

Unlocking Efficiency through Diversity: Exploring the Impact of Human Resource Automation Practices on Performance in Energy Distribution Firm

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Abstract

This study investigated the implications of human resource automation and diversity on organizational performance at Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC) in Nigeria. The research employed a survey design, collecting primary data from 250 respondents in the Human Resource Department. Findings revealed that IBEDC extensively uses e-recruitment portals, web-based systems, and electronic compensation and benefits portals. Regression analysis showed that e-recruitment, e-performance management, and compensation and benefits e-portals significantly impacts diversity. Similarly, these automation practices, except web-based systems, significantly impact organizational performance. Notably, diversity moderates the relationship between human resource automation and organizational performance. The study concludes that human resource automation improves workforce diversity and organizational performance at the IBEDC and recommended among others the continuous improvement of e-Performance Management System which helps in improving work effectiveness and support business processes.

Keywords: Human Resource Automation, Diversity, Performance, Electricity Distribution

Introduction

The energy sector in Nigeria is critical to the economic growth and development of the country, and has untold effects on businesses and organizational productivity. The sector has undergone reforms to improve its services. While the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC) is one of the outcomes of the Nigeria's energy sector reform; there is dearth of information on the nature and extent of human resource automation in the IBEDC.

Information (United States Agency for International Development – USAID, 2019) has it that though the sector has an installed capacity of 12,522 MW (Hydro: 19%, Thermal: 81%), only 58 percent of the total installed capacity is available. This available capacity, since it is under sufficient, calls for efficient use of automation to achieve inclusion of a diversified workforce, clients and user of electricity across the regions, and thus the need to investigate the extent to which the adoption of human resource automation affect diversity in the organization.

In the Nigerian context, though HR automation has become increasingly common in many organizations, there is limited research on the nature and extent of use, especially in the area of study. The specific technologies, algorithms, complexity, and the various aspects of human resources applications presents a significant gap in the literature. An understanding of the practices use in automation will position organizations to identify, monitor, deploy, and take advantage of changes in HR automation for employees' satisfaction, productivity and organizations' competitiveness.

While the relationship between HR automation and employee productivity has been demonstrated in literature (Jade & Adeniyi, 2020; Firawi, 2024); these studies did not address the moderating role of diversity in the relationship between HR automation and employee productivity in Nigeria. Exposition on how diversity could impact on the nexus between HR automation and organization performance is paramount to effective human resources management, resource utilisation, and strategic policy formulation to enhance the holistic growth and well-being of the organization.

By addressing these problems, this study sought to provide insights into how the IBEDC can better manage diversity and HR automation to improve employee productivity and organizational performance. The energy sector may uncover fresh potential impacts of HR automation on diversity that could help explain the perpetuation of biases and inequalities in the work place, especially in the power sector. Additionally, the study may help to identify ways in which HR automation can be designed to promote diversity and

inclusivity in the workplace. The following research questions were addressed: What is the nature and extent of human resource automation at IBEDC; To what extent does the adoption of human resource automation affect diversity in the organization? What is the impact of human resource automation on the productivity of employees in the organization? And, how does diversity moderate the relationship between human resource automation and employee productivity in the organization?

Methodology

The research design utilized was a cross-sectional survey design. The population of the study consists of 3000 staff of IBEDC which spread across five regions comprising Oyo, Ibadan, Osun, Ogun and Kwara Regions. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 250 staff in the Human Resource Department in Ibadan which is the Headquarters and manages all HR automations of other regions. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, consisting primarily of closed-ended questions. Productivity and work process efficiency were used to proxy Performance; diverse ethnicity, gender, educational background, religion, geographically diverse workforce and diverse leadership styles were used to proxy diversity. Finally, e-Recruitment portal, e-Performance Management System, Web-Based System and Compensation and benefits e-portal were used to proxy HRM Automation. The results were analysed using frequencies and regression analysis. Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis Ho₁: Human resource automation has no significant influence on diversity in the workplace.

