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STRATEGIC HRM AS A DRIVER FOR FOSTERING INNOVATION IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED ENVIRONMENTS: PERCEPTIONS FROM SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Organisational sustainability rests on the degree of how innovative its management is. Irrespective of the constraints on resources, innovation plays a significant role in salvaging such anomalies or situations. However, how much the management can leverage on employees' capacity and capabilities to innovate remains pivotal towards fostering organisational success. For this purpose, the current study was embarked upon to interrogate strategic human resource management as a driver for fostering innovation in resource-constrained environments with perceptions from selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study was anchored on the resource-based view theory, human capital theory and knowledge-based theory. The study employed a descriptive method of research design where data were quantitatively obtained from academic staff of six (6) selected private-owned universities in Ogun State. Findings revealed that a positive and significant relationship existed between targeted training and development and innovation with ($r=0.923$, $p=.000$); similarly, empowerment and autonomy were found to affect innovation with ($r^2=0.946$, $p=.000$); furthermore, a positive and significant relationship was found between cross-functional collaboration and innovation with ($r=0.802$, $p\text{-value}<0.05$). The study concluded that SHRM plays a cardinal role in fostering and facilitating innovations within private institutions operating within constrained environments; nevertheless, SHRM's effectiveness is contingent upon investment in staff development, strategic alignment and stronger cross-functional collaboration systems. However, through the adoption of a tailored framework of SHRM in addressing systemic constraints, management of private institutions can positively harness their human capital to foster innovations and sustain competitive advantages.

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Keywords: Cross-functional collaboration, empowerment and autonomy, resource-constrained environment, strategic HRM, targeted training and development and innovation.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly competitive and resource-constrained higher-education landscape, private universities in Nigeria, particularly those in Ogun State, must continuously seek innovative strategies to remain relevant and sustainable (Odiagbe & Ojo, 2020). While limited funding, infrastructural deficiencies, and talent gaps are persistent challenges, the strategic management of human capital offers a promising pathway to institutional renewal (Imasuen & Chinwe, 2025). Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), the intentional alignment of HR practices with long-term organisational goals, can act as a critical driver of innovation even when financial and material resources are scarce (Ejibe, Olutimehin & Nwankwo, 2024). Scholars have long argued that SHRM is not merely administrative but a strategic lever for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage (Agha & Richard, 2016). Through practices such as talent development, performance appraisal, and reward systems, SHRM nurtures the capabilities and commitment of employees, which in turn enhances organisational adaptability and innovation (Imasuen & Chinwe, 2025). In the Nigerian context, the role of SHRM has been especially significant, as organisations increasingly recognise that their human capital properly managed can compensate for other resource deficits (Okolie & Oyovwevotu, 2024).

Empirical findings from developing countries reinforce this proposition. For instance, a qualitative study in a public-sector setting demonstrated that HRM practices such as training, innovation-oriented performance evaluation, and intrinsic rewards can stimulate employee creativity and organisational innovation, even under tight resource constraints (Redalyc, 2022). Similarly, in Nigeria's commercial banking sector, SHRM practices have been shown to positively influence innovation, which in turn enhances organisational performance (Bassey, Emmanuel, & Ije, 2024). Moreover, the evolving scholarship on SHRM underscores its relevance in institutional contexts beyond the conventional corporate arena. Recent literature highlights how SHRM trends in the 21st century emphasise agility, strategic thinking, and innovation to respond to dynamic environments (Kess-Momoh, Tula, & Omotoye, 2024). In creative and educational sectors, SHRM has also been suggested as a framework for sustainability, aligning HR strategies with innovation-focused organisational goals (Ejibe, Olutimehin, & Nwankwo, 2024).

Despite these insights, there remains a critical gap in knowledge regarding how SHRM drives innovation in private universities in Nigeria, especially within resource-constrained environments. While much of the literature focuses on public institutions, SMEs, or corporate settings, less attention has been paid to how HR strategy can catalyse innovation in private higher education, where resource scarcity is acute, and institutional flexibility may be higher. This study, therefore, filled this gap by exploring the perceptions of academic staff in six (6) selected private universities in Ogun State. Specifically, it investigates how SHRM practices (e.g., targeted training and development, empowerment and autonomy and cross-functional collaboration) contribute to fostering innovation in

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spite of resource limitations. By doing so, the research seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which strategic HRM becomes a driver of innovation under constraint, and to offer practical recommendations for university leaders and policymakers. Through a better understanding of these dynamics, private universities may be better positioned to leverage human capital strategically, turning resource limitations not into insurmountable obstacles but into catalysts for creativity and growth.

Innovation has become a central requirement for the survival and competitiveness of higher-education institutions globally. However, private universities in Nigeria, particularly those located in Ogun State, continue to operate within environments characterised by chronic resource constraints, including limited funding, inadequate research infrastructure, and high staff turnover (Adebayo & Oni, 2021). These constraints hinder the ability of institutions to implement innovative practices and to invest in human capital development, which is a core driver of organisational renewal. While strategic human resource management (SHRM) has been recognised internationally as a crucial mechanism for enhancing innovation by aligning people, processes, and strategy (Wright & Ulrich, 2017), its effectiveness within resource-constrained Nigerian private universities remains insufficiently understood.

Existing research in Nigeria has primarily focused on SHRM in public institutions, SMEs, or corporate organisations (Odiagbe & Ojo, 2020; Okolie, 2022). Consequently, very little empirical evidence explains how SHRM influences innovation specifically within private universities, despite their unique structural and financial challenges. In Ogun State, home to one of the largest clusters of private universities in the country, these institutions often rely heavily on tuition and private funding, making strategic human-resource decisions critical for survival (Akinyemi, 2020). Yet, anecdotal observations suggest that HR practices in many of these universities remain predominantly administrative, reactive, and compliance-driven rather than strategic and innovation-focused.

Moreover, although SHRM practices such as talent development, performance management, and innovation-linked reward systems have been shown to foster creativity and adaptive capacity in organisations (Boxall & Purcell, 2016), it is unclear whether these practices are being implemented effectively or at all in private universities constrained by limited financial flexibility. The absence of clear evidence creates a gap in understanding how HR strategy can be used as a lever for innovation in contexts where resource scarcity is the norm rather than the exception.

