

Strategic Human Resource Management Practices and Workforce Thriving: Evidence from Public Universities in South-West, Nigeria

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Abstract

The evolving nature of higher education reflects the rising significance of strategic human resource management practices (SHRMP) in enhancing personal development and organisational success. Although SHRMP has been studied extensively in different industries, few studies have been conducted on the joint impact of SHRMP on workforce thriving within Nigerian public universities. Thus, the current study sought to determine the impact of SHRMP, such as digital HR practices, learning culture, and employee engagement programs, on workforce thriving among staff members in public universities in South-Western Nigeria. A descriptive survey research method was employed through the use of a structured questionnaire administered to 395 participants selected from a target population of 34,880 full-time academic and non-academic staff from 12 public universities in six states. Data were analysed through multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that learning culture ($B = 0.895$), digital HR practices ($B = 0.690$), and engagement efforts ($B = 0.685$) contribute positively and significantly towards influencing innovation and thriving at work. Learning culture, especially, was observed to make the greatest contribution, followed by digital HR practices and employee engagement efforts. From the conclusion drawn, it was recommended that public universities should adopt digital HR technology, foster a learning culture, and provide professional development to ensure innovation and ongoing employee engagement.

Keywords: Digital HR practices, employee engagement initiatives, learning culture, strategic human resource management, workforce thriving

Introduction

The ever-evolving work environment emphasises the need for the increasing use of strategic human resource (HR) management approaches to facilitate the growth of employees and the sustainability of the organisation. Adabala (2025) and Zeng & Fu (2025) conducted research that revealed that HR approaches that incorporate well-being, learning, and technology enable employees and organisations to succeed in the

ever-evolving work environment. Jayman et al. (2025) pointed out that universities are supposed to develop environments that encourage creativity, resilience, and engagement. Mohammadi Zaer & Roudgarnezhad (2025) further emphasised that strategic HR is important for improving skills and resilience. Erturk et al. (2025) pointed out that building human capital through evidence-based HR practices is important to organisational success, as automation, digitalisation, and hybrid work influence job design. Consequently, public universities are expected to adopt strategic HR practices that can boost employee well-being and promote an innovative academic workforce.

There is growing interest in how strategic human resource management practices (SHRMP), particularly learning culture, digital HR, and employee engagement, help employees thrive in knowledge-based organisations, as work continues to change. Within universities, Armstrong (2021) and Khan et al. (2020) revealed that the role that digital HR tools play in enhancing collaboration, efficiency, and flexibility is impressive. Similarly, Boxall & Purcell (2016) and Dessler (2017) have shown that HR systems that focus on fostering knowledge sharing and learning improve adaptability, as well as enable academic staff to navigate rapid digital changes. In addition to this, Al-Hajri (2020) and Nguyen et al. (2022) revealed that employee engagement programmes have a significant effect on retention, motivation, and overall institutional success. All these works collectively indicated the relevance of strategic human resource practices for developing an agile and resilient academic workforce that can excel in the current fast-changing higher education scenario.

In Africa, the dynamic nature of higher education has, indeed, emphasised the need for strong HR practices for the development of staff and institutions. Khan et al. (2020), in their studies, illustrated that the universities are redesigning their human capital strategy to match digital transformation, lifelong learning, and participation of employees. Ssemambo & Kamulegeya (2021) and Munjuri (2013), in their studies conducted in Uganda and Kenya, respectively, illustrated that well-crafted HR policies using digital platforms, continual development of staff, and participation increase motivation and retention. Learning culture and digital HR practices have also been discussed by Mabaso & Dlamini (2021) in South Africa for increasing the well-being and performance of staff. The findings of the reviewed studies indicated that continual learning, digital HR, and engagement practices are essential for developing successful and adaptive academic teams.

Human Resource (HR) strategies have a significant impact on promoting personal and organisational development among the employees working in Nigeria's universities. Some of the examples of research conducted by various authors include Adebakin (2020), Adewale (2020), and Ojo (2019). According to them, learning culture, digital HR, and employee engagement programs increase the level of adaptation of employees towards changes in the environment and enhance their retention rate. Another example is provided by Ogundele (2020) and Salau (2020). Olowookere (2020) and Akinwunmi (2019) noted that strategic HR practices in universities help build resilient employees who maintain institutional excellence in South-West Nigeria, where public higher institutions face strong competition and workforce changes.

