

Green Human Resource Acquisition Practices as a Determinant of Employee Performance in Developing Countries: Evidence from Public Universities in Western Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations are embracing sustainability initiatives as the global race towards environmental conservation picks momentum. Some organizations in Kenya including public universities, have undertaken green-oriented human resource management practices, including employee acquisition practices as they seek to cope with reduced government financial support for their operations. The role of green human resource acquisition practices on academic staff performance in public universities remains relatively unexplored in Kenya. This study assessed the effect of green human resource acquisition practices on employee performance. Anchored on a positivist philosophy and using the Ability, Motivation and Opportunity Theory, a correlational research design was used to undertake the study on a target population of 438 academic staff holding top and middle level management positions in 11 public universities in the Western region of Kenya. From it, a sample size of 209 respondents was determined using Slovin's sample determination method. Questionnaires were used to collect data. The collected Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics where correlation analysis was done using SPSS version 25.0. The results show that green Human Resource Acquisition practices had a strong positive correlation ($r=0.702$) to the employee's performance. The research concluded that Human Resource Acquisition practices of recruitment and selection determined employee performance. The study recommends that Public Universities should focus on recruiting and selecting green focused human resources in order to improve employee performance.

Keywords: Employee Performance, Green Human Resource Acquisition Practices, Public Universities, Developing Countries

I. INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has put the spotlight on recognition of climate change and its effects as well as the embracing of green initiatives by human resource management practitioners in organizations globally. Green human resource acquisition practices have been adopted in a bid to encourage superior employee performance (Gupta & Jangra, 2024; Ari *et al.*, 2020). According to Awwad *et al.* (2022) and Al-Ghazali and Afsar, (2021), focus has shifted to ensuring the organizations acquire employees who have green awareness and its impact on organizational sustainability in a bid to effectively direct their firms towards the achievement of success in environmental management initiatives in workplaces. Green human resource recruitment and selection practices have been identified as a potential tool for supporting environmental activities and sustainability of organizations (Jamil *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, organizations are developing recruitment and selection practices that encourage from the onset the acquisition of employees who embrace eco-friendly initiatives.

Organizational Human Resource acquisition systems in developing countries are continuously being aligned to the new approach of green initiatives. Ahmad (2015) posits that for organizations to be effective, employee recruitment and selection processes need to reflect the comprehensive, sustainable approach being pursued by the organization. They need to be designed in a way that they connect to the firm's corporate culture and conceptually sustain the behavioral change being promoted by the business. The attainment of specific environmental initiatives should be integrated into the organization's employee acquisition system in a manner that builds and sustains employee interest in environmental conservation initiatives and organizational performance (Mwita, 2019). This would be a recipe for motivating employees to pursue corporate environmental management initiatives. Green human resource acquisition practices have been practiced globally resulting in both financial and non-financial benefits (Rashmi, 2021). Huff (2007), Pham and Paille (2020) and Akpobolokami,(2023) hold the view that embracing green human resource acquisition programs have been seen to result in sustained competitive advantage and sustainability of firms.

Shahrulnizam *et al.* (2023) suggests several green human resource acquisition practices have been practiced

globally. In Canada, for example, Castanelli (2019) undertook a study that found out that green job announcements were posted on GoodWork.ca, the main platform for green worker recruitment in Canada. Other studies in Asia (Yusoff et al., 2018) and Africa (Mensah et al., 2023) also found that green human resource acquisition practices of recruitment and selection were a predictor of firm performance. Further, Mtembu (2019) established that green human resource acquisition practices had an effect on organizational implementation and project success. Another study by Chemjor (2020) done in Kenya further affirm this relationship.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite this increase in awareness and a concerted push towards sustainability, many organizations are struggling to embed environmental considerations into their recruitment and selection processes (Szczeny, 2023). Several studies affirm that firms can achieve positive employee performance and sustainability through implementing green human resource management practices, including utilizing green focused initiatives in its human resource acquisition practices that include recruitment and selection (Yusliza et al., 2019; Renwick et al., 2013). Whereas this may be the case in the manufacturing and service industries in the private sector in developed countries where these studies were conducted, the possibility of such eventualities has not been fully explored in public institutions in developing countries like Kenya, where the concept of green human resource acquisition practice has not yet strongly taken root. Further, even where such studies have been done in developing countries in the public sector, such studies were done not in public universities (Das and Dash, 2024). The one done in universities (Lashari et al., 2022) was done outside Kenya. This study, therefore, sought to fill this empirical gap by establishing the relationship between green human resource acquisition practices and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