This gap in knowledge raises critical questions: To what extent are SHRM practices being adopted in private universities in Ogun State? How do university employees perceive the role of SHRM in driving innovation amid resource limitations? And which strategic HR mechanisms are most influential in enabling innovation in such constrained environments? To better advance the above questions, this study rests on the objectives to interrogate the degree of relationship targeted training and development has on innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria; examine the effect of empowerment and autonomy on innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria; and

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evaluate the relationship between cross-functional collaboration and innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Addressing these questions is essential, as many private universities that fail to innovate risk declining academic quality, reduced competitiveness, and limited long-term sustainability. Therefore, this study investigated how SHRM functions as a driver of innovation within resource-constrained private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria, with a particular focus on how targeted training and development, empowerment and autonomy, and cross-functional collaboration affect and share a significant relationship with innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The overall objective of this study was to examine strategic HRM as a driver for fostering innovation in resource-constrained environments with perceptions from selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study specifically aimed to:

i. Iinterrogate the degree of relationship targeted training and development has on innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria;
ii. examine the effect of empowerment and autonomy on innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria; and
iii. evaluate the relationship between cross-functional collaboration and innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Strategic Human Resource Management

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) has increasingly transformed to meet the demands of a fast-changing business environment, driven by digitalization, inclusion, and workforce volatility (Kumar et al., 2024). Rather than being a back-office administrative function, HR today is a strategic partner in navigating disruption and enabling sustainable organisational performance. One of the most prominent shifts is the emergence of digital HR strategy as a core component of SHRM. Recent empirical research conceptualises a "digital human resource strategy" as the deliberate integration of digital technologies (such as AI and analytics) across the full employee lifecycle from hiring to off-boarding to create synergies that improve firm performance. According to Mwambela (2024), this underscores a broader reconceptualisation: HR is not simply digitised, but *co-develops* with digital systems to generate competitive advantage. Closely related is the growing concern for employee well-being in the AI era (Nosratabadi et al., 2022).

As organisations increasingly automate HR functions, studies show that AI has double-edged effects: while it can streamline processes and reduce bias, it also raises issues around job security, transparency, and trust (Nosratabadi et al., 2022). In SHRM, this means balancing the efficiency of algorithmic decision-making with ethical, human-centred designs that preserve psychological safety (Wiyono et al. 2025). In parallel, strategic workforce planning has been reimagined through predictive analytics and scenario-based models. HR leaders are now using AI-informed tools to anticipate future talent needs,

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model multiple strategic futures, and design more resilient workforce architectures, particularly in hybrid or remote contexts (SHRM, 2024). This evolution elevates workforce planning from tactical hiring forecasts to strategic foresight. Another important trend is inclusion and diversity strategy infused into SHRM (Sadeghi, 2024).

The role of leadership development and talent retention remains central. According to recent SHRM research, many HR professionals are planning to shift their strategic investments in 2025 toward leadership, management development, and "employee experience, recognizing that retention, not just recruitment, is key in a constrained labour market. This strategic pivot highlights how SHRM supports sustainable performance through building internal capacity and fostering loyalty. In today's environment, SHRM is more than aligning HR practices with business strategy; it's about co-creating value through digital tools, inclusion, sustainability, and leadership development (Eshete & Birbirssa, 2024). HR practitioners are increasingly acting as architects of the future workforce, balancing technological innovation with human-centred design, and embedding long-term resilience into organisational DNA (Kess-Momoh et al., 2024).

Targeted Training and Development

Targeted training and development refer to structured learning interventions that are intentionally designed to address specific skill gaps, performance deficiencies, or strategic capability needs within an organisation. Unlike generic training programs, targeted training is aligned with organisational goals and tailored to the particular competencies required for improved employee performance and innovation (Noe, 2020). This approach ensures that training investments produce measurable outcomes, such as enhanced productivity, better job proficiency, and stronger strategic alignment. The theoretical foundation of targeted training is rooted in the Human Capital Theory, which posits that investing in employee knowledge and skills improves organisational effectiveness and competitive advantage (Becker, 1993). By identifying critical roles or departments that drive strategic outcomes, organisations can channel resources into training that builds capabilities essential for achieving long-term objectives. This is especially important for institutions operating in resource-constrained environments, where training must yield maximum value for minimal investment (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

Furthermore, targeted training supports the concept of strategic HRM, which emphasises the integration of HR practices with organisational strategy. Strategic alignment enables employees to acquire the exact competencies needed for innovation, problem-solving, and adaptability (Wright & McMahan, 2011). For universities, this may involve enhancing faculty digital literacy, research capacity, or pedagogical competencies to improve teaching quality and promote institutional innovation. Studies have shown that targeted training leads to improved performance, higher employee commitment, and enhanced organisational learning (Salas et al., 2012). In environments facing resource scarcity, targeted training ensures that limited resources are invested in high-impact areas, thereby fostering a more agile and innovative workforce. In summary, targeted training and

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development serve as a strategic tool for building specialised competencies, aligning human capital with organisational goals, and fostering innovation, particularly in settings where resources are limited and efficiency is critical.

Empowerment and Autonomy

Empowerment and autonomy are central concepts in contemporary organisational behaviour and strategic human resource management, particularly in environments requiring innovation, adaptability, and employee engagement. Empowerment refers to practices that increase employees' perceived control, competence, and meaningfulness in their work, often by providing greater access to information, resources, and decision-making authority (Zheng et al., 2020). Autonomy, a component of psychological empowerment, reflects the degree to which employees experience discretion and freedom in performing job tasks (Park & Searcy, 2021). From the perspective of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy is essential for fostering intrinsic motivation, creativity, and proactive behaviour at work (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Employees who feel empowered are more likely to take initiative, engage in problem-solving, and contribute innovative ideas, outcomes that are especially crucial in resource-constrained environments where creative solutions are needed to compensate for limited material inputs (Jha & Varkkey, 2021).