Globally, Khan et al. (2020) and Wright & McMahan (2011) noted that universities face challenges in developing strategic HR practices that sustain employee engagement and workforce thriving amid digital transformation. Obeidat (2018) and Katou & Budhwar (2017) showed that learning culture, talent management, and digital HR significantly enhance employee adaptability and institutional competitiveness in Europe and Asia. Ssemambo & Kamulegeya (2021) and Nabukeera (2020) noted that universities across Africa encounter persistent workforce instability due to weak learning structures, inadequate digital HR systems, and limited employee engagement strategies. Adebakin (2020) and Adewale (2020) reveal that public universities in Nigeria still struggle with brain drain challenges, high turnover, and weak implementation of strategic HR practices.

However, most studies focused on individual universities within Nigeria, with a particular state or isolated HR dimensions such as digital HR practices, talent management, learning culture, or performance management, without assessing their combined effect on workforce thriving. Despite the South-West region hosting the highest concentration of public universities, there is limited empirical evidence addressing how combined strategic HR practices affect workforce thriving. This gap justifies the current study.

Consequently, the research was intended to fill this gap by investigating the impact of strategic human resource management practices on the capability of the labour force to flourish. The significance of this study is that it emphasises the welfare and adaptability of employees in the new world of work. Specifically, it investigated the contribution of learning culture, digital HR, and employee engagement in fostering a flourishing labour force in South-West Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The major aim of this research is to determine the impact of SHRMP on employee thriving amongst workers in public universities located in the Southwest, Nigeria. The specific aims of this research are to:

- (i) evaluate the effect of digital HR practices on workforce thriving among employees of public universities in South-West, Nigeria;
- (ii) examine the effect of a learning culture on workforce thriving among employees of public universities in South-West, Nigeria; and
- (iii) assess the effect of employee engagement initiatives on workforce thriving among employees of public universities in South-West, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Strategic Human Resource Management Practices (SHRMP)

According to Khan et al. (2020), Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) entails linking an organisation's human resource policy with its objectives for sustainable growth. Simply put, strategic human resource management involves ensuring that all aspects of hiring, development, and engagement strategies are well-coordinated to enhance performance and sustainability within the institution. SHRPs involve deliberate practices, including developing a learning culture, implementing a digital human resource management system, hiring the best talent, and enhancing employee engagement (Sekitooleko & Kamoga, 2025). The institutions are assisted by such strategies in building an adaptive workforce in today's changing world of work. This theory is justified through the findings in studies conducted by Chen et al. (2022), Adu & Okeke (2021), and Al-Hajri (2020), where it was found that continuous learning opportunities, employee engagement programs, and digital HR systems ensure high job satisfaction and retention. All these HR strategies are important in universities because, in addition to making the institution more adaptive and innovative, they help in maintaining engagement amid the fast-paced technology environment. Thus, learning culture, employee engagement, and digital HR are regarded by this study as important dimensions of strategic human resources management impacting workforce thriving among employees of public universities in South-West, Nigeria.

Digital HR Practices

One significant change introduced by digital HR practices is the use of technology in managing employees, where technology ensures that workforces become more engaging, flexible, and effective. Digital HR practice has been described by Nabukeera (2021) and Adewale (2020) as the use of technologies such as cloud recruiting, e-learning platforms, and HR analytics in HR practices. It is through this process that organisations can have decision-making based on data and can quickly react to workforce requirements. Digital HR practice is emphasised by Obiekwe & Uzoechi (2021) and Adebakin (2020), where this technology is associated with HR practices in enhancing performance appraisal, employee engagement initiatives, and talent management. In an educational institution, Salau (2020) and Oke (2019) pointed out that digital HR improves learning culture and employee engagement in terms of training, performance dashboard, and interaction feedback mechanism since all the above processes align with strategic HR management objectives. Ultimately, digital HR practices facilitate innovation, teamwork, and continuous learning, which are necessary attributes for success in the ever-changing world of work.