Hypothesis Ho₂: Human resource automation has no significant effect on the organization performance

Hypothesis Ho₃: Diversity does not moderate the relationship between human resource automation and employee productivity.

The summary of the model used in evaluating the hypothesis is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the hypothesis testing and A-priori expectation

Hypothesis	Model	Decision Rule
HO ₁	DV = β ₀ + β ₁ HRA + ε ₁	Reject is P < 0.05, β ₁ ≠ 0; otherwise accept
HO ₂	PD = β ₀ + β ₁ HRA + ε ₂	Reject is P < 0.05, β ₁ ≠ 0; otherwise accept

H_0	$PD = \beta_0 + \beta_1 HRA + \beta_2 DV + \beta_3 (HRA)(DV) + \varepsilon_2$	Reject is $P < 0.05$, $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3 \neq 0$; otherwise accept
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Where β_0 = constant, $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ are coefficients of Human Resource Automation (HRA), Diversity (DV), and Human Resource Automation and Diversity respectively. PD = Productivity and ε = error term

Review of Literature

Globally, human resource management practices are becoming more complex due to world challenges such as pandemics, telecommuting and e-businesses. For instance, Taqui (2020) posited that rapid economic growth and technological transformation have necessitated organizations to change from the traditional human resources management practices in order to meet up with customers' expectation. Also, Vardarlier (2020) pictured the global trend of the traditional human resources function being increasingly taken over by innovative digital media in a bid to keep pace with modern management practices using digital transformation. In another vein, globalization has lent credence to human resource automation, such that the concern about diversity is already inclusive. Although the idea of a global workforce extends beyond managing diversity (Burke and Ng, 2006), because, globalization presupposes that a diverse workforce spanning nations, culture, background, and orientations are interacting to meet customers' demand and make global impacts. However, this may not be the case in all scenarios as may be applied to global but local firms, where the human resources function may still be coordinated or handled locally.

Looking at America, Youndt, Snell, Dean, and Lepak (1996) in the United States, found that organizations that adopt human resource automation tend to have a more diverse workforce. The researchers suggest that this is because automation allows for more objective and standardized recruitment and selection processes that minimize bias and discrimination. Moreover, a study by Farhan, Salamzadeh, and Richardson (2021) in Turkey found that human resource automation positively impacts employee productivity. The researchers argue that automation allows employees to focus on more creative and strategic tasks, rather than time-consuming administrative work. However, the relationship between human resource automation and employee productivity can be moderated by diversity, as found in a study by Roberge and Van Dick (2010) in Germany. The researchers suggest that when organizations implement human resource automation in diverse work environments, it can lead to a reduction in productivity due to communication barriers and misunderstandings.

Africa has not been left behind in the rippling effects of globalization permeating every aspect of human endeavours and affecting the world of work and management practices. Though advances in digital technologies

development and its adoption are at a relatively slower pace, when compared to advanced economies, the continent has had its share of digital transformation impacts. In South Africa, electronic human resources management practices were found to enhance firms' performance (Bag et al., 2022), they were found most effective in cutting cost and ensuring customers' satisfaction.

In Nigeria, Worgu and Nwaeke (2021) and also Bob-Manuel (2023) found that automation in HRM practices improved diversity in Nigerian organizations. They argued that automation reduced bias in the recruitment process and allowed for a more objective assessment of candidates, thereby increasing the chances of underrepresented groups being hired. In contrast, Worgu and Nwaeke (2021) found that automation had a negative impact on diversity in Nigerian organizations. They argued that automation favoured candidates with technical skills, which resulted in the exclusion of candidates who lacked these skills, particularly women.

Similarly, employee productivity is a critical determinant of organizational success. Human resource automation has the potential to enhance employee productivity by reducing the time and effort required to perform routine HRM tasks, such as payroll processing and employee record-keeping. However, the impact of automation on employee productivity is not clear cut. Some scholars argue that automation may have a negative impact on employee productivity as it may lead to the displacement of workers and reduced motivation. On the other hand, other scholars argue that automation may have a positive impact on employee productivity as it may reduce the workload and allow employees to focus on higher-level tasks.

