

## **GREEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: A COMPARISON OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THAILAND**

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### **Abstract**

Human resource (HR) in organizations has to keep up with changes, adjust and avoid being complacent by sticking to traditional roles to remain relevant. There is consensus for countries and organizations to be proactive with environmentalism. Green human resource management (GHRM) is a topical agenda amongst human resource management (HRM) researchers and new literature emerging. As a result, the main aim of this study is to explore and compare the policies and practices of GRHM in South Africa and Thailand. This particular study, employed a qualitative approach – systematic review – followed a desktop approach and looked at different literature sources that researchers analyzed, summarized, and draw suppositions about GHRM in South Africa and Thailand. The results show that even though various researchers carried out studies on GHRM, very few focus on South Africa and Thailand. There are also discrepancies between the awareness and implementation. However, various HR practitioners in South Africa have a perception that greening activities should not be the main priority of the HR department but of environmental specialists.

**Keywords:** Green Human Resource Management; GHRM; Systematic Review; South Africa; Thailand

### **Introduction**

Globalization and meteoric technological innovations are compelling companies to adapt to the changing environment. This also infiltrated down to departments like HR in organizations that have to keep up with changes, adjust and avoid being complacent by sticking to traditional roles to remain relevant (Ajadi, Adewumi, & Ntshangase, 2022:160; Mtembu, 2019:269). Globally there is consensus for countries and organizations to be proactive with environmentalism. Green human resource management (GHRM) is a topical agenda amongst human resource management (HRM) researchers and new literature emerging (Hosain & Rahman, 2016:54). GHRM includes

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environmental performance, organizational performance, green performance management, green employee relations, green compensation, green development and training, green selection and recruitment, green supply chain, and discipline management (Jirawuttinunt & Limsuwan, 2019; Acquah, Agyabeng-Mensah, & Afum, 2020; Birbirsa & Worku, 2022; Napathorn, 2022b). In contrast, according to Mtembu (2018) and Napathorn (2022) there is a dearth of information on GHRM in South Africa and the African continent, as well as in Thailand's high educational institutions (HEIs). This correlates with (Stojanoska, 2016) who highlighted that various experts and academics in HR are not familiar with GHRM.

Globally, GHRM is still an emerging field under HRM that focuses on the organization's ability to be environmentally conscious in its operations (Bombiak, 2019:1648; Mwita, 2019:14). However, there are various definitions of GHRM. Henceforth, Ren, Tang and Jackson (2018:12) suggested that the researcher should agree and have a single definition that will advance the field. Mwita (2019:15) defines GHRM as a process of making use of human resources at workplaces to achieve organizational goals with deliberate efforts to make sure the process contributes towards environmental sustainability. This study follows the definition that GHRM is a phenomenon relevant to understanding relationships between organizational activities that influence the natural environment and the design, evolution, implementation and influence of HRM systems (Ren, Tang & Jackson, 2018:12).

The conceptual understanding of GHRM according to Ajadi, Adewumi, and Ntshangase (2022:161) is that the core of GHRM is in the infusion of environmental sustainability and a hazardous-free company. Moreover, GHRM does not focus only on environment management but the economic well-being of employees and the organization (Chemjor, 2020:114). Therefore, the execution of GHRM is by HRM to implement policies, mechanisms and strategies that promote greening in the workplace. GHRM helps create a green workforce within an organization. Parts of GHRM entails green recruitment, green performance management, green training and development, green compensation, green employee relations, green building, paperless office, the conservation of energy and recycling and waste disposal (Tang, Chen, Jiang, Paillé and Jia, 2018:31).