Learning Culture

With the rapidly evolving workplace, many firms consider having a good learning culture as the foundation for adaptability and innovation. As defined by Marsick (2021) and Kim & Park (2020), a learning culture

denotes “the culture of an organisation where practices and values of people who work in such a culture are aimed at the constant development of knowledge and skills.” Continuous learning is promoted by workplaces and builds employee engagement and digital HRM, which is crucial for success in the evolving future of work (Ghosh & Raj, 2022; Mahmod et al., 2021). Within higher education, universities benefit from technology-driven HR initiatives that build a culture of learning (Ng & Lucianetti, 2022; Akinwale & George, 2020). Such initiatives not only boost academic excellence and resilience but also enhance strategic human resource management. Zhang et al. (2023) and Sonnentag & Fritz (2021) established that learning-oriented cultures help organisations stay agile by aligning employee development with institutional goals and sustaining long-term performance.

Employee Engagement Initiatives

The intentional efforts by organisations to boost involvement, commitment, and motivation among their people are known as employee engagement programmes. The initiatives like supportive leadership, shared decision-making, and recognition programmes not only lift morale but also improve job satisfaction and employee retention (Sekitooleko & Kamoga, 2025; Al-Hajri, 2020). Engagement efforts that are tied to strategic HR practices in universities have proven especially effective. Integrating these initiatives with digital HR tools encourages continuous learning, collaboration, and a stronger sense of belonging among staff (Edwin et al., 2025). Similarly, engaged employees tend to spark innovation and drive better performance, the qualities that are essential for building future-ready institutions (Khan et al., 2020; Akingbola, 2017). Ultimately, engagement enhances resilience, adaptability, and long-term excellence within higher education when it is aligned with digital HR strategies and a culture of learning.

Workforce Thriving

How employees grow and succeed by staying resilient, innovative, adaptable, and satisfied in fast-changing environments is described as workforce thriving. It represents a holistic contribution and sense of growth that goes beyond simply meeting performance targets (Spreitzer et al., 2021). Similarly, thriving employees across sectors like healthcare, technology, and education tend to show greater flexibility, resilience, creativity, and satisfaction, which in turn drive continuous innovation (Parent-Lamarche & Tremblay, 2020). Workforce thriving is defined by the World Bank (2022) as the optimal use of human capital to boost productivity, while the Central Bank of Nigeria (2023) connected it directly to a nation’s overall innovation capacity. The importance of agile skills and lifelong learning is highlighted by NIM (2022) and CIPMN (2021) as essential ingredients for a thriving workforce. Given this, workforce thriving is measured using innovation as its metric because it reflects how effectively new ideas are generated and put into action to support institutional goals. The strategic human resource practices that help foster innovation-based prosperity in higher education institutions include having a robust learning culture, active employee engagement, and the use of digital HR systems. Such human resource practices are important because they help align talent management with future-of-work trends.

Theoretical Review

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory was introduced by Becker (1964). The theory emphasises investments in training, skills, and education as ways of increasing productivity and performance. The theory has been further developed by Schultz (1971) and Mincer (1974) and later on by scholars like Olanrewaju & Okorie (2023) and García-Aracil & Van der Velden (2021), in that they associate the development of human capital with workforce adaptability and innovation. Assumptions of the theory include the fact that the acquisition of skills and education increases the economic worth of employees and that increased investments in people increase productivity and growth. Criticism of the theory by Rubenson (2020) includes the fact that it does not consider other aspects of life aside from economics and inequalities within society. However, the proponents still believe that the theory is useful in illustrating how human resource practices like talent management and digital learning foster innovation and workforce thriving at public universities (Amadi, 2024; Tan, 2021).

Empirical Review

A review of prior research on the impact of SHRMP on employee thriving is necessary to create a sound foundation for this research. By conducting a review of the existing literature, useful information on how various fields, such as learning culture, employee engagement programs, and digital HRM, affect innovation and development of employees in the rapidly changing world of work can be gained.

Edwin et al. (2025) examined the impact of strategic HRM practices on employee retention and organisational performance in selected Nigerian universities. Three hypotheses guided the study that stemmed from the research problem and objectives. Structured questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data, supported by secondary sources. A sample of 278 participants was selected from the population of 1,000 academic staff across five universities, using Cochran's formula. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyse the data. Results revealed a strong positive link between strategic HRM practices, particularly employee retention, talent and performance management, suggesting that effective HR strategies significantly enhanced staff commitment and institutional success in Nigerian higher education.