Recent studies highlight that empowerment-oriented HR practices such as participatory decision-making, open communication, and decentralised structures enhance employees' psychological ownership, thereby increasing innovation behaviours (Nawaz et al., 2022). Similarly, job autonomy has been shown to improve employee learning, engagement, and performance by allowing individuals to tailor their work processes to their strengths or situational needs (Wang et al., 2023). In knowledge-intensive institutions such as universities, autonomy positively influences academic performance, research productivity, and collaborative innovation (Aguinis et al., 2022). Overall, empowerment and autonomy function as strategic levers that enable employees to respond creatively and resiliently to organisational challenges. When intentionally integrated into strategic HRM systems, they support innovation, enhance employee motivation, and enable institutions to thrive even under significant resource constraints.

Cross-functional Collaboration

Cross-functional collaboration refers to the coordinated interaction among employees or teams from different departments, disciplines, or functional areas to accomplish shared organisational goals. It has become an essential organisational capability in environments characterised by complexity, rapid change, and the need for innovation. Collaboration across functional boundaries enables the integration of diverse knowledge, skills, and perspectives, which enhances problem-solving quality and fosters organisational learning (Berg & Sutcliffe, 2020). From an innovation perspective, cross-functional collaboration strengthens the exchange of information and the recombination of ideas, both of which are crucial for developing novel solutions (Im & Rai, 2021). Studies show that when teams collaborate across functions, they are more likely to generate creative outcomes and adapt quickly to environmental

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challenges. This is because cross-functional arrangements reduce departmental silos, enhance communication, and promote shared ownership of outcomes (Rosenbaum et al., 2022).

Within strategic HRM, cross-functional collaboration is seen as a mechanism for improving organisational agility and knowledge flow. HR practices that promote collaborative culture, such as team-based rewards, cross-training, and shared performance metrics, significantly enhance interdepartmental coordination (Zhao & Liu, 2023). Furthermore, digital collaboration tools have emerged as enablers of cross-functional integration, especially in resource-constrained environments where virtual coordination reduces costs and increases flexibility (Lee & Edmondson, 2024). In higher-education institutions, cross-functional collaboration supports interdisciplinary research, curriculum development, and administrative effectiveness. It promotes synergy between academic staff, administration, and support units, thereby enhancing innovation and institutional performance (Ankrah & Omar, 2021). Overall, cross-functional collaboration serves as a strategic driver of innovation, organisational learning, and adaptability. When supported by enabling structures, leadership, and HR practices, it becomes a powerful asset for institutions, especially those operating under resource constraints.

Innovation

Innovation has become a central pillar of organisational survival and competitive advantage in the 21st century, but its conceptual nature is evolving rapidly (Agazu & Kero, 2024). Rather than just an outcome, innovation is increasingly understood as a dynamic capability, a process embedded within organisational structures, strategies, and ecosystems (Indiran, Fu & Fahim, 2025). A key conceptual shift is the rise of digital innovation, which redefines innovation as not only technological advancement but also the recombination of business models, processes, and knowledge facilitated by digital tools (Lin et al., 2024). A recent bibliometric review highlights how digital innovation is now at the intersection of information systems, management, and strategy, calling for a re-conceptualisation of innovation beyond traditional product-process binaries (Alaassar et al., 2025). From a strategic perspective, innovation strategy matters deeply. Research demonstrates that firms that deploy combinations of innovation types (product, process, organisational, marketing) outperform those that focus on just one type (Smuts et al. 2024). Thus, innovation is increasingly conceptualised not as a monolithic concept, but as a portfolio of interdependent strategies. In small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), disruptive innovation is being reconceptualised as a way to foster growth and adaptability (Alaassar et al., 2025). A new conceptual model argues that SMEs can harness disruptive innovation strategically, navigating uncertainty through flexible structures and dynamic learning. This shifts innovation discourse from large corporations to smaller players, highlighting agility and adaptability.

In the organisational context, innovation is tied to resilience and dynamic capabilities. Empirical research shows that service firms that cultivate innovation and organisational resilience can improve performance in turbulent environments, reinforcing the idea that innovation is both a strategic resource and a capability to absorb shocks. Furthermore, innovation in management itself is evolving (Agazu & Kero, 2024). A bibliometric review of management innovation demonstrates three emerging hotspots:

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business-model innovation, open innovation, and environmental innovation. These themes reflect a broader conceptual expansion: management practices themselves are innovated, not just products or processes (Indiran et al., 2025). It is important to note the institutional dynamics of innovation, especially in higher education. Policy and institutional shifts in regions like the European Union have changed how innovation is conceptualised at universities: from narrow technology transfer to broader notions of social and organisational innovation. This illustrates that innovation is not just a firm-level phenomenon but is shaped by institutional logics and public policy (El Moudden & Balhadj, 2024).

Strategic Human Resource Management and Innovation

In resource-constrained contexts such as private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria, Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) can serve as a critical lever for fostering innovation. Despite limited financial and material resources, these institutions can leverage human capital strategically to spur creative problem-solving, adaptability, and institutional growth. Firstly, SHRM enables private universities to align HR practices with institutional mission and innovation goals. By intentionally linking recruitment, performance management, training, and job mobility to strategic objectives, HR becomes more than administrative; it becomes a driver of change (Akinosi, Ajike & Shodunke, 2020). In the context of higher education, such alignment encourages the recruitment of staff with not just technical expertise but also an orientation toward innovation and continuous improvement.

Secondly, HR development is especially important in constrained settings. Strategic investment in capacity building and self-management helps academics to self-regulate, take initiative, and produce creative outputs even when external resources are scarce (Falola, Abasilim & Salau, 2016). For example, in private universities in Ogun State, self-management among academic staff was found to correlate significantly with research output, suggesting that when staff are empowered and self-directed, they compensate for infrastructural limitations through personal initiative. Thirdly, SHRM helps to retain and motivate talent, which is vital for innovation. Private universities often struggle with retention, particularly because of competition and limited resources. HRM practices like training, compensation, and promotions, when deployed strategically, can anchor academic staff, reduce turnover, and sustain a pool of innovative thinkers (Igwilo, 2020). Moreover, studies in Ogun State private universities (e.g., Babcock University) show that HR practices such as job movement significantly boost staff performance, making employees more versatile and engaged.