Unsurprisingly, globally environmental awareness within organizations became an important aspect due to the consolidation of the industrial revolution (Ahmad, 2015:1; Mwita, 2019:13). Regarding these aspects aforementioned, there are research conducted to study about GHRM policies and practices in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, china, and South Africa) countries (Miranda, Moletta, Pedroso, Pilatti, & Picinin, 2021), South Africa (Wood & Bischoff2020), and Thailand (Jirawuttinunt & Limsuwan, 2019; Wongleedee, 2020; Jirakraisiri, Badir, & Frank, 2021; Napathorn, 2022a; Napathorn, 2022b). Consequently, this catalyst is an urge for firms to conduct GHRM as soon as plausible, in order to survive sustainably. As a result, authors aim to explore and compare the policies and practices of GRHM in South Africa and Thailand. This research is arranged as follows: firstly, general concept of GHRM is discussed; secondly, the reviews of literature were explored and GHRM cases in South Africa and Thailand are also explored; thirdly,

the systematic review was conducted to find GHRM policies and practices in South Africa and Thailand; finally, results and discussion, along with research limitations are explained.

## Literature Review

As the world is experiencing climate change and its challenges, countries and companies are obligated to relook at the traditional ways of operations and uphold environmental sustainability. More so, South Africa and Thailand, both are emerging economy (Bag & Gupta, 2019; Chinyamurindi, Kyogabiirwe, Kabagabe, Mafadi, & Dywili, 2021; Napathorn, 2022a), do have many contrasts due to the mixed traits of both a developed nation and a developing country (Samkin & Wingard, 2021). Both countries are challenged by different aspects e.g. apartheid in South Africa (Samkin & Wingard, 2021) or political turmoil in Thailand. Thence, in order to overcome such challenges, no matter what South African or Thai firms, these organizations are now aware that adopting an environmentally conscious approach known as a greening lifestyle is beneficial to their business operations (Chemjor, 2020:111). As explained by Mtembu (2018) and Napathorn (2022) South African and Thailand public and private sectors have been working hard over the past decade towards attaining greening lifestyle status internally and outside their organizations. Therefore, the predominant focus of various companies globally is no longer just the maximization of profits and the minimization of losses (Molewa & Maluka, 2020:169) and the use of GHRM is needed.

GHRM is a recent term coined by human resource management (HRM) researchers (Khan & Muktar, 2020). GHRM stirs a global impact in all aspects of brand-new process of HRM to solve aforementioned problems (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021) and to strengthen beneficial environmental consequences (Dimitrov, 2021). In addition, Hosain and Rahman (2016:54) highlighted how the global business environment is evolving from the financial perspective to the competency and strategic perspective that interfuse GHRM. According to Mtembu (2019:268), Napathorn (2022a), and Napathorn (2022b), HRM practices in South Africa and Thailand are very distinctive when compared to other countries due to different aspects like work culture, and economic and social priorities. There is a clear indication that GHRM awareness even amongst HR practitioners in South Africa and Thailand is minimal with others not even familiar with the term 'green HRM' (Mtembu, 2019:271; Napathorn (2022)). As a result, a few companies in South Africa and Thailand consciously apply GHRM. However, the Covid-19 pandemic coerced various companies to be innovating and started using online interviews or meetings on Zoom and Teams considered as GHRM. Furthermore, Chidau and Khosa (2022:30) acknowledged that every aspect of modern life is indubitably affected by the exponentiation of technology.

