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Abstract

The Nigerian local government system has long struggled with inefficiency, corruption, and lack of transparency, primarily due to outdated human resource (HR) practices and weak administrative structures. This paper explores the potential of Digital Human Resource (Digital HR) systems as a transformative tool for sustainable local government administration in Nigeria. With a specific focus on Oyo State, the study reviews existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and policy documents to assess the feasibility, benefits, and barriers of integrating digital HR into the Nigerian local governance system. Findings reveal that, although there are significant infrastructural and institutional barriers, adopting digital HR tools such as e-recruitment, biometric payroll systems, and HR analytics can significantly enhance accountability, staff performance, and service delivery. The paper concludes by proposing a strategic roadmap for implementing digital HR in local government settings and recommends robust policy reforms, capacity-building, and stakeholder engagement to drive sustainable transformation.

Keywords: Digital HR, Local Government, Sustainable Administration, Nigeria

Introduction

The path to sustainable development and a progressive society depends upon continual improvement, effective tools, efficient systems, and well-structured governance. Constitutionally designated as the third tier of government, local government bears primary responsibility for ensuring the political, social, and economic advancement of its jurisdiction and its people, owing to its proximity to grassroots citizens (Rudeback, 1997). However, this system frequently struggles to achieve sustainable development, hampered by weak administrative structures, poor policy implementation, operational inefficiencies, inadequate workforce management, corruption, and a lack of innovation (Agbodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto, & Nkah, 2014). Indeed, many Nigerian local governments still rely on manual human resource procedures that are error-prone and susceptible to fraud.

In his analysis, Amodu (2018) highlights Digital Human Resource Management (e-HRM or Digital HR) to modernize the public service by leveraging technology to automate and enhance HR functions and governance outcomes. From online recruitment and biometric payroll systems to performance monitoring and HR data analytics, these digital tools have the

potential to transform human resource practices and drive sustainable development at the local level.

Sustainable development is defined as meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (UNDP, 2009). Achieving meaningful and enduring progress requires “Popular Participation,” whereby citizens, from the grassroots to the federal level, are actively involved in decision-making processes (Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osawe, & Nkah, 2014).

The 1976 Local Government Reforms define local government as:

“Government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas and to ensure, through devolution of functions to their councils and through the active participation of the people and traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized” (FRN, 1976).

An ineffective Local Government Service Commission inevitably yields an ineffective local government service delivery system. Accordingly, any nation pursuing sustainable development must establish a planned, people-centered, and adaptable public service (Jega, 2018). Central to this endeavor is human resource planning, which encompasses recruitment, staffing, promotion, deployment, and other personnel functions. Just as in the private sector, where businesses and corporations depend upon the talents and contributions of their employees, the public service relies on its human resources to achieve organizational objectives (Hollenbeck, 2015).

In recent years, a global shift in Human Resource Management has given rise to an emerging E-Philosophy known as Digital Human Resource Management (HRM) (Waddill, 2018). By harnessing innovations such as e-recruitment, electronic biometric payroll systems, performance-tracking platforms, digital training modules, employee self-service portals, and HR data analytics, public sector organizations can manage their workforces more efficiently and responsively (Amodu, 2018).

This paper examines the adoption of digital HR tools in Nigerian local government administration, focusing on Oyo State as a case study. It identifies prevailing HR challenges, assesses current digital initiatives, and explores the prospects and barriers to broader digital HR implementation. Ultimately, the study offers actionable recommendations for policymakers and public administrators to enhance service delivery, transparency, and governance efficiency.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Digital HR and Its Application in Public Governance

Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) signifies a paradigm shift from conventional, paper-based personnel processes to technology-driven automation and

enhancement of HR functions (Amodu, 2018). In the public sector of developing nations like Nigeria, tools such as e-recruitment portals, biometric time-and-attendance systems, Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), and performance-management dashboards are increasingly viewed as catalysts for governance reform and improved public-sector performance (Amodu, 2018; Igbokwe-Ibeto & Akinwale, 2021).

The foundations of Human Resource Management lie in the early twentieth-century human relations movement, which foregrounded the importance of employees within managerial practice (Obedgiu, 2017). The advent of 21st-century technology ushered in Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM), now fully embraced as Digital HRM.