Song et al. (2021) examined the learning culture and employee thriving in the digital future of work in South Korea. A quantitative survey design was employed. A structured questionnaire distributed to 412 employees across firms operating in ICT, selected through stratified random sampling, was used. The study population comprised knowledge-based workers in Seoul's technology sector. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data collected. Findings revealed that employee thriving by improving continuous skill development, engagement, and psychological safety in the future of work was significantly affected by a strong learning culture.

Liu & Chen (2021) evaluated employee engagement initiatives and workforce thriving in the digital era among technology organisations in Shanghai, China. A descriptive survey design was adopted by the study, using closed-ended questionnaires for data collection. Stratified random sampling was used to select 350 participants from the study population, which included permanent employees in five major tech companies. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data collected. Findings revealed that employees' sense of vitality and learning, which in turn promoted workforce thriving in the rapidly dynamic future of work, was significantly affected by engagement initiatives such as continuous learning, digital collaboration tools and flexible work design.

Shuck et al. (2021) carried out a study on HR development practices and employee thriving at work: the role of psychological capital in the United States. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was employed, using a structured questionnaire for data collection. 389 participants were selected using stratified random sampling from the study population, which included employees from service and technology industries. Structural equation modelling was used to analyse the data collected. Findings revealed that workforce thriving through increased psychological capital, demonstrating how HR strategies foster engagement and adaptability, is significantly enhanced by strategic HR practices, including empowerment, performance feedback, and training.

Mousa & Othman (2020) investigated a study on the impact of digital human resource management practices on employee agility and thriving in the era of Industry 4.0 in Egyptian public universities. A descriptive survey design was adopted by the study, using structured questionnaires as the main data collection instrument. The population comprised academic and non-academic staff, and a stratified random sampling technique was used to select 350 respondents. Data were analysed using structural equation modelling. Findings showed that digital HR practices, particularly e-training, performance analytics, and e-recruitment, significantly enhanced employees' engagement, adaptability, and thriving in the digital future of work.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the effect of strategic human resource practices on workforce thriving among employees of public universities in South-West Nigeria. The study was conducted across six states within the South-West geopolitical zone, including Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti. The reason for selecting these states is that they host a large concentration of public universities and represent diverse academic and non-academic staff, which enhances the generalisability of

findings. The population of the study comprised 34,880 permanent academic and non-academic staff across 12 purposively selected public universities, which consisted of one state-owned and one federal institution from each state. A formula by Taro Yamane was used to determine a sample size of 395 respondents to ensure adequate representation. The data were gathered using a closed-ended questionnaire, which was constructed using a 5-point Likert scale and could quantitatively capture attitudes and perceptions. The research tool comprised three main sections, where Section A gathered demographic information, Section B captured strategic HRM practices such as learning culture, employee engagement activities, and digital HRM practices, and Section C captured innovation.

An expert review was undertaken to establish the construct and content validity of the instrument, while the test-retest pilot study ensured clarity and consistency of the instrument. Pilot testing involved a period of two weeks, during which 120 academic and non-academic employees, consisting of 10 people from each of the six states outside the sample location, participated. Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the research instrument, yielding satisfactory coefficients for learning culture (0.772), employee engagement initiatives (0.786), digital HR practices (0.739), and innovation (0.774). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation, and inferential analysis through multiple regression with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to determine the effect of strategic human resource practices on workforce thriving among employees of public universities in South-West, Nigeria.

Model Specification

Mathematically, the model is expressed as follows:

Model: $WT = f(X_{1i}; X_{2i}; X_{3i})$

Where: WT = workforce thriving, X_{1i} = digital HR practices, X_{2i} = learning culture, X_{3i} = employee engagement initiatives, β_0 = Intercept, $\beta_1 - \beta_3$ = Regression Coefficient, μ = Stochastic error term.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Characteristics Analysis

All 395 questionnaires distributed to academic and non-academic staff across 12 public universities in South-West Nigeria were fully completed and returned, resulting in a 100% response rate. Trained research assistants were on hand to assist respondents, ensuring all answers were clear and thorough.

Table 1: Distribution of the Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	218	55.2
Female	177	44.8
Total	395	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The gender distribution of respondents is presented in Table 1, where 177 respondents (44.8%) were female, and 55.2% were male. This indicates a slightly higher proportion of male respondents compared to females. The results also indicate that both genders are fairly represented in the study and show that gender inclusion in the workforce at South-West Nigerian public universities is comparatively balanced, reflecting advancements in the academic setting.