To establish the relationship between green human resources acquisition practices on the performance of Public universities in western Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: Green human resource acquisition practices do not have a significant relationship with employee performance in public universities in western Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empirical Review

The study was guided by the Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) model. AMO theory was proposed by MacInnis and Jaworski in 1989 within the context of information processing and employee behavior. It proposes that employee performance is determined by abilities, motivation, and opportunities. The theory highlights three separate elements of the work system that form employee characteristics and affect organizational progress. These include the employee's ability, desire, and opportunity to make a contribution (Ilro, 2021). Therefore, in the absence of any of the aspects of AMO, the total output of an employee is insignificant. In order to create well-functioning human resources pool, it is crucial that the management of public universities look inward to assess and enhance the composition of their employee profiles for sustainable outputs. The risk of a wrong team composition of employees disenables the requisite synergies between ability, motivation, and opportunity for both employees and the overall sustainable performance of the universities.

Therefore, drawing on the Ability Motivation Opportunity (AMO) framework, green human resource management practices embraced by organizations should emphasize enhancing the abilities of the employees, motivating the employees, and providing the employees with the opportunity to perform. Green recruitment involves hiring individuals with knowledge and skills in environmental management systems universities (Das and Dash, 2024). It aims to lower recruitment costs through automation and promote environmental awareness from the outset (Akpobolokami, 2023). This process enhances organizational performance by aligning new hires with the company's environmental culture. However, attracting and retaining skilled professionals remains a significant challenge for HR managers (Mwita, 2019). As environmental awareness grows, an organization's green reputation becomes crucial for attracting talent (Pham and Paillé, 2020). Effective human resource acquisition practices include automated applications, virtual interviews, and psychometric testing (Abid et al., 2020; Adubor et al., 2022).

The concept of green recruitment practices has gained significant traction as organizations seek to align themselves with sustainable development goals and environmental stewardship. Green recruitment practices encompass strategies aimed at attracting candidates who are environmentally conscious and likely to contribute to an organization's sustainability objectives. When attracted to and acquired by the organization, such employees enhance green awareness, green employer branding, and this in turn is expected to have an effect on employee performance. Green awareness

refers to the level of consciousness and understanding that individuals have regarding environmental issues and the importance of sustainability in their professional roles (Zhang *et al.*, 2019). Research has demonstrated that candidates with a strong green awareness tend to perform better in organizations that prioritize sustainability. The application of specific green criteria during the recruitment process involves setting environmental considerations as key factors when evaluating candidates.

2.2 Empirical Review

The study also reviewed empirical literature. Jamil *et al.* (2023) examined the concept of green recruitment (GR) and its subsequent impact on organizational sustainability performance. The study established that green recruitment had an impact on sustainable performance of organizations. Further, research by Zhang *et al.* (2020) explored the effectiveness of green criteria in attracting candidates to organizations focused on sustainability and the results showed that companies employing green criteria in their recruitment attracted candidates who were more likely to embrace eco-friendly practices within the workplace. In addition, according to a comprehensive meta-analytic study by Tang *et al.* (2018), various green recruitment practices collectively contribute to enhanced employee engagement and performance. The study analyzed 45 empirical articles focusing on the link between green HR practices and employee performance across different sectors. Another by Javed *et al.* (2024) that examined the implementation of environmentally responsible (Green) human resource management practices in the health sector found out that such practices had an influence on organizational sustainability performance in Pakistan.