Fourthly, culture and leadership mediated by HRM can further catalyse innovation. Supportive organisational culture and transformational leadership help create psychological safety, motivating staff to experiment, collaborate, and take risks (Odunlami, Awolusi & Awosusi, 2017). Meanwhile, strategic HR development, as implemented in some Ogun universities, contributes to both job performance and the institution's competitive posture in the higher education ecosystem (Odunayo, 2022). Finally, SHRM in these contexts supports sustainable competitive advantage through human capital. The resource-based view (RBV) of the firm suggests that when human capital is well managed, it becomes a source of enduring advantage. Empirical studies (in Nigeria and beyond) affirm that

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strategic HRM practices positively influence sustainable competitive advantage via the development of human capital and employee commitment (Falola, Abasilim & Salau, 2016).

Theoretical Anchorage

The study was anchored on the Resource-Based View Theory, **Human Capital Theory (HCT) and the** Knowledge-Based Theory.

Resource-Based View Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) was popularised by Barney (1991). It theorises that an organisation's sustainable competitive advantage derives from its internal resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) (Lubis, 2022). In the context of higher-education institutions, especially private universities operating under significant resource constraints (e.g., limited funding, weak infrastructure, and staffing challenges), human capital and strategically designed HR systems emerge as some of the most critical strategic resources. Under the RBV, human capital, the collective knowledge, skills, tacit expertise, and commitment of faculty and staff, is not just a cost to be minimised, but a strategic asset. In resource-poor settings like private universities in Ogun State, physical assets (such as research labs or advanced technology) might be limited, but investing in human capital through SHRM practices (targeted training, selective recruitment, and development) enables them to build a valuable and rare resource that is difficult for competing institutions to replicate.

Because the knowledge and tacit capabilities of academic staff are deeply embedded in the individuals and shaped by the specific institutional culture, the resulting human resource becomes inimitable. Such inimitability supports sustained innovation (curricular, pedagogical, and research-based) even in environments lacking large capital outlays. Beyond individual talent, SHRM involves creating systems and practices (training, performance appraisal, rewards, and cross-functional collaboration) that coordinate, develop, and preserve human capital (Helfat et al., 2023). From the RBV perspective, these HR systems themselves can be capabilities, another strategic resource that meets the VRIN criteria. For example, a performance management system that explicitly rewards faculty for innovation (e.g., novel teaching methods, new research, and interdisciplinary collaboration) can align individual goals with the university's strategic mission. By doing so, the institution makes the HR system a non-substitutable mechanism: it is not easily replaced by external funding or infrastructure alone.

In resource-constrained private universities, SHRM guided by RBV can help compensate for limited physical resources by leveraging people as the primary source of innovation. Strategic training, mentorship, and internal promotion can build dynamic capabilities, the ability to reconfigure and renew resources to respond to changing academic and competitive demands. Although the RBV traditionally emphasises static resources, recent scholarship suggests integrating it with the concept of dynamic capabilities to account for innovation in turbulent environments Mugure & Mose, 2024). For instance, private universities can design learning programs (e.g., faculty development, research capacity building) that not only upskill personnel but also embed a culture of experimentation and creativity. Over time, the process of building and sustaining these capabilities becomes a distinctive internal asset

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difficult for other universities to duplicate, especially those that do not adopt such a long-term, people-centred HR strategy. By applying the RBV lens, university leaders and HR managers in Ogun State can reconceptualise their staff not merely as functional employees but as strategic resources. Investing in SHRM, particularly in practices that nurture innovation, becomes a way to differentiate the institution sustainably: not through scale of infrastructure, but through the unique combination of human capital and HR practices. In so doing, these universities can generate sustainable competitive advantage based on people: building a workforce that is not just skilled, but also adaptive, innovative, and deeply embedded in the institution's strategic mission. This approach aligns with RBV's core insight that when human resources and HR systems satisfy the VRIN criteria, they become enduring drivers of innovation and institutional success.

Human Capital Theory (HCT)

Human Capital Theory (HCT), originally developed by economists such as Becker and Schultz (1964), posits that investments in people in the form of education, skills, knowledge, and experience build an organisation's capacity and productivity (Awu, Darius, & Chimele, 2025). Rather than viewing employees as purely a cost, HCT treats them as valuable assets whose competencies can be grown through targeted development. In the context of private universities in Ogun State, this perspective offers a powerful rationale for Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) as a driver of innovation, particularly under conditions of resource scarcity.

In resource-constrained environments, where financial and infrastructural resources may be limited, the intellectual capacity of staff becomes a critical lever. By using SHRM to invest strategically in faculty and administrative human capital through professional development, research training, pedagogical workshops, and graduate education, universities can enhance their innovation capacity. Such investments may initially require financial outlays, but HCT argues that returns come in the form of greater creativity, knowledge generation, and productivity. This is consistent with findings that aligned HR practices strengthen human capital and contribute to sustainable competitive advantage.

Empirically, the very idea that employees are assets rather than costs is reasserted in the Nigerian context: Awu, Darius, & Chimele (2025) highlight that viewing employees as organisational assets under HCT leads to better alignment of strategic HRM practices with innovation and organisational goals. SHRM lets universities structure HR systems such as recruitment, performance appraisal, reward, and training to deliberately foster human capital that supports innovation. For instance, if performance evaluation rewards research output or creative curriculum design, faculty are incentivised to generate new ideas. Aligning HR practices with innovation-oriented goals effectively channels human capital into the kinds of behaviours that drive institutional innovation. University leadership and HR managers should strategically prioritise human capital investments (e.g., continuous training, research support, career progression) even when resources are tight. They should design SHRM practices that align HR activities with innovation goals, such as setting performance metrics for creativity, incentivising cross-disciplinary collaboration, and providing funding for faculty-led

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innovations. By framing staff development as an asset-building exercise rather than a cost, HRM becomes a central lever for institutional transformation and innovation.