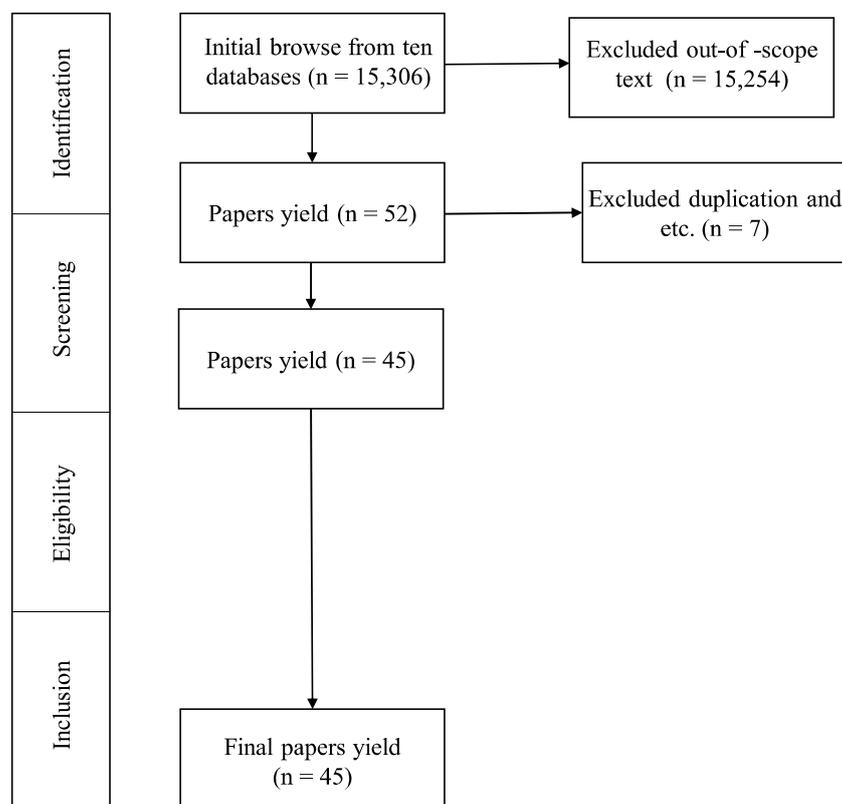
However, Adewumi, Ajadi and Ntshangase (2022:167) disagree and argue that GHRM does not exist in South African private sector companies only, but in the public sector which, includes Government parastatals like the eThekweni municipality. Therefore, it can be deduced that GHRM is prevalent. Mtembu (2018) explained that GHRM faces many challenges including

a lack of financial support, a lack of management commitment and a lack of skills and capacity in South Africa. Various GHRM practices include; green recruitment and selection, green performance management, green training and development, green compensation, green employee relations, green building, paperless office, the conservation of energy and recycling and waste disposal (Molina-Azorin, López-Gamero, Tarí, Pereira-Moliner and Pertusa-Ortega, 2021; Mwita, 2019:15). However, in this contemporary study only probed the practices relevant to South Africa and Thailand. According to Molewa and Maluka (2020:177) in South Africa HR, departments are making use of online recruitment and selection, recycling of paper, paperless office environment, rewarding systems that encourage greening amongst employees and infusing technology in things like distributing payslips online or via emails as part of GHRM practices. This correlates with Mtembu (2018) and Napaothorn (2022) who explained that HR still have not embraced fully greening but confirmed that GHRM exists even in higher education institutions in South Africa and Thailand. Finally, authors generate two research questions:

- 1) What will be the policies and the practices of GHRM between South Africa and Thailand? Do they differ in some aspects?;
- 2) If GHRM does exist in South African and Thai organizations, how do they manipulate/exploit the benefits of GHRM?

### **Research Methodology and Data Collection**

This particular study followed a desktop approach and looked at different literature sources that researchers analyzed, summarized and draw suppositions about GHRM. The research does have a bias towards the qualitative approach as it seeks to explore published articles. In addition, the research design involved conceptual content analysis of documents by hand from selected studies that focused on GHRM. The researcher gathered data from online databases and libraries. The methodology used in this study bases on the works of Yong, Yusliza, Ramayah and Fawehinmi (2020). The study made use of the English language as a medium and includes articles sourced from ten online databases EBSCOhost (Academic Search Ultimate, Business Source Ultimate, and EconLit™ with Full Text), Emerald Insight (Emerald Management), Google scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, SAGE Publications Scopus, Science Direct, SpringerLink and Taylor & Francis, and Wiley. In this study, the researchers used different search terms (keywords) such as “Green Human Resource”, “Green Human Resource Management”, “GHRM”, “Green Sustainability”, “Environmentalism” and “Green Lifestyle”. In this study, Microsoft Word was used to conduct selective reduction for the duration of this research. The period and timeframe of articles considered by the researchers are manuscripts published from the beginning of year 2015 until 2023 to include all the recently published articles. The initial searches yielded 15,306 articles, authors then browsed through the most related articles according to the theme (52 articles) and finally retrieved 45 articles (duplication excluded) for in-depth systematic review (see Fig. 1).