Adopting Digital HR in public governance enables real-time analysis of personnel data, streamlined service delivery, and more effective workforce planning. As Amodu (2018) asserts, digital HR transcends mere automation, transforming public service delivery through data-driven decision-making and strengthened accountability mechanisms. For example, the deployment of biometric attendance systems within certain Nigerian federal agencies has markedly curtailed payroll fraud, absenteeism, and the prevalence of “ghost” workers, challenges equally troublesome at the local government level.

Igbokwe-Ibeto and Akinwale (2021) further contend that public organizations leveraging digital HR tools enjoy enhanced administrative transparency, more reliable employee records, and superior decision-making capabilities. They emphasize that successful digital transformation requires not only technology adoption but also institutional commitment, capacity building, and an enabling legal framework. These are particularly vital within Nigeria’s fragmented local governance landscape, where disparate policy regimes can stifle innovation.

As digital HR becomes a global standard, Nigerian local governments cannot lag. Beyond achieving administrative efficiencies, these tools liberate valuable human and financial resources from wasteful or corrupt practices, thereby improving responsiveness to citizens’ needs.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, analyzing secondary sources, including policy documents, government reports, academic literature, theoretical frameworks, and case studies, to assess the feasibility, benefits, and barriers of integrating digital HR into Nigeria’s local governance framework. The empirical focus is on Oyo State, which has demonstrated early progress in digital governance initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by two complementary theories, Resource-Based View (RBV) and Institutional Theory, to examine the prospects for digital HR in achieving sustainable local government administration in Nigeria.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

First articulated by Barney (1991), the Resource-Based View posits that an organization’s sustainable competitive advantage derives from its capacity to secure and deploy resources

that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Applied to local government, RBV underscores the critical role of internal capabilities, such as skilled personnel, robust technological infrastructure, and advanced data analytics platforms, in realizing enduring governance improvements. Digital HR systems (e.g., e-recruitment portals, automated payroll, and human capital analytics) qualify as strategic resources under RBV. By streamlining personnel processes, boosting operational efficiency, and deterring corruption, these technologies enhance service delivery and strengthen governance outcomes (Waddill, 2018). For instance, biometric payroll systems not only ensure accurate salary disbursement but also eradicate “ghost” workers, a persistent challenge within Nigerian public administration (Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osawe, & Nkah, 2014). However, RBV also cautions that technology alone is insufficient; local governments must concurrently develop the requisite skills, upgrade IT infrastructure, and cultivate a data-driven culture to achieve lasting sustainable benefits.

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory, advanced by Meyer and Rowan in the late 1970s, examines how formal rules, social norms, routines, and belief systems coalesce into authoritative structures that shape organizational behaviour. According to this perspective, organizations adopt particular practices not only to enhance efficiency but also to secure legitimacy, stability, and resources within their institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In the context of digital HR transformation in Nigerian local governments, specifically Oyo State, Institutional Theory illuminates how external pressures drive internal change. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) classify these pressures as:

- i. Coercive pressures:** Mandates from regulatory bodies (e.g., federal or state governments) requiring the adoption of technologies such as biometric attendance systems or e-recruitment platforms.
 - ii. Mimetic pressures:** Local councils tend to emulate the digital practices of peer or more advanced institutions to bolster legitimacy and performance.
 - iii. Normative pressures:** The influence of professional standards, educational curricula, and professional associations that promote digital proficiency among HR practitioners.
- Empirical studies confirm that both national agencies and international donors exert significant coercive and normative pressures on Nigerian local governments, accelerating digitalization efforts (Amodu, 2018). Meanwhile, mimetic forces encourage the replication of successful innovations, although such imitation has yet to yield substantial, sustainable development gains.

Literature Review

Human Resource Functions in Nigerian Local Governments

Human Resource Management (HRM) is pivotal to administrative efficiency within any governance structure, including Nigeria’s local governments. Although most Local Government Areas (LGAs) lack dedicated HR departments, HR functions are typically managed by the Department of Administration, which oversees personnel records, recruitment, leave administration, credential verification, staff promotions, and payroll

(Onyishi, Eme, & Emeh, 2012). Yet these processes often suffer from inefficiencies, manual handling, and poor accountability.