Knowledge-Based Theory

The Knowledge-Based View (KBV) of the firm asserts that knowledge, rather than physical or purely financial resources, is one of the most strategically important resources that a firm (or institution) can possess. Under KBV, knowledge is valuable, difficult to imitate, and deeply embedded in people, routines, and systems (Abiwu & Martins, 2024). In the context of private universities in Ogun State, which often operate under resource constraints (limited infrastructure, tight budgets, high operational costs), the KBV provides a theoretically rich lens to understand why Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) is central to driving innovation. According to this theory, universities are inherently knowledge-intensive institutions, where intellectual capital embodied in academic staff, administrators, and collective routines is a core resource. Strategic HRM practices (such as recruiting academically strong faculty, investing in their ongoing professional development, and facilitating research collaboration) directly cultivate this intellectual capital (Ketut & Astuti, 2024).

In doing so, SHRM helps embed unique, tacit, and explicit knowledge within the institution's knowledge that can be converted into new curricula, research breakthroughs, and pedagogical innovation Le, 2023). Universities in resource-constrained environments may lack physical research infrastructure, but through KBV-informed SHRM, they can develop dynamic capabilities that transform knowledge inputs into innovative outcomes. A study within higher-education institutions demonstrates that knowledge inputs (e.g., intellectual capital), processed through effective HR-enabled routines, lead to knowledge outputs (e.g., new research, teaching methods), fueling institutional innovation (Ramírez & Gordillo, 2024).

Empirical Review

This section of the study reviewed previous scholarly investigations on the subject of discourse for the purpose of formulating the study’s hypotheses.

Targeted Training, Development, and Innovation

Empirical research in recent years has increasingly underscored the significant role that targeted training and development play in fostering organisational innovation. Targeted training, i.e., programmes specifically designed to build particular skills or competencies, is shown to have a measurable impact on firms’ innovation performance. One of the most notable studies is by Burlina (2025), which investigates training programs in transition economies (Eastern Europe and Central Asia). The study demonstrates that firms investing in structured training significantly increase their levels of innovation, especially in product and process innovation. This empirical evidence suggests that even in resource-constrained or developing contexts, well-focused training drives innovation. Another relevant study by Istiqomah (2025) finds that training has a mediating effect on digital innovation in a local government context. Using PLS-SEM, the author shows that effective training not

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only improves employee performance but also enhances their engagement with digital innovation, thereby contributing to better organisational outcomes. In technology-oriented and knowledge-intensive businesses, empirical work by Mehner (2025) offers critical insights into how competency development (a form of targeted training) can be maximised. The study highlights that the transfer of learning, how employees apply what they've learned back on the job, is crucial for innovation outcomes. Without strong mechanisms for training transfer, even well-designed training programs may fail to contribute meaningfully to innovation.

A further quantitative piece is the study by Wiley (2024), which examined "Training Investments and Innovation Gains in Knowledge-Intensive Firms." The research found that specific training, rather than general training, is positively associated with incremental innovation. This suggests that training must be carefully aligned with the type of innovation a firm seeks: general training may boost broad skills, but targeted training is more effective for innovation. In a developing country setting, Jega et al. (2025) studied human resource strategies, talent development, and technological innovation in organisations in Nigeria. Their empirical results indicated that strategic training interventions (i.e., talent development) significantly predict innovation. This underlines that growth in capabilities via training is a fundamental driver of technological innovation in emerging markets. Moreover, Alzuod (2024) explored how talent management (including competence training and development) influences both process and product innovation in Jordanian pharmaceutical firms. Using survey data, the study found a strong positive relationship between training development (as part of talent management) and innovation outcomes, reinforcing the value of strategic, competency-based training. Finally, a systematic review by Obeng-Tuaah (2025) synthesises evidence from multiple empirical studies and reports that training and development programs not only enhance productivity and retention but also promote innovation and the generation of new ideas in organisations across diverse sectors.

From the above accentuations, the hypothesis below was formulated:
H1: Targeted training and development have a significant relationship with innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Empowerment, Autonomy, and Innovation

Empirical research increasingly supports the idea that empowerment and autonomy are important predictors of innovative behaviour in organisations. Psychological empowerment, which includes meaning, competence, self-determination (autonomy), and impact, has been empirically linked to innovation across a variety of contexts. For example, a recent study by Jiang, Zhang, Zhu, and Wang (2024) found that high-involvement work practices (which often include empowerment) significantly improve innovation performance among older workers. Their quantitative data showed that when employees feel empowered through greater participation and responsibility, their exploratory and exploitative innovation both benefit.

Autonomy, a core dimension of empowerment, has also been shown to drive innovation. In a qualitative study, Zhou & Song (2025) argue that autonomy combined with psychological safety fosters an

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environment where employees feel safe to propose and experiment with new ideas. Moreover, Indrayanti (2024) offers strong empirical support for empowerment's role in innovation. Her study, conducted in organisations with flexible working arrangements, found that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between flexible working and innovative work behaviour. Employees with higher autonomy and influence (impact) tended to report greater innovative behaviour. In addition, cross-cultural evidence suggests that the empowering effect on innovation is mediated by emotional and social factors. A study by Sami Akrom (2025) showed that employee empowerment positively predicts innovative behaviour, but this relationship is strengthened by emotional intelligence and an open, supportive organisational culture. Based on the above submissions, the hypothesis below was formulated:

H2: Empowerment and autonomy have an effect on innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Cross-functional Collaboration and Innovation

Recent empirical studies consistently show that cross-functional collaboration, the coordination and joint problem-solving across different functional departments, plays a vital role in driving innovation in organisations. One key investigation by Sanyaolu, Adeleke, Efunniyi, Akwawa, and Azubuko (2022) examines cross-functional collaboration in agile product development. Their study finds that agile teams composed of members from engineering, design, marketing, and quality assurance create more innovative products and bring them to market faster. The diversity of skills and perspectives enhances problem-solving, communication, and continuous improvement, which in turn fosters innovation (Sanyaolu et al., 2022). Another recent quantitative study by Vasudevan and Kumar (2025) investigated the role of cross-functional collaboration and leadership practices in new product development (NPD). Using survey data from professionals in operations, engineering, procurement, and marketing, the authors find that strong inclusive leadership, clear communication protocols, and structured coordination significantly improve innovation outcomes and reduce project delays (Vasudevan & Kumar, 2025).