Theoretical Underpinning

This work is anchored on the Social Exchange Theory (SET). The Social Exchange Theory is a theoretical framework that explains how social interactions involve an exchange of rewards and costs between individuals or groups (Blau, 1964). Social Exchange Theory was developed by George Homans, a prominent American sociologist, in the 1950s. However, the theory was further expanded and developed by other scholars such as Peter Blau and Richard Emerson. According to SET, individuals are motivated to engage in social relationships when they perceive that the benefits of the relationship outweigh the costs (Homans, 1961).

In the context of this study on Human Resources Automation, Diversity, and Performance, SET is relevant in understanding how employees perceive the benefits and costs of working in an organization that values diversity and utilizes automation technology. For instance, employees may perceive the benefits of diversity as increased creativity and innovation, improved problem-solving abilities, and a more inclusive work environment. However,

diversity can also bring costs such as communication barriers, misunderstandings, and conflicts that could negatively impact employee well-being and organizational performance.

Furthermore, employees' perception of the benefits and costs of automation can influence their attitudes towards the technology and its impact on their productivity. For example, automation can reduce the time and effort required to complete tasks, leading to increased productivity. However, it can also lead to job loss or reduced job security, which could negatively affect employee motivation and performance.

Findings

Influence of Human Resource Automation on Diversity

Hypothesis Testing of Influence of Human Resource Automation on Diversity

The analysis in Table 2 shows the multiple regression analysis of the influence of human resource automation on workforce diversity in Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC). This was used to test the Hypothesis One of the research: “Human resource automation has no significant influence on diversity in the organization”. Human resource automation practices such as e-recruitment portal (e-REC), e-Performance Management System (e-PMS), Web-Based System (WEBS), and Compensation and benefits e-portal (COMP) were regressed against workforce diversity (DIV).

The results showed that each of the human resource automation practices had positive influence on diversity within the organization as depicted by the coefficients in Table 2. However, e-recruitment portal ($t = 3.495, p < 0.05$), e-Performance Management System ($t = 5.281, p < 0.05$), and Compensation and benefits e-portal ($t = 6.389, p < 0.05$) had a significant influence on diversity, while Web-Based System ($t = 0.198, p > 0.05$) was not significant to diversity.

Furthermore, the ANOVA of the regression analysis revealed that the joint influence of human resource automation practices on workforce diversity was significant ($F = 86.559, p < 0.05$). The coefficient of determination (R-square) displayed that human resource automation practices explained as high as 63.5% of variation in workforce diversity, which confirmed that human resource automation practices have positive and significant influence on diversity in the organisation. Therefore, the hypothesis One in its null state was rejected, and the research concluded that human resource automation practices have significant influence on diversity in the organisation.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Influence of HR Automation on Diversity

Independent variable.	Coefficient	Std. Error	T	P
Constant	1.668	0.668	2.498	0.013

e-REC	0.224	0.064	3.495*	0.001
e-PMS	0.312	0.059	5.281*	0.000
WEBS	0.014	0.071	0.198	0.845
COMP	0.441	0.069	6.389*	0.000
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)				
Model	Sum square	Df	Mean square	F
Regression	104.898	4	26.227	86.559*
Error	60.201	200	0.303	(0.000)
Total	165.099	204		
Model Summary				
Dependent varb.	R-square	R-square (Adj)	Std. Error of Est	Durbin-Watson
DIV	0.635	0.629	32.351	1.986

**Significant at 5 percent level*

Source: Author's Computation (2024)

Effect of Human Resource Automation on Organizational Performance

Hypothesis Testing of Effect of HR Automation on Organizational Performance

The analysis in Table 3 shows the multiple regression analysis of the effect of human resource automation practices on organization performance. This was used to test the Hypothesis Two of the research: "Human resource automation has no significant effect on organizational performance". Human resource automation practices include e-recruitment portal (e-REC), e-Performance Management System (e-PMS), Web-Based System (WEBS), and Compensation and benefits e-portal (COMP) which were regressed against organisational performance (ORGP).