An organization's survival depends on financial, material, and human resources. While finance and materials support operations, competent human resources are essential to plan and execute tasks effectively (Hunga & Hassan, 2023). A case study of Ewekoro LGA in Ogun State revealed significant HR deficiencies, outdated records, irregular training, and weak performance monitoring, reflecting systemic challenges across many Nigerian LGAs (Hunga & Hassan, 2023). Uncoordinated recruitment, politicized staff placement, and underutilization of training funds further undermine service quality.

Armstrong (2009) frames HRM as a strategic, holistic integration of practices aimed at enhancing employee development and organizational well-being, while Boxall et al. (2007) emphasize its role in aligning daily activities and personnel toward desired outcomes. Adewale (2012) describes HRM as a defined set of policies designed to improve operations, foster employee commitment, support flexibility, and ensure high-quality work delivery. More recently, Adebayo and Oluwatobi (2022) highlighted the continued reliance on analogue record-keeping in many LGAs, which is prone to manipulation and inefficiency, underscoring the urgent need for digital HR tools to enhance transparency and effectiveness.

In Nigeria, personnel policies and service-quality standards for local government employees are prescribed by State and Local Government Affairs departments, with implementation overseen by Local Government Service Commissions, Directors of Local Government Administration, and Heads of Service (Hunga & Hassan, 2023). Effective execution of these policies depends on the caliber of personnel employed. Key offices, such as the Local Government Council Chairman, the Director of Local Government Administration, and the Local Government Service Commission, bear responsibility for HR management and workforce planning (Ezeani & Nwankwo, 2002). However, political interference often distorts recruitment and staffing decisions: for example, Chairmen sometimes exploit commissioning authority over Grades 01–06 for patronage (Hunga & Hassan, 2023). The Director of Local Government Administration (Head of Service) consolidates recruitment data, liaises with the Service Commission, and chairs the Senior Staff Management Committee, which oversees HR decisions for Grades 07 and above.

Digital HR and Sustainable Local Government Administration

Digital HR transformation within local government extends beyond technology deployment; it entails reengineering systems, processes, and organizational culture to bolster transparency, citizen engagement, and operational efficiency. The World Bank (2020) notes that digitalization in governance correlates with enhanced service delivery, diminished corruption, and heightened accountability. Yet, Nigeria's local governments have been slow to embrace these innovations, impeded by inadequate infrastructure, resistance to change, and limited digital literacy among staff (Onyishi, Eme, & Emeh, 2012).

Learning Management Systems (LMS), for example, furnish government personnel with portals for both onboarding and continuous professional development, offering training modules, instructional videos, and e-learning courses (Amodu, 2018). Similarly, Performance

Management Systems represent a significant upgrade from manual appraisal methods, enabling continuous feedback and longitudinal performance tracking (Adeline, 2014).

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals further underscore the relevance of digital HR. Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) collectively highlight the necessity of digital transformation and, by extension, Digital HR to achieve resilient, participatory, and transparent local governance (Diala & Amodu, 2023; Sarkis & Ibrahim, 2020). Local Government Service Commissions and administrative leaders are charged with enacting policies that optimize human resources to meet these global objectives and secure a sustainable future.

Integrating Digital HR tools in local administration yields multiple advantages. The first advantage is that of transparency and accountability. Automated systems provide accurate, up-to-date data on workforce numbers, salary disbursements, promotions, and disciplinary actions. Biometric and payroll automation tools help eliminate ghost workers, a ubiquitous issue in many Nigerian LGAs (Diala & Amodu, 2024).

The second advantage is efficiency and cost savings. Automation reduces paper-based workflows, expedites administrative tasks, and cuts expenses related to printing, storage, and manual labour. Ogunrotifa and Olamide (2021) find that LGAs adopting HR technology maintain more accurate records, streamline operations, and manage staff performance through systematic, data-driven processes.

Additionally, digital platforms offer LMS for ongoing training, performance-appraisal tools, and KPI-tracking dashboards, transforming the public workforce into an agile, goal-oriented team aligned with development imperatives.

More importantly, it supports sustainable development. By fostering adaptable governance structures, Digital HR equips local governments to navigate future challenges, including demographic shifts and rising citizen expectations, ensuring continuous innovation and long-term sustainability (Amodu, 2018).