In addition, a 2024 study by Tobari, Dewi, Naim, and Azizah explored how knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and adaptive leadership jointly affect innovation success. Their PLS-SEM analysis reveals that cross-functional collaboration mediates the relationship between knowledge sharing and innovation success: knowledge sharing alone has a positive effect, but collaboration across functions amplifies that effect, making innovation outcomes stronger (Tobari et al., 2024). Furthermore, empirical research on the role of cross-functional collaboration in digital transformation underscores its centrality to innovation. Ahmad, Boit, and Aakula (2023) show that during digital transformation initiatives, collaboration between IT, human resources, finance, operations, marketing, and R&D is strongly associated with organisational agility and creative problem-solving. In their sample, cross-functional teams enabled risk assessment, rapid decision-making, and innovation in digital projects.

Even in more structural contexts, cross-functional collaboration contributes to capability development. For example, Crupi and Mortara (2025) studied middle managers in a university–industry consortium

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and found that cross-boundary collaboration strengthens managerial dynamic capabilities, which are essential for innovation and open-innovation processes (Crupi & Mortara, 2025). Finally, in a project-management context, Adebiyi, Obadimu, and Ibrahim (2025) examine cross-functional team dynamics in the Nigerian construction industry. They report that effective cross-functional coordination improves project delivery efficiency and encourages the adoption of new problem-solving methods, which indirectly fosters innovation in how projects are executed (Adebiyi et al., 2025).

From the above analysis, the hypothesis below was formulated:

H_3: Cross-functional collaboration has a relationship with innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

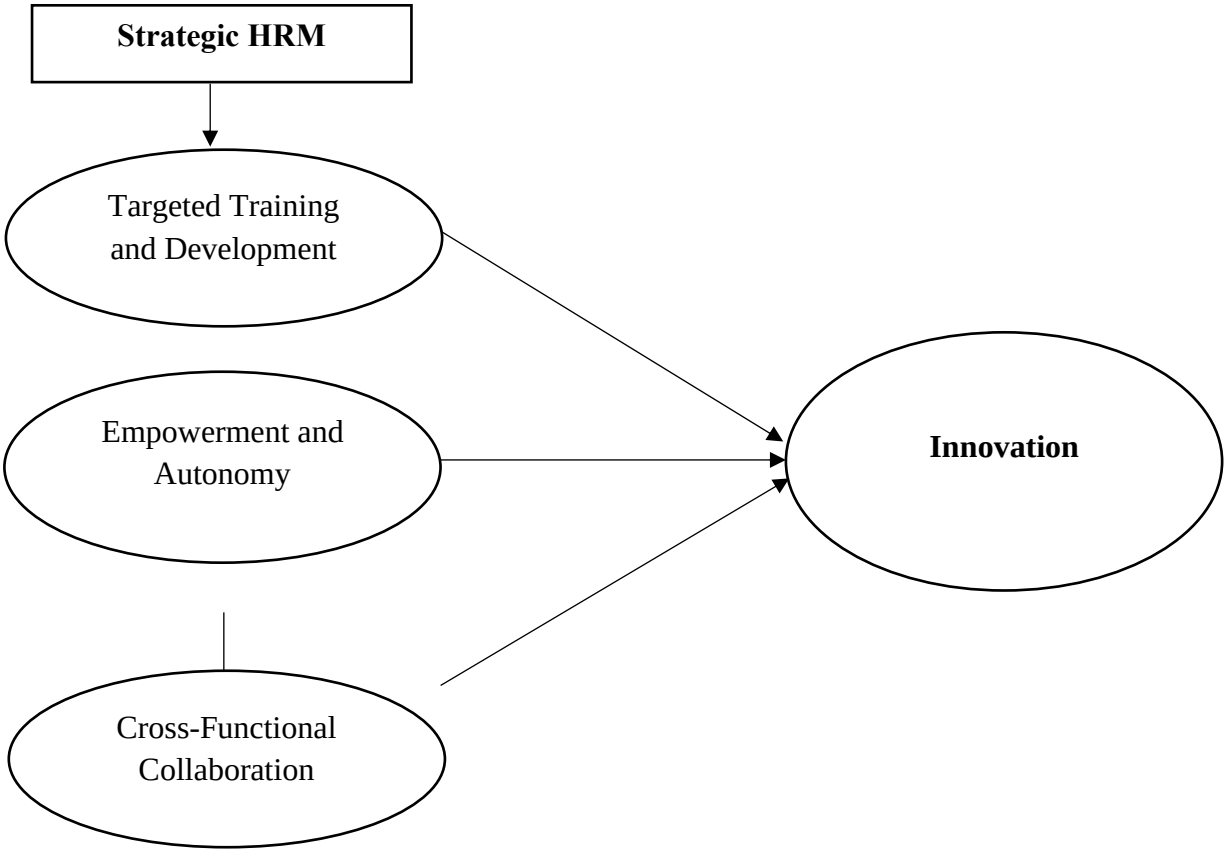

Fig I: Conceptual Framework for the study
Source: Authors' Schematic Model (2026)

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3. Methodology

This section describes the methodology adopted for the study. It covered the research design, population, sampling and sampling techniques, instrument development, method of data collection, validity and reliability testing, method of data analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations of the methodology. This study adopts a descriptive research design**,** using a quantitative approach. The quantitative approach provides the statistical basis for examining relationships among variables within the study. The target population comprised academic staff across six (6) selected private universities in Ogun State. Ogun State hosts one of Nigeria's highest concentrations of private universities, making it an ideal context for studying SHRM in constrained environments. Private institutions examined in the study are presented in Table I below.