Strategic HRM Practices Analysis**Table 2a: Respondents' Distribution Based on Strategic HRM Practices**

Digital HR Practices	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Mea n	SD	Decision
Access to digital HR platforms makes it easier for me to share innovative ideas and collaborate with colleagues	86	182	4	39	84	3.37	1.46	Low Strategic HR Practices
	21.8	46.1	1.0	9.9	21.3			
The use of digital HR technologies in my department enhances my ability to experiment with new ways of completing tasks	67	267	0.0	48	13	3.83	.962	High Strategic HR Practices
	17.0	67.6	0.0	12.2	3.3			
Through digital HR initiatives, I receive timely feedback that encourages me to develop and apply innovative solutions at work	60	255	3	43	34	3.67	1.12	Low Strategic HR Practices
	15.2	64.6	.8	10.9	8.6			
I feel that the digital HR platforms used in my university (e.g., e-recruitment, online performance management, or learning portals) motivate me to experiment with new and innovative ways of doing my work	116	207	10	35	27	3.95	0.97	High Strategic HR Practices
	29.4	52.4	2.5	8.9	6.8			

Note: N = 395, SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. Decision: - Weighted Average = $14.82/4 = 3.70$

The results in Table 2a show the responses regarding strategic HR practices related to digital HR platforms. It indicates that 86 respondents (21.8%) strongly agreed, 182 (46.1%) agreed, and 39 (9.9%) disagreed, with a mean score of 3.37, when the question asked if access to digital HR platforms makes it easier for them to share innovative ideas and collaborate with colleagues, indicating moderately low strategic HR practices. The results also revealed that 67 respondents (17%) strongly agreed, 267 (67.6%) agreed, 48 (12.2%) disagreed, and 13 (3.3%) strongly disagreed that the use of digital HR technologies enhances their ability to experiment with new ways of completing tasks. The mean score of 3.83 also indicates that the respondents agreed that their ability to experiment with new ways of completing tasks has been enhanced by the use of digital HR technologies. The study's findings are consistent with those of Edwin et al. (2025), who argued that digital HR technologies play a crucial role in enhancing employee engagement and institutional success in Nigerian higher education.

On the issue of digital HR initiatives, the results revealed that 60 respondents (15.2%) strongly agreed, 255 (64.6%) agreed, 43 (10.9%) disagreed, and 34 (8.6%) strongly disagreed. The results of digital HR platforms based on the analysis revealed that 116 respondents (29.4%) strongly agreed, 207 (52.4%) agreed, 35 (8.9%) disagreed, while 27 (6.8%) strongly disagreed.

Table 2b: Respondents' Distribution Based on Learning Culture

Learning Culture	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Mean	SD	Decision
I am given opportunities to share new ideas and learn from colleagues across different departments	115	230	0.0	16	34	3.95	1.10	High Learning Culture
I regularly engage in professional development activities to enhance my innovative abilities	29.1	58.2	0.0	4.1	8.6	3.99	1.01	High Learning Culture
My university actively encourages me to seek new knowledge and apply it in my work	114	216	7	40	18	3.93	1.05	High Learning Culture
I regularly engage in professional development activities to enhance my innovative abilities	28.9	54.7	1.8	10.1	4.6	3.73	0.94	Low Learning Culture
	67	267	0.0	48	13			
	17.0	67.6	0.0	12.2	3.3			

Note: $N = 395$, SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. Decision:- Weighted Average = $15.60/4 = 3.90$

Table 2b illustrates how respondents feel about the learning culture. Based on this assertion, the statement addressed opportunities to share ideas and learn from colleagues in other departments and revealed that 115 (29.1) strongly agreed, 230 (58.2%) agreed, 16 (4.1) disagreed, and 34 (8.6%) strongly disagreed with this position.

Regarding the issue of regular engagement in professional development activities to enhance my innovative abilities, it was ascertained that 119 (39.1%) strongly agreed, 217 (54.9%) agreed, 30 (7.6%) disagreed with the statement, while 17 (4.3%) strongly disagreed with it. On the item statement stated seeking new knowledge, 114 (28.9%) strongly agreed, 216 (54.7%) agreed, 40 (10.1) disagreed, while 18 (4.6%) strongly disagreed with a mean score of 3.93. However, when the statement came to professional development activities, 67 (17.0%) strongly agreed, 267 (67.6%) agreed, 48 (12.2%) disagreed, while 13 (3.3%) disagreed with a mean of 3.73, indicating a good learning culture was reaffirmed, which is consistent with the findings of Song et al. (2021) about the beneficial impact of learning culture on employee thriving.