**Fig.1** In-depth Systematic Review Process (Author’s Contribution)

## Research Results and Discussion of the Findings

Based on the systematic review of 45 articles from 38 publishers (see Table 1), this research establishes that even though various researchers carried out studies on GHRM, very few focus on South Africa and Thailand. The findings in the literature corroborate with Ajadi, Adewumi, and Ntshangase (2022:167) and Napaothorn (2022) that GHRM exists in South African and Thai companies even though there are still discrepancies between the awareness and implementation. However, Mtembu (2018) asserts that various HR practitioners in South Africa have a perception that greening activities should not be the main priority of the HR department but of environmental specialists. This is corresponding to Badar, Kundi, Siddiquei, and Abualigah (2023) that GHRM requires such environmentally-specific empowering leadership or ESEL., some firms even need to conduct green recruitment (hiring someone with significant knowledge in environment) (Afzal, Khan, Baig, & Ashraf, 2023). Legislation in South Africa also hinders green buildings’

construction and design (Windapo & Goulding, 2021). In African continent, GHRM does not really affect financial performance (Afum, Agybeng-Mensah, Mensah, Mensah-Williams, Baah, & Dacosta, 2021). Despite a redundant amount of obstacles, however, this contradicts the findings by Chemjor (2020:112) which stated that the HR department plays a central role in GRHM design and implementation. Bag and Gupta (2019) also encourage that, regarding GHRM policy and practice, South African top managers show some interests in GHRM, especially in green human capital. HEIs in South Africa also implement GHRM into their policy and practice (Tshivashe & Bisschoff, 2023).

**Table 1.** List of Publishers and Their Frequency

<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Benchmarking: An International Journal	4
Cogent Business & Management	3
Sustainable Development	2
International Journal of Manpower	2
International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science	1
Review of Applied Mangement and Social Sciences	1
Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal	1
Journal of Global Responsibility	1
Journal of Service Theory and Practice	1
International Journal of Organizational Leadership	1
The Service Industries Journal	1
Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues	1
Africa Journal of Technical and Vocational Education and Training	1
International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science	1
Employee Relations: The International Journal	1
Trakia Journal of Sciences	1
The International Journal of Human Resource Management	1
International Journal of Professional Business Review	1
IOSR Journal of Business and Management	1
Journal of Intellectual Capital	1
UTCC International Journal of Business and Economics	1

International Journal of Hospitality Management	1
SAGE Open	1
Administrative Sciences	1
Acta Commercii	1
Problems and Perspectives in Management	1
East African Journal of Social and Applied Sciences	1
Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration	1
Asia Pacific Journal of Management Accounting, Auditing, & Accountability Journal	1
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	1
Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources	1
Journal of Economic Development, Environment, and People	1
Smart and Sustainable Build Environment	1
Systematic Review Pharmacy	1
Journal of Knowledge Management	1
Business Strategy and the Environment	1
Journal of Cleaner Production	1

Additional to GHRM policy and practice in Thailand, according to Kim, Kim, Choi, and Phetvaroon (2019:90) the results in Phuket, Thailand revealed that GHRM enhances the eco-friendly behavior of employees and the environmental performance of the hotels. GHRM, simultaneously, progresses positive employee and organizational outcomes (Tanova & Bayighomog, 2022). A number of Thai organizations also apply business strategies, especially GHRM, to sustain environmentally (Jirakraisiri, Badir, & Frank, 2021). In order to improve such GHRM practice in environmental performance aspects, Thai employees need to be motivated (Jirawuttinunt & Limsuwan, 2019). Napathorn (2022a) also suggests that it is a must for Thai firms to embed GHRM into their employees as their main stakeholders. Hence the findings corroborate with Bombiak (2019:1657); Yong, Yusliza, Ramayah and Fawehinmi (2019) who explained that organizations are increasing their efficiency and competitiveness by implementing GHRM. More so, Singh, Del Giudice, Chierici and Graziano (2020:9) agree that sustainable competitive advantage and green beliefs in a workplace are only possible when organizations utilize GHRM practices. And if organizations do so it can increase working-life quality of employees (Haeruddin, Natsir, Aswar, Aslam, & Salam, 2023). These benefits of GHRM prove that it is worth-trying to incorporate GHRM in organizations.