Table I: List of Private Institutions used in the Study

S/N	Name of Institutions	Location	Academic Staff
1.	Alethia University	Ago-Iwoye	71
2.	Bells University of Technology	Ota	207
3.	Christopher University	Mowe	63
4.	Crawford University	Igbesa	93
5.	Crescent University	Abeokuta	132
6.	Mcpherson University	Seriki Sotayo, Ajebo	137
	Total		**703**

Source: HR Departments of the selected Institutions, (2026)

A total of two hundred and forty-nine (249) respondents were selected for the quantitative component. This sample size is considered adequate for multiple regression and moderation analysis, as recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). A combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling was used. Stratified random sampling ensured proportionate representation of academic staff, reduced sampling bias and allowed valid generalisation to the wider population. The purposive sampling was used in selecting the six (6) private universities in Ogun State.

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Table II: Sample Size Determination

S/N	Name of Institutions	Academic Staff	Proportion	Sample Size
1.	Alethia University	71	71(249)/703	25
2.	Bells University of Technology	207	207(249)/703	73
3.	Christopher University	63	63(249)/703	22
4.	Crawford University	93	93(249)/703	33
5.	Crescent University	132	132(249)/703	47
6.	Mcpherson University	137	137(249)/703	49
	Total	**703**		249

Source: Authors' Computation, (2026)

The instrument used in gathering data for the study was a questionnaire which was organised into sections covering demographic data, perceptions of SHRM, such as targeted training and development, empowerment and autonomy and cross-functional collaboration. Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale. Content, construct, criterion and face validity were ensured by subjecting the instrument to review by three experts in Human Resource Management and higher education research in Abuja. Their feedback guided revisions to ensure clarity, relevance, and coverage of key variables.

A pilot study was conducted using thirty (30) respondents from three selected private universities in Ondo State. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency. The questionnaire was pilot-tested; Cronbach's alpha coefficients for SHRM and innovation scales were computed (both > 0.70).

Table III: Scales Employed in the Study

S/N	Scales	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha	After Pilot Study
1.	SHRM Practices	**20**	**0.89**	**0.87**
2.	**Innovation**	**15**	**0.85**	**0.81**

Source: Researchers' Computation (2026)

All values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating high reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

Quantitative Data Collection was used, and questionnaires were distributed electronically. Institutional permission was obtained from university authorities, and research assistants facilitated distribution. Quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). **Statistical Tools Used were descriptive and inferential statistics. Linear regression analysis** was used to test the effect of SHRM on innovation, while **correlation analysis was used to examine** the strength of

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association between variables. The **decision rule was to** reject null hypotheses (H_0) if the p-value < 0.05. The study was guided by the following ethical principles: Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Responses were anonymised to protect participants' identities. No harm (physical or psychological) came to participants. Data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. Permission was obtained from each selected university to conduct the research.

4. Findings and Discussion

A total of two hundred and forty (249) questionnaires were distributed, with 217 returned, but 212 were valid for analysis, giving a response rate of 85.1%, which is acceptable for statistical analysis (Baruch & Holtom, 2008).

Hypothesis one

H_1: Targeted training and development have a significant relationship with innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Table IV: Results of the correlation analysis between targeted training and innovation

		Targeted T&D	Innovation
Targeted T&D	Pearson Correlation	1	.983**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	212	212
Innovation	Pearson Correlation	.983**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	212	212

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above correlation table reflected that there exists a positive and significant relationship between targeted training and development, which has a significant effect on innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria, with ($r=0.983$, p-value<0.05). On this note, the null hypothesis was rejected as the result proved otherwise. This implies that targeted training and development have a significant effect on innovation in the selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

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Hypothesis Two

H_2: Empowerment and autonomy affect innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Tables V, VI, VII: Results of linear regression analysis on the effect of empowerment and autonomy on innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Table V: Model Summary of Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.951[a]	.904	.904	.414

a. **Predictors**: (Constant), Empowerment and autonomy

Table VI: ANOVA of Regression Analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	247.198	1	247.198	1443.835	.000[b]
	Residual	26.195	211	.171		
	Total	273.394	213			

a. **Dependent Variable**: Empowerment and autonomy

b. **Predictors**: (Constant), Innovation

Table VII: Coefficients of Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.686	.083		8.220	.000
	Digital technology	.877	.023	.951	37.998	.000

a. **Dependent Variable**: Innovation

T

Tables V, VI and VII presented the results of the linear regression used in predicting empowerment and autonomy as independent variables on innovation, which served as the dependent variable. Result indicated that a significant regression coefficient was found (F (1,153) = 1443.835, p=.000), with R^2 of 904. This presupposes that 90.4% variation in innovation was a result of empowerment and autonomy. Evidence in Table VII is also the beta value under the standardised coefficients, which highlighted that empowerment and autonomy equally contributed to the change in the dependent variable (innovation) (β=.951, p=.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected because results signposted that empowerment and autonomy significantly affected innovation in the selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

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Hypothesis Three

H_3: Cross-functional collaboration has a relationship with innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Table VIII: Results of Correlations analysis between cross-functional collaboration and innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

		Cross-functional Collaboration	Innovation
Cross-functional Collaboration	Pearson Correlation	1	.802**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	212	212
Innovation	Pearson Correlation	.802**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	212	212

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above correlation table reported the existence of a positive and significant relationship between cross-functional collaboration and innovation, with (r=0.802, p=.000). This implies that a significant relationship exists between cross-functional collaboration and innovation in selected private universities in Ogun, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected because the results communicated that a significant relationship was found between cross-functional collaboration and innovation in the selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The thrust of this study centred on the investigation of strategic HRM as a driver for fostering innovation in resource-constrained environments with perceptions from selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. Three hypotheses were formulated. The first hypothesis, which stated that targeted training and development have a significant effect on innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The results highlighted a positive relationship between targeted training and development with innovation. This finding aligns with the study by Burlina (2025), which concluded that firms investing in structured training significantly increase their levels of innovation, especially in product and process innovation. This empirical evidence suggests that even in resource-constrained or developing contexts, well-focused training drives innovation. The study also confirms the position of Mehner (2025), which study offered critical insights into how competency development (a form of targeted training) can be maximised in technology-oriented and knowledge-intensive businesses. The

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findings of this study also align with the position of the investigation by Wiley (2024), which highlighted that specific training, rather than general training, is positively associated with incremental innovation. This suggests that training must be carefully aligned with the type of innovation a firm seeks: general training may boost broad skills, but targeted training is more effective for innovation.