Table 2c: Respondents' Distribution Based on Employee Engagement Initiatives

Employee Initiatives	Engagement	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Mean	SD	Decision
I feel that engagement initiatives in my university encourage collaboration and innovation among staff		109	230	28	27	1	3.86	1.07	Low Employee Engagement Initiatives
		27.6	58.2	7.1	6.8	.3			
The engagement programmes in my university make me feel motivated to explore new and better ways of doing my work		109	226	1	29	30	3.90	1.11	High Employee Engagement Initiatives
		27.6	57.2	.3	7.3	7.6			
Employee engagement activities in my university make me more committed to improving work processes		66	264	0.0	33	32	3.76	1.08	Low Employee Engagement Initiatives
		16.7	66.8	0.0	8.4	8.1			
Employee engagement initiatives in my university help me build the		120	217	15	27	16	4.01	0.98	High Employee

skills necessary for future-oriented innovation	30.4	54.9	3.8	6.8	4.1	Engagement Initiatives
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Note: $N = 395$, SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. Decision: - Weighted Average = $15.53/4 = 3.88$

Table 2c shows how respondents feel about employee engagement initiatives at their universities. When an item statement addressed whether these initiatives promote collaboration and innovation, 109 respondents (27.6%) strongly agreed, and 230 (58.2%) agreed, with a moderate score of 3.86, indicating low engagement. On the other hand, when the item statement was directed to motivation for trying new work methods, the average score was 3.90, with 109 (27.6%) strongly agreeing and 226 (57.2%) agreeing, reflecting higher engagement. Regarding the item statement, which was made on commitment to improving work processes, only 66 (16.7%) strongly agreed, with a lower mean score of 3.76. Finally, 120 respondents (30.4%) strongly agreed with the item statement that engagement initiatives help build skills for innovation, resulting in a high mean of 4.01. The findings of this study aligned with those of Liu & Chen (2021), who reported a positive impact of engagement initiatives on employee vitality and innovation.

Table 2d: Respondents' Distribution Based on Innovation

Innovation	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Mean	SD	Decision
Collaboration with colleagues inspires me to think creatively and implement new ideas in my tasks	120	217	15	27	16	4.01	.991	High Innovation
The skills and knowledge I have gained through my job help me generate innovative solutions to work challenges	30.4	54.9	3.8	6.8	4.1			
My work environment encourages me to experiment with new methods, even when there is a risk of failure	116	207	10	35	27	3.89	1.13	Low Innovation
	29.4	52.4	2.5	8.9	6.8			
	111	218	5	33	28	3.88	1.12	Low Innovation
	28.1	55.2	1.3	8.4	7.1			

Note: $N = 395$, SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. Decision:- Weighted Average = $11.78/3 = 3.92$

Table 2d presents how respondents responded to innovation in the workplace. When an item statement asked if collaboration with colleagues sparks creativity and new ideas, 120 participants (30.4%) strongly agreed, and 217 (54.9%) agreed, with an average score of 4.01, reflecting strong innovation. Regarding a statement which stated whether employees' job skills help them come up with innovative solutions to challenges, 116 (29.4%) strongly agreed, and 207 (52.4%) agreed, giving a mean score of 3.89, suggesting a more moderate level of innovation. Finally, when the participants were asked whether the organisation's work environment supports trying out new approaches despite the fear of failure among the employees, 111 (28.1%) strongly agreed, while 218 (55.2%) agreed with the statement, with the total average being 3.88, thus demonstrating a low innovation level. The results of the current research correspond to the findings made by Mousa & Othman (2020).

Testing of Hypothesis**Table 3a: Model Summary^b**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.845 ^a	.714	.709	.61851	2.021

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Engagement Initiatives, Digital HR Practices, Learning Culture

b. Dependent Variable: Innovation

The model summary presented in Table 3a revealed the testing of hypotheses on the effect of strategic HR practices on workforce thriving among employees of public universities in South-West, Nigeria. The results of the analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($R = .845$), with an R-Square of .714, meaning 71.4% of the variation in innovation was explained by digital HR practices, learning culture, and employee engagement initiatives. The adjusted R-Square of .709 confirms the reliability of the model, while the standard error (.61851) indicates minimal prediction deviations. A Durbin-Watson value of 2.021 suggests no significant autocorrelation, which indicates that the model is reliable and robust for hypothesis testing.