Finally, in this particular study, it is evident that previous researchers mainly focused on getting the views of HR practitioners while, sometimes, plausibly excluding company employees. There is consistency with findings by Ajadi, Adewumi, and Ntshangase (2022), Mtembu (2019),

and Napathorn (2022) who researched HR practitioners in South Africa and Thailand. Literature on GHRM is still very limited in South Africa and Thailand, even though there are some proofs that GHRM can affect organizational performance (Jirawuttinunt & Limsuwan, 2019), ability to compete (Anlesinya & Susomrith, 2020), and financial performance of the firm, with additional help from business strategy (Chinyamurindi, Kyogabiirwe, Kabagabe, Mafadi, & Dywili, 2021). GHRM should be put into university curriculum (Napathorn, 2022a). These results concur with Mwita (2019:18) who noted that GHRM is a new and emerging field that still requires more attention to create awareness and evidence-based findings. Therefore, the results portray that there are similarities between the two countries. Furthermore, Ajadi, Adewumi, and Ntshangase (2022:165) explained that the public sector is integrating environmental sustainability mainly by going paperless, through automation and applying key performance assessment/indicator (KPA) or (KPI). Various researchers such as Ajadi, Adewumi, and Ntshangase (2022); Ajadi (2020); Molewa and Maluka (2020); Mtembu (2019) and Mtembu (2018) agree that green recruitment and selection, green training, paperless office, and recycling are prevalent in South Africa. While, GHRM skill enhancement is needed in Thailand (Napathorn, 2022).

### **Limitations of Study and Future Studies**

As in any study, this is not without its limitations. The limitation of this study is focusing on the previous year's research findings whereas, in this 21<sup>st</sup>-century era, things are constantly changing. The study only looked at two countries (South Africa and Thailand) on different continents therefore; the outcomes might not be applicable in other countries due to different variables. The amount of articles are also mentioned more about GHRM in South Africa, rather than in Thailand, which may be due to the fact that GHRM literatures in Thailand are more written in Thai. Furthermore, the results might not apply to countries with economies not equivalent to South Africa and Thailand. Therefore, we suggest that future research should focus particularly on less developed countries, which are usually marginalized globally. Even though the study is for South Africa and Thailand as a whole but the relevant articles in this study have a bias towards certain areas in these only.

Furthermore, the current study did not explore how different cultures in these two countries can be a varying factor in the findings. Therefore, future studies should consider how cultural differences in countries could influence GHRM. Additional amalgams, apart from GHRM, which affect employee performance should also be considered (e.g. Al-Abbadi and Rumman (2023) suggests that not only GHRM affects employee performance positions, but innovation and entrepreneurship). Various researchers in the field focus on HRM personnel and there is a need to consider quantitatively collecting data from people who are not in management positions like ordinary employees. Future studies can focus on comparing developed countries and third-world countries and how organizations can collaborate even though operating in different economies vis-à-vis qualitative or quantitative method, including green supply chain management/sustainable

green logistics (Al-Minhas, Ndubisi, & Barrane, 2020; Wongleedee, 2020; Saeed, Rasheed, Waseem, & Tabash, 2022) and green technology (Miranda, et al. 2021).

## Conclusion

The focus of this research was to make a comparison of the policies and practices of GRHM in South Africa and Thailand. The findings make a paramount addition to the literature in the field. Foremost, the results disclose how technology played a vital role in the adaption and implementation of GHRM in both countries and how organizations are gradually making environmentalism a priority. The findings reveal that there is a need to ensure that HR practitioners accept GHRM as part of the HR department within an organization. More so management should prioritise financing the development of GHRM policies and creating a green culture of upholding a green lifestyle (Hooi, Liu, & Lin, 2022). In support, according to Ahmad (2015:10), GHRM has resulted in increased efficiency, cost reduction, employee retention and improved productivity.

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