Policy, Legal Frameworks, and Digital Governance Initiatives in Local Governments

In Nigeria, state governments have made notable progress in digitizing civil service payrolls and implementing biometric staff verification, yet the majority of local governments continue to depend on manual processes. This digital divide generates inefficiencies such as delayed salary disbursements, duplicate personnel records, and unchecked absenteeism. As Egwemi, Olojede, and Adeyemi (2018) observe, many Nigerian local governments still operate under outdated administrative frameworks that fail to meet contemporary governance requirements. To support the integration of digital HR at the local level, Nigeria has adopted several policies and legal instruments. The National e-Government Master Plan (2019) and the Nigeria Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS) 2020–2030 both articulate strategic visions for ICT-driven governance and data-informed decision-making, objectives that align closely with digital HR implementation. Nevertheless, these national directives are rarely domesticated or enforced at subnational tiers. In practice, local authorities often lack bespoke HR policies or digital roadmaps, hindering the application of uniform standards and systems (Elem, 2016). Moreover, explicit regulations governing electronic record-keeping, digital

signatures, and the protection of biometric data are largely absent from local government statutes.

To address this gap, scholars have advocated the creation of Local Government Digital HR Implementation Committees (LGDHICs). These bodies would partner with state ICT agencies to ensure policy coherence, coordinate staff training, and oversee the ongoing monitoring of digital HR initiatives (Hunga & Hassan, 2023).

Improvements and Challenges in Implementing Digital HR for Sustainable Local Government Administration

Oyo State has distinguished itself as a frontrunner in digital governance, pursuing initiatives that bolster administrative efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. This commitment was recognized at the 2024 National Council on Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy meeting, where Oyo State garnered awards for Best State in Human Capital Development, Best State in E-government, and Second Runner-up in Digital Technology Infrastructure, achieving an overall score of 83%.

Between 2012 and 2022, Oyo State's Ministry of Works and Housing introduced e-governance tools, including online portals, mobile applications, and electronic document management systems. These platforms streamlined workflows, reduced paperwork, and enhanced service-delivery efficiency. Empirical evidence further underscores these gains. In her 2024 study on e-governance in Oyo State, Olaniyan assessed citizens' awareness of digital public-service platforms using the following scale:

- 0.000–1.499 = Never Aware (Very Bad)
- 1.500–2.499 = Not Too Aware (Bad)
- 2.500–3.499 = Aware (Good)
- 3.500–4.500 = Highly Aware (Very Good)

Her findings revealed that 40% of respondents were highly aware, 50% were aware, and 10% were not very aware of e-governance services, yielding a mean score of 3.30. For specific platforms, 20% reported high awareness and 80% moderate awareness, with no respondents in the lowest category, resulting in a mean of 3.20. Although these figures indicate moderate outreach success, they also highlight the need for enhanced education and promotional efforts by local authorities (Olaniyan, 2014).

Despite these advances, persistent challenges hinder both Oyo State and other Nigerian local governments. Deficiencies in digital literacy among citizens, unreliable electricity, poor internet connectivity, and limited access to modern hardware impede effective HR technology deployment (Amodu, 2018). Institutional barriers, such as resistance to change, bureaucratic red tape, and politicized appointments, further delay policy implementation and weaken digital governance reforms. Financial constraints compound the problem: limited budgets are often diverted to high-visibility projects, leaving digital HR systems underfunded. Consequently, the transformative potential of digital HR to enhance staffing efficiency, transparency, and long-term development remains underexploited (Agbodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto, & Nkah, 2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This analysis underscores the critical need to surmount infrastructural, institutional, and financial obstacles through targeted strategies. First, there is the need for policy reform. Develop comprehensive frameworks that delineate clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms for digital HR adoption. These policies should harmonize with Nigeria's overarching digital-economy objectives while accommodating the unique needs of local governance.

Capacity building is also important, as frequent training and digital literacy programs for HR officers, IT personnel, and senior administrators must be prioritized. Leadership development initiatives will ensure staff can effectively operate and sustain digital systems. Lastly, stakeholder engagement is recommended to foster collaboration among government agencies, civil society, technology providers, and local communities. Inclusive partnerships will help tailor digital HR solutions to local contexts and promote transparent, sustainable implementation.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigerian local governments can enhance service delivery and reinforce transparency. Enhanced public service delivery, accountability, and transparency would positively impact the actualization of long-term sustainable development goals.

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