Generally, studies on green human resource management have been done in various areas (Yusliza *et al.*, 2019; Mwita & Mwakasangula, 2020; Ardiza *et al.*, 2020). However, there is a knowledge gap on the extent to which green human resource acquisition practices affect employee performance, more so in universities in Kenya. As a hub for research, knowledge, and innovations, universities should take the lead in adopting and implementing innovative green initiatives to promote environmental sustainability. Green Human Resource management practices affected organizational sustainability performance

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Philosophy

This study was guided by a positivist philosophy, which holds that genuine and factual occurrences could be studied and observed scientifically and empirically (Khaldi, 2017). Positivism subscribes to the view that only factual knowledge gained through observation (the senses), including measurement, is trustworthy. In positivism studies, the researcher's role is limited to data collection and interpretation of the same in an objective way (Dawadi *et al.*, 2021).

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a correlational research design which is a quantitative research design to test a hypothesis by collecting data that supports or defies it (Efron & Ravid, 2019). It aided in establishing the relationship between the human resource acquisition practices and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya.

3.3 Study Area

The study was carried out in universities located in the western region of Kenya. This region comprises of ten of the 47 counties in Kenya, namely Busia, Vihiga, Kakamega, Bungoma, Migori, Kisumu, Homa Bay, Siaya, Kisii, and Nyamira. The region was viewed as representative in terms of the number and types of public universities in it.

3.4 Target Population

This study targeted the top and middle-level management academic staff of the 11 public universities in the western region of Kenya. This group comprises of Deputy Vice Chancellors, registrars, deans, and heads of sections. The study focused on the main campuses only, with a target population of 438 such employees. These universities included Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOUST), Kibabii University (KIBU), the University of Kabanga (KABU), Kisii University (KSU), Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), Bomet University College (BOMU), Kotialet Arap Samoei University College (KASU), Maseno University (MU), Rongo University (RU), Alupe University (AU), and Kaimosi Friends University (KAFU). These public universities are obligated to pursue the attainment of the sustainability agreements of the Kenya Green University Network (KGUN), which is a joint initiative of the Commission for University Education (CUE), the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (Chemjor, 2020).

3.5 Sampling Technique

The study used the probability sampling technique which ensured that every member of the sample had an equal probability of being selected for the research. This included stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Stratified random sampling was used to select the top and middle-level academic staff managers, namely Deputy VCs, Deans/Directors, HODs/CODs, and Registrars in public universities. Stratified sampling involves dividing the population into sub-populations that may differ in important ways (Denscombe, 2017). It allowed the study to draw more precise conclusions by ensuring that every subgroup was properly represented in the sample. Simple random sampling was used to select participants from each stratum. Each member of the stratum had an equal chance of being selected. Data was then collected from randomly from each subset.

3.6 Sample Size

The study used Slovin's formula to calculate the sample size. Using the formula, 209 respondents were selected as a sample for this study as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size

e = the margin of error (0.05).

n= 438/ (1+(438*0.0025))

n= 209

According to Memon et al. (2020), a good maximum sample size is usually around 10% of the population. Therefore 209, which is 47.7% of the population was preferable for this study.

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire administered to sampled employees. The questionnaire had close-ended items on a 5-point Likert scale commonly used in the social sciences to measure perceptions, attitudes, values, and behavior (Gkana & Nychas, 2018). The items adopted a 5-point Likert scale with 1: strongly disagree (SD), 2: disagree (D), 3: undecided (U), 4: agree (A), and 5: strongly agree (SA). The structured questionnaire was used to elicit specific information regarding respondents' perceptions of green Human Resource acquisition practices and employee performance. Respondents were assured of anonymity, were to give consent to participate in the study and were free to exit from it at their own will. Further, study obtained relevant authorization to conduct the research from the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovations of Kenya. The collected data was fed into SPSS version 25.0 software for analysis. Content, construct and face validity was established as well as reliability.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Out of the 209 questionnaires distributed to respondents, 204 were returned. This translated to a response rate of 97.61% as shown in Table 1. This response rate is high hence indicative of the participants' engagement and the effectiveness of the data collection process. It further suggests that the findings of the study are likely to be reliable and representative of the target population, thereby enhancing the validity of the research conclusions.

