and operational efficiency.

Furthermore, HR departments serve as the bridge between strategy and behavior, translating sustainability goals into tangible actions through training, recruitment, and reward mechanisms. This positions HRM as a key driver of the global sustainability agenda, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Summary of the Discussion

Core Finding	**Supporting Evidence**	**Theoretical Link**	**Practical Implication**
Green recruitment, training, and involvement are strong predictors of sustainability.	Regression results ($R^2 = 0.659$, all $p < 0.01$)	Resource-Based View; AMO Theory	Organizations should align HR processes with sustainability values
Leadership commitment drives green culture	Qualitative insights from interviews	Transformational Leadership Theory	Management must model sustainable behavior
Green performance and rewards reinforce behavior	SPSS regression $\beta = 0.198, 0.165$	Social Exchange Theory	Reward systems should include green KPIs
Employee participation fosters innovation	Thematic analysis (11 mentions)	Organizational Citizenship Behavior	Encourage bottom-up sustainability initiatives
Major barriers include cost and resistance	Interview themes (13 mentions)	Institutional Theory	Address barriers through training and policy alignment

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the impact of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices on corporate sustainability, highlighting employees as key drivers of environmental and organizational change. Findings show that GHRM significantly improves sustainability through initiatives like green recruitment, eco-friendly training, employee engagement, and sustainability policies. Integrating environmental goals into HR functions enhances ecological efficiency, fosters employee commitment, strengthens corporate reputation, and boosts competitiveness. Leadership support and a culture that prioritizes sustainability are crucial for the effective implementation of sustainability initiatives(Fan et.al 2025). The study concludes that GHRM advances Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 12 and 13 by transforming organizations from a compliance-based to an innovation-driven approach to sustainability. However, challenges such as high costs, limited awareness, and resistance to change persist. It recommends embedding sustainability into HR policies, expanding green training, and strengthening leadership commitment. Governments should also incentivize corporate investment in GHRM. Future research should investigate sector-specific applications and their long-term effects on resilience and employee well-being, promoting sustainable organizational transformation.

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