The findings of this study uphold the research by Jega et al. (2025), whose empirical results indicated that strategic training interventions significantly predict innovation. This underlines that growth in capabilities via training is a fundamental driver of technological innovation in emerging markets. The finding also validates the report by Obeng-Tuaah (2025), which states that training and development programs not only enhance productivity and retention but also promote innovation and the generation of new ideas in organisations across diverse sectors. The study also supports the investigation by Alzuod (2024), which opined that strategic, competency-based training can enhance innovation outcomes. The outcome of this study validates the principle of the resource-based view theory as it suggests that targeted training and development as dimensions of SHRM enhance the quality of human capital (academic staff); as skilled academic staff become drivers of innovation, and even though resource constraints may pose a challenge, they cannot eliminate innovation potential.

The second hypothesis, which states that empowerment and autonomy have a significant relationship with innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The outcome of the study indicated a positive and significant influence of empowerment and autonomy was found on innovation. This outcome aligns with the study of Zhang, Zhu, and Wang (2024), which found that high-involvement work practices (which often include empowerment) significantly improve innovation performance among workers. In a similar vein, the finding is in congruence with the research by Zhou & Song (2025), which argued that autonomy combined with psychological safety fosters an environment where employees feel safe to propose and experiment with new ideas. Findings from the study further corroborate the submission of Indrayanti (2024), whose study offers strong empirical support for the role of empowerment and autonomy in innovation because employees with higher empowerment and autonomy and tends to report greater innovative behaviour. The outcome of this study supports the finding of a study by Sami Akrom (2025), which concluded that employee empowerment positively predicts innovative behaviour, but this relationship is strengthened by emotional intelligence and an open, supportive organisational culture. Finally, the finding of the human capital theory argues that investments in education as a means of empowerment and ensuring autonomy can positively drive innovations. Thus, in private universities, academic staff represent highly skilled human capital whose expertise contributes to research innovation through curriculum development, which can further enhance institutional growth.

The third hypothesis, which stated that cross-functional collaboration has a relationship with innovation in selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. Finding from the study recorded a positive relationship. This outcome is in alignment with the position of a study by Sanyaolu et al (2022), who in their study find that agile teams composed of members from engineering, design, marketing, and

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quality assurance create more innovative products and bring them to market faster. Thus, the diversity of skills and perspectives enhances problem-solving, communication, and continuous improvement, which in turn fosters innovation. A study by Vasudevan and Kumar (2025) which investigated the role of cross-functional collaboration and leadership practices in new product development (NPD). The authors find that strong inclusive leadership, clear communication protocols, and structured coordination significantly improve innovation outcomes and reduce project delays. The study outcome authenticates the result of a study by Tobari et al (2024), which explored how knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and adaptive leadership jointly affect innovation success. Their PLS-SEM analysis revealed that cross-functional collaboration mediates the relationship between knowledge sharing and innovation success: knowledge sharing alone has a positive effect, but collaboration across functions amplifies that effect, making innovation outcomes stronger.

Findings from this study also confirmed the investigation by Ahmad, Boit, and Aakula (2023), whose study showed that during digital transformation initiatives, collaboration between IT, human resources, finance, operations, marketing, and R&D is strongly associated with organisational agility and creative problem-solving. Their study illustrated that cross-functional teams enabled risk assessment, rapid decision-making, and innovation in digital projects. The study finding agrees with the research by Crupi and Mortara (2025), which studied middle managers in a university–industry consortium and found that cross-boundary collaboration strengthens managerial dynamic capabilities, which are essential for innovation and open-innovation processes. The study finding aligns with the opinion of Adebiyi, Obadimu, and Ibrahim (2025), who examined cross-functional team dynamics from a project-management context, within the Nigerian construction industry. They report that effective cross-functional coordination improves project delivery efficiency and encourages the adoption of new problem-solving methods, which indirectly fosters innovation in how projects are executed. Finally, the study outcome validates the principle of the knowledge-based theory, as this theory views knowledge as the organisation's most strategic asset. Universities function as knowledge-creating institutions; hence, SHRM practices that promote knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and intellectual development enhance innovation. Thus, cross-functional collaboration as a mechanism for knowledge-sharing increases research productivity and spurs new grounds for innovations.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Strategic Human Resource Management is an essential mechanism for fostering innovation in higher education institutions. However, in resource-constrained environments, its effectiveness is significantly influenced by available resources. Policies and strategies should therefore address both human capital and resource adequacy to maximise innovation outcomes. Strategic HRM in private universities in Ogun State can serve as a critical driver of innovation, even in the face of significant resource constraints. However, strategic alignment, reward systems, and capacity-building require institutional commitment and external support to be effective. By adopting a tailored SHRM framework and addressing systemic constraints, these institutions can better harness their human capital to foster innovation and sustain their competitive advantage.

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Based on the outcomes of the study, the study recommended that: Management of private institutions should prioritise the allocation of funds for continuous professional development to enhance staff capacity for innovation. They should ensure that HR practices are consistently aligned with institutional innovation goals to strengthen empowerment and autonomy, and they should promote mentorship programmes, workshops, and collaborative platforms for teaching and research innovations. Equally, policymakers should ensure the provision of grants and infrastructural support to private universities to reduce resource constraints.

Some limitations are worth acknowledging. The study is cross-sectional, relying on perceptions rather than objective innovation metrics such as the number of published research papers. It is limited to private universities in one state (Ogun), which may affect generalisability. It was based on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias, and based on geographical limitations to Ogun State private universities restricts generalisability. Future studies could carry out longitudinal Studies in investigating SHRM and innovation over time in order to establish causal relationships. In addition, a broader geographical scope should be explored as a way to extend the study to public universities and other Nigerian states for comparative insights. Finally, other moderators should be explored in examining organisational culture, leadership style, and technology adoption as additional factors influencing SHRM-innovation linkage. In addition, future research could use longitudinal designs to assess how SHRM interventions influence innovation outcomes over time. Also, future studies might compare public vs. private universities, or explore how external partnerships (with industry, government) can alleviate resource constraints and amplify SHRM's impact.

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