Table 1

Response Rate

Sampled	Responded	Response Rate
209	204	97.61%

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

The study collected and examined the demographic characteristics of the respondents before embarking on descriptive and inferential analysis of results. Amongst these included their age, gender, academic qualification and age of respondents as presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency	Per cent(%)
Gender	Male	109	53.4
	Female	95	46.6
Age(Years)	30-35	32	15.7
	36-40	23	11.3
	41-45	39	19.1
	46-50	60	29.4
	51-55	35	17.1
	Above 55	15	7.4
Highest Academic Qualifications	Masters	94	46.1
	Ph. D	110	53.9
Years of service as an Academic staff in the University	1-5	27	13.2
	6-10	58	28.4
	11-15	48	23.5
	16-20	54	26.5
	Above 20 years	17	8.3

A majority of the respondents were male although the female gender was also represented at 46.6% as seen on Table 1. Most of the respondents had Master's degree and above as their highest academic qualification and a majority had served in the universities for between 6-20 years (78.4%). Arising from this, it can be deduced that they had adequate experience to give information regarding green human resource acquisition practices and how it affected performance.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Human Resource Acquisition Practices

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with selected statements regarding Human Resource Acquisition practices of their universities. This was done on a 5-point Likert scale where: SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = undecided, D = disagree, and SD = strongly disagree. The findings were presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Green Reward Management Practices

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Job applicants are selected based on their awareness of the environmental policies of the organization	29	7	15	97	56
	14.20%	3.40%	7.40%	47.50%	27.50%
Job description focus on environmentally responsible candidates	29	21	29	122	3
	14.20%	10.30%	14.20%	59.80%	1.50%
The organization uses automated application for employment	36	96	46	25	1
	17.60%	47.10%	22.50%	12.30%	0.50%
Email is used when corresponding with candidate	45	115	44	0	0
	22.10%	56.40%	21.60%	0.00%	0.00%
Past environmental conservation initiatives achieved by the university are made prominent on its hiring webpage to attract prospective employees	52	99	33	20	0
	25.50%	48.50%	16.20%	9.80%	0.00%
My university uses brochures or paper recruiting materials that are made of recyclable resources	47	157	0	0	0
	23.00%	77.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Priority in selection of employees is given to prospective employees who are considered as green environmental champions	39	43	55	65	2
	19.10%	21.10%	27.00%	31.90%	1.00%
Part of the Employee promotions criteria is linked to their participation in green initiatives, e.g. planting trees, recycling wastes, communication	78	72	27	20	7
	-38.2	-35.3	-13.2	-9.8	-3.4
The candidates for employee selection are to demonstrate environmental awareness and conservation credentials as a condition for being chosen to work for my university	122	3	7.40%	29	7
	59.80%	1.50%	29	14.20%	3.40%

From the above results in Table 3, it can be seen that although the universities did not have the main focus of job descriptions being environmental focus as was stated by a majority of respondents (59.8%), they had automated their job applications systems, thereby minimizing use of papers as was confirmed by 47.1% of the respondents. Further, they used email communication when corresponding to candidates as was stated by 56.4% of the respondents who agreed and 22.1%

of the respondents who agreed and strongly agreed respectively with the statement on the issue. Also, although there was agreement among respondents that job applicants were not majorly selected based on their awareness of environmental policies of the organization (47.5%), a majority of the respondents were of the view that past environmental conservation initiatives of the universities were made prominent on the universities' hiring websites to attract prospective employees. This findings show that the universities were championing environmental consciousness and promoting environmental initiatives that contribute to organizational sustainability. By so doing, they sought to inculcate in the minds of prospective employees that they put a premium in greening initiatives.

There was agreement among a majority of the respondents (59.8%) that candidates who presented themselves before the panels for employee selection were expected to demonstrate their impressive environmental awareness and conservation credentials as a condition to being selected to work in the university. The universities further put a premium on participation in greening initiatives as part of the conditions for promotion as was confirmed by 38.2% of the respondents who strongly agreed and 35.2% of them who agreed with the statement on the issue. This shows that during human resource acquisition initiatives, the issue of sustainability is given attention by the universities. Further, for academic staff who have worked in the university over time, they have to demonstrate their active participation in greening initiatives for them to climb the career ladder. These findings tally with earlier studies such as Adubor *et al.* (2022) who established that human resource acquisition practices such as recruitment and selection play a prominent role in enhancing employee performance. Workforce resulted in enhanced environmental performance. Similarly, Huff (2007) equally established that green human resource acquisition initiatives enhanced employee performance.