The results showed that each of the human resource automation practices had positive influence on the organizational performance as depicted by the coefficients in Table 3. More so, each of the HR automation practices e-recruitment portal ($t = 2.105$, $p < 0.05$), e-Performance Management System ($t = 4.318$, $p < 0.05$), Web-Based System ($t = 2.078$, $p > 0.05$) and Compensation and benefits e-portal ($t = 4.958$, $p < 0.05$) had a significant effect on organizational performance.

In addition, the ANOVA of the regression analysis revealed that the joint influence of human resource automation practices on workforce diversity was significant ($F = 70.768$, $p < 0.05$). The coefficient of determination (R-square) displayed that human resource automation practices explained as high as 58.8% of variation in organizational performance, which confirmed that human resource automation practices have positive and significant effect on the organizational performance. Therefore, the Hypothesis Two in its null state was rejected, and the research concluded that human resource automation practices have significant effect on the organizational performance.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Effect of HR Automation on Organizational Performance

Independent variable.	Coefficient	Std. Error	T	P
Constant	2.015	0.872	2.313	0.019
e-REC	0.345	0.164	2.105*	0.021
e-PMS	0.272	0.063	4.318*	0.000
WEBS	0.216	0.104	2.078*	0.025
COMP	0.357	0.072	4.958*	0.000
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)				
Model	Sum square	Df	Mean square	F
Regression	119.172	4	29.793	70.768*
Error	83.677	200	0.421	(0.000)
Total	202.849	204		
Model Summary				
Dependent varb.	R-square	R-square (Adj)	Std. Error of Est	Durbin-Watson
ORGP	0.588	0.572	36.412	2.003

**Significant at 5 percent level*

Source: Author's Computation (2024)

Moderation of Diversity on the Relationship between Human Resource Automation and Organizational Performance

The analysis in Table 4 shows the hierarchical regression analysis of the moderating effect of diversity in the relationship between human resource automation practices and organizational performance. This was used to test the Hypothesis Three of the research: "Diversity has no significant effect on the relationship between human resource automation and organizational performance". Model 1 demonstrated a positive and statistically significant effect of human resource automation practices on organizational performance, as these practices collectively accounted for 58.8% of the variation in organizational performance.

When diversity was introduced into Model 2, where it was acting as a moderator in the relationship between human resource automation practices and organizational performance, the results revealed a positive and significant effect of human resource automation practices on organizational performance, as the practices collectively explained a greater proportion (61.6%) of the variation in organizational performance.

When the percentages of variation in Model 1 (without diversity) and Model 2 (with diversity) were compared, the percentage of variation increased by 2.8% due to the moderating effect of diversity in the relationship between human resource automation practices and organizational performance. As a result, the Hypothesis Three in its null form was rejected, and the study concluded that diversity had a moderating role in the relationship between human resource automation practices and organizational performance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.028$, $t = 2.683$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, when the organization introduces workforce

diversity, it strengthens the effect of HR automation practices on organizational performance.

Table 4: Moderating Effect of Diversity on the Relationship between Human Resource Automation and Performance at IBEDC

Predictor	Model 1 Dependent Varb: ORGP	Model 2 Dependent Varb: ORGP
Constant	2.313 (0.019)	3.072 (0.000)
e-REC	2.105* (0.021)	2.107* (0.021)
e-PMS	4.318* (0.000)	3.968* (0.000)
WEBS	2.078* (0.025)	1.607 (0.738)
COMP	4.958* (0.000)	4.028* (0.000)
DIV	-	2.683* (0.002)
F-statistic	70.768*	79.739
Standard Error of Estimate	36.412	32.380
R ²	0.588	0.616
ΔR^2	-	0.028

First value represents t-statistic, and brackets represent the significance level at 5 percent

Source: Author’s Computation (2024)

Discussion of Findings

The study found that although the e-performance management system was only moderately used, IBEDC made substantial use of the web-based system, the e-recruitment portal, and the compensation and benefits electronic portal. The finding is consistent with the study by Bondarouk and Rul (2009) and Strohmeier and Piazza (2013), which show a growing trend of human resource automation across a variety of industries.