Table 3b: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	81.894	3	27.298	71.356	.000 ^b
	Residual	149.581	391	.383		
	Total	231.475	394			

a. Dependent Variable: Innovation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Engagement Initiatives, Digital HR Practices, Learning Culture

Table 3b shows the ANOVA results of the tested hypothesis on the effect of strategic HR practices on innovation among employees in public universities in South-West Nigeria. The regression model showed a significant effect ($F = 71.356$, $p = .000$), which indicates that digital HR practices, learning culture, and employee engagement initiatives significantly affect innovation. The model explains a substantial portion of the variation in innovation, showing strong explanatory power, with a regression sum of squares of 81.894 and a residual sum of squares of 149.581.

Table 3c: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.955	.213		4.471	.000
1 Digital HR Practices	.690	.547	.684	4.065	.000
Learning Culture	.895	.543	.896	8.359	.000
Employee Engagement Initiatives	.685	.525	.663	3.339	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Innovation

The coefficient analysis in Table 3c reveals that all the independent variables have a significant effect on innovation. digital HR practices ($B = .690$, $p = .000$), learning culture ($B = .895$, $p = .000$), and employee engagement initiatives ($B = .685$, $p = .001$) are all positively related to innovation. The results of the study revealed that learning culture demonstrated the highest effect on innovation ($B = .895$), followed by digital HR practices and employee engagement initiatives. The findings of this study suggest that strategic HR practices, namely the promotion of engagement and the boost of a learning culture, significantly contribute to enhancing innovation among employees in public universities in South-West Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed significant observations on the effect of strategic HR practices on workforce thriving in public universities in South-West Nigeria, especially regarding learning culture, employee engagement initiatives, and digital HR practices. The regression analysis carried out by the study revealed that all three factors play a major role in boosting innovation, with the high R-squared value (71.4%), which revealed a strong positive correlation between these HR practices and workforce creativity. Digital HR tools, for example, significantly affect innovation, as confirmed by the coefficient analysis ($B = .690$, $p = .000$). In this study, the findings were consistent with the results of Mousa & Othman (2020), which highlighted the relationship between digital HRM practices such as adaptability support, employee engagement, and e-recruitment and e-training in achieving innovation. The Human Capital Theory supports the link between the mentioned digital HRM practices and innovation by emphasising the importance of investment in learning and technology for the improvement of skills and, hence, innovation.

Moreover, the impact of a thriving learning culture on innovation was identified through this study. The learning culture proved to be the key driver of innovation, with a coefficient of ($B = .895$, $p = .000$). The findings of this study corroborate the results of previous research by Song et al. (2021), stating that a strong learning culture is necessary for the adaptability of employees in a digital workplace. The importance of building a thriving working environment has been highlighted through the results of this study, where knowledge sharing and learning take place, as these elements are necessary to stay competitive in a dynamic work environment. Similarly, initiatives that help in engaging employees, such as professional development and flexible work, have been found to significantly influence innovation ($B = .685$, $p = .001$). Such initiatives not only build commitment among employees but also prepare them for future challenges. The findings of this study support the idea that strategic HRM is required to develop a resilient and skilled workforce.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research concludes that strategic HR practices, which entail learning culture, employee engagement programmes, and digital HR practices, influence workforce thriving in public universities of South-West Nigeria. Learning culture and digital HR practices proved to have a strong effect on innovation, with learning culture being the strongest determinant. Moreover, employee engagement programmes had a positive impact on the creation of innovation. This result is consistent with the current body of knowledge and highlights the significance of these HR practices for the creation of an adaptive and skilled workforce that can thrive. Based on these findings, it is advisable for the public universities of South-West Nigeria to invest more in professional development, the development of a learning culture, and digital HR tools to

enhance innovation and engagement of employees. The implementation of employee engagement programmes that can help to increase motivation, innovation, and commitment and thus ensure the sustainable success of organisations, should be conducted in public universities.

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