4.4 Employee Performance

Furthermore, there was consensus among respondents that employee performance had improved over the years, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Employee Performance

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I effectively teach all assigned courses in a semester	130	64	10	0	0
	63.7%	31.4%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%
I promptly undertake all assigned duties as set in the university schedule	139	50	13	2	0
	68.1%	24.5%	6.4%	1.0%	0.0%
The pass rate of students in my department has been excellent	129	57	12	6	0
	63.2%	27.9%	5.9%	2.9%	0.0%
The teams I lead in the university have accomplished all assigned tasks on time	104	55	30	14	1
	51.0%	27.0%	14.7%	6.9%	0.5%
I have attracted one research grant in the last one year	81	50	0	71	2
	39.7%	24.5%	0.0%	34.8%	1.0%
I have published two articles in referred journals in last one year	138	54	8	4	0
	67.6%	26.5%	3.9%	2.0%	0.0%
In general, embracing green human resource initiatives has improved employee performance among academic staff in my university	135	51	10	05	03
	66.2%	25%	4.9%	2.4%	1.5%

From the results, it can be seen that the employee performance among academic staff improved in terms of undertaking assigned courses (68.1%). The respondents also successfully led teams in accomplishing assigned tasks, as was affirmed by 104 (51%) who strongly agreed and agreed, 55 (27%) respectively with the statement on the issue. In addition, they were undertaking research initiatives and publishing at least two articles in refereed journals in a year, as was confirmed by 138 (67.6%) of the respondents who strongly agreed with the statement on the issue. In general, the respondents were in agreement that embracing green human resource acquisition initiatives had improved employee performance in the universities as was confirmed by 66.2 % of the respondents who strongly agreed and 25% of them who agreed with the statement on the issue. These findings are similar to earlier findings of the study by Yusoff *et al.* (2018) and Mensah *et al.* (2023) that report on the positive influence of green Human resource acquisition initiatives on performance.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

The study further undertook a correlation analysis to establish the relationship between Green Human Resource Acquisition practices and Employees' performance. The results are presented in Tables 5.

Table 5
Correlation Analysis

		Human Resource Acquisition Practices	
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.702**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	204	204

It can be noted in Table 4 that the value for $r=0.702$, which indicates a strong positive relationship between green Human Resource Acquisition practices and employee performance in public universities in public universities in Western region of Kenya. The study hypothesis that green human resource acquisition practices do not have a significant relationship with employees' performance in public universities in Western Kenya was therefore rejected.

It was therefore established that green human resource acquisition practices had a positive and significant relationship with employee performance. To that extent, green human resource acquisition practices determined employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya. These findings tally with those of earlier studies by Bhutto and Auranzeb (2016), Catherine (2016) and Titin *et al.* (2024) who found that green human resource acquisition practices had a positive relationship with and determined employee performance. It, however, differs from that of Wang *et al.* (2024), who established that green human resource acquisition practices did not affect employee performance. In general, a majority of such studies tend to show that green human resource acquisition practices influences employee performance.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study established that green human resource acquisition practices significantly had a strong relationship with and determined employee performance in western region universities in Kenya.

5.2 Recommendations

Public universities in the Western region should adopt green human resource acquisition practices. This involves incorporating and utilizing strategies aimed at creating awareness of greening initiatives and working to ensure that prospective and acquired employees adopt and undertake environmental sustainability initiatives such as planting trees, using communication channels that do not deplete the green environment. Further waste recycling should be encouraged to create sustainable work environments. The universities should align their recruitment and selection practices with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and learn from successful case studies to foster long-term business success and contribute to a sustainable future. These will create a culture that encourages newly employed and promoted employees to adopt environmentally friendly practices and actively contribute to sustainability efforts.

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