The study also revealed that human resource automation practices in the organization had a positive and significant influence on workforce diversity like age diversity, ethnic diversity, gender diversity, cultural diversity, religious diversity, educational diversity, work role diversity, and geographical diversity. The finding is in line with the study of Vivek (2023), Firawi (2024) and Praba et al., (2025) which discovered that human resource automation practices improve diversity by reducing human biases in hiring.

In addition, the results showed that human resource automation practices had a positive and significant effect on the organizational performance in terms of improving employee productivity, work processes’ efficiency, work accuracy, quality of service, and reducing paperwork, task completion time, errors in HR processes and costs of operations. The findings of this research

are consistent with what many scholars have discovered. Stone, Deadrick, Lukaszewski and Johnson (2015) and Bessen (2019), discovered that automation in human resource automation practices increase organizational productivity and efficiency. Marler and Boudreau (2017) indicate that HR automation increases work process efficiency. Lepak and Snell (1998) reveal that HR automation considerably decreases paperwork. Bondarouk and Ruel (2013) found that automating HR jobs improves accuracy. Parry and Tyson (2011) discover that HR automation considerably improves time efficiency in organizations. Laumer et al. (2016) found that automating HR operations reduces the likelihood of mistakes. Parry and Tyson (2011) found that HR automation raises the quality of HR services.

This research further revealed that diversity had a moderating effect on the relationship between human resource automation practices and organizational performance. This finding is consistent with the outcomes of some scholars. Roberts et al. (2020) found that diversity strengthens the impact of human resource automation on performance of organization. Lewis et al. (2020) shows that diversity acts as a connecting thread between HR automation and organizational productivity. Nishii (2013) emphasizes that diversity can increase the beneficial effects of HR automation on productivity by promoting a more innovative and inclusive atmosphere. Thus, diversity plays significant roles in organizations as alluded by some management scholars. Zanoni and Janssens (2015) highlight that better employee relations and organizational coherence are fostered by respecting religious diversity in the workplace. Shore and Goldberg (2013) found that age diversity has a favourable effect on organizational procedures. According to Cox and Blake (1991), cultural diversity plays a significant role in enhancing organizational competitiveness.

Conclusion

The present study offers a comprehensive and empirically solid investigation of how diversity, human resource automation, and organizational performance interact. The results highlight the significance of automated procedures in eliminating human biases and support Vivek (2023), Firawi (2024) and Praba et al (2025) analysis by affirming the beneficial impact of HR automation on diversity. The study supports the assertion made by Bessen (2019) that there is a connection between HR automation and improved organizational performance.

Most importantly, according to the findings, diversity has a moderating effect in the relationship between HR automation and organizational performance, which Nishii (2013) previously highlighted. The study concludes that diversity may generate an inclusive and inventive atmosphere that will increase the beneficial effects of automation, encourages a deeper

comprehension of the synergistic potential between these vital organizational elements.

These results add to the body of knowledge by providing new perspectives that may influence academic debate and tactical approaches to human resource management. It emphasises the need for a concentrated focus on diversity and technological innovation within the HR sector, reflecting its combined potential in maximising organizational productivity and efficiency.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The management of IBEDC should intensify their efforts in the use of human resource automation, especially e-Performance Management System which helps in improving work effectiveness and support business processes.
2. Since HR automation has significant influence on diversity of workforce, therefore diversity should be encouraged to boost an innovative and inclusive atmosphere, employee relations, and organizational competitiveness.
3. The management of IBEDC should invest in training and development. It is advised that businesses engage in training programmes that places a strong focus on both diversity awareness and technical proficiency. An atmosphere where automation and diversity coexist would be fostered by such training.
4. Continuous monitoring and assessment should be done in addition to human resource automation and diversity programmes. This strategy will guarantee alignment with corporate objectives and uphold adherence to the guidelines for greater productivity and efficiency.

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