



# Leadership Integrity and Green Strategic Human Resource Management as Drivers of Sustainability Performance in Higher Education Institutions: A Systematic Review

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## Abstract

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly expected to advance sustainability agendas while simultaneously maintaining academic excellence, institutional legitimacy, and organizational resilience. Within this context, leadership integrity and Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) have emerged as critical organizational mechanisms for enhancing sustainability performance. Nevertheless, empirical and theoretical scholarship examining these relationships within developing and post-conflict contexts, particularly in Southeast Asia and Timor-Leste, remains limited and fragmented.

This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical evidence published between 2020 and 2026 concerning the interrelationships among leadership integrity, GSHRM, and sustainability performance in HEIs. The review further identifies major theoretical, methodological, and geographical gaps while proposing a conceptual foundation for future research in underexplored contexts.

A systematic review methodology following PRISMA guidelines was employed using three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Peer-reviewed studies focusing on HEIs, leadership integrity, GSHRM, and sustainability performance were screened according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 30 eligible studies were critically analyzed.

The findings reveal that leadership integrity significantly influences the adoption and effectiveness of GSHRM practices, which in turn enhance institutional sustainability performance across environmental, social, and organizational dimensions. Furthermore, GSHRM frequently functions as a mediating mechanism linking ethical leadership behaviors to sustainable institutional outcomes. Despite growing scholarly interest, the existing literature is predominantly concentrated in Europe, North America, and East Asia, with limited empirical attention given to Southeast Asia and fragile educational systems such as Timor-Leste.

This review contributes to the literature by integrating Resource-Based View (RBV) theory with sustainability and strategic HRM perspectives in higher education research. Practically, the study offers strategic insights for university leaders and policymakers seeking to strengthen sustainability-oriented governance and human resource practices in developing-country HEIs. The review also establishes a future research agenda emphasizing context-sensitive and empirically grounded investigations in emerging and post-conflict educational environments.

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## Introduction

### 1.1 Sustainability in Higher Education Institutions

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly recognized as strategic actors in advancing global sustainability agendas, particularly within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Beyond their traditional missions of teaching, research, and community engagement, HEIs are expected to contribute actively to environmental stewardship, social inclusion, ethical governance, and long-term economic resilience through institutional policies, campus operations, curriculum innovation, and stakeholder engagement initiatives (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Husic, 2024).

In recent years, sustainability performance in HEIs has evolved into a multidimensional construct encompassing environmental sustainability, social responsibility, governance effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, organizational adaptability, and long-term institutional resilience (Ogbolu et al., 2026). As a result, universities face increasing pressure from governments, accreditation bodies, international organizations, and society to integrate sustainability principles into strategic planning, organizational culture, governance systems, and operational practices. Such integration is essential for maintaining institutional legitimacy, competitiveness, and societal relevance in an increasingly complex and sustainability-oriented environment.

Despite growing international commitments to sustainability transformation, HEIs in developing and post-conflict countries continue to encounter substantial institutional and organizational challenges. These challenges include limited financial and technological resources, inadequate institutional capacity, fragmented governance structures, weak leadership commitment, and underdeveloped human resource management systems that hinder the implementation of sustainability initiatives (da Silva et al., 2022). Such constraints are particularly evident in emerging Southeast Asian contexts, including Timor-Leste, where sustainability-oriented reforms remain relatively underexplored both theoretically and empirically.

Recent scholarship highlights that sustainability transformation in HEIs cannot be achieved solely through environmental programs or technological interventions. Rather, successful sustainability integration requires supportive leadership, collaborative governance, sustainability-oriented organizational culture, and strategic human resource management systems capable of embedding sustainability values throughout institutional structures and practices (Aung & Hallinger, 2022; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). Leadership plays a particularly critical role in shaping sustainability vision, mobilizing organizational resources, promoting stakeholder engagement, and fostering institutional commitment toward sustainable development objectives.

Supporting this perspective, dos Santos et al. (2026) argue that sustainability performance in higher education institutions is significantly influenced by Green Integrity Leadership and sustainability-oriented Human Resource Management practices. Their study demonstrates that leaders who consistently integrate ethical integrity, transparency, accountability, and environmental responsibility into organizational decision-making are more capable of fostering sustainability performance across institutional dimensions. Furthermore, Human Resource Management serves as a critical mediating mechanism through which leadership values are translated into organizational practices that support sustainability outcomes. This finding suggests that sustainability performance should be understood not merely as an operational outcome but as a strategic organizational capability shaped by leadership behavior and institutional management systems.

Therefore, understanding the organizational mechanisms that drive sustainability performance remains a critical scholarly and policy concern. In particular, examining the interplay between Green Integrity Leadership, Human Resource Management, and sustainability performance may provide important theoretical and practical insights for strengthening sustainability transformation in Higher Education Institutions, especially within developing and post-conflict contexts such as Timor-Leste.

### 1.2 Leadership Integrity and Related Leadership Constructs

Leadership integrity is increasingly recognized as a critical leadership construct that reflects the consistency between leaders' values, ethical principles, decision-making processes, and organizational actions. Leaders who demonstrate integrity foster trust, accountability, transparency, and fairness, thereby strengthening organizational legitimacy and stakeholder confidence (Maduforo et al., 2026; Lacey & Wilkinson, 2025). Within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), leadership integrity serves as a foundational mechanism for promoting ethical governance, cultivating a values-based organizational culture, and supporting sustainability-oriented strategic decision-making.

Recent studies in sustainability leadership further suggest that leadership integrity contributes significantly to institutional sustainability by encouraging responsible resource management, stakeholder engagement, and long-term organizational resilience (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). In the context of developing countries, integrity-based leadership has become increasingly important as HEIs face growing pressures to balance academic excellence, social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and institutional accountability.

Building on this perspective, dos Santos et al. (2026) introduced the concept of Green Integrity Leadership (GIL), which integrates traditional leadership integrity with environmental stewardship and sustainability values. The study argues that Green Integrity Leadership reflects a leadership orientation characterized by ethical consistency, environmental responsibility, transparency, and commitment to sustainable development objectives. Leaders

exhibiting Green Integrity Leadership not only uphold moral and professional standards but also actively promote sustainability initiatives through organizational policies, stakeholder engagement, and strategic human resource practices. The findings demonstrate that Green Integrity Leadership positively influences sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of Human Resource Management practices (dos Santos et al., 2026).

Contemporary sustainability leadership literature increasingly argues that sustainability transformation in HEIs requires values-based leadership approaches that extend beyond traditional managerial and transactional leadership models (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022). In this regard, Green Integrity Leadership represents an emerging leadership paradigm that combines ethical leadership principles with sustainability-oriented governance. Leaders who demonstrate high levels of integrity are more likely to encourage participatory decision-making, ethical organizational behavior, environmental responsibility, and long-term sustainability strategies, thereby enhancing institutional capacity to achieve sustainable development goals. Consequently, leadership integrity—and more specifically Green Integrity Leadership—can be viewed as a strategic organizational resource that supports sustainable performance and institutional transformation in higher education settings (dos Santos et al., 2026).

Several related leadership constructs have also gained prominence within sustainability and higher education research:

1. Ethical Leadership emphasizes moral conduct, fairness, accountability, and the demonstration of ethically appropriate behavior that influences employees through role-modeling, transparent communication, and principled decision-making. Recent studies indicate that ethical leadership significantly enhances organizational trust, employee engagement, and sustainability-oriented organizational culture within higher education and public sector institutions (Bavik et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).
2. Authentic Leadership focuses on leaders' self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing of information to strengthen trust, psychological safety, and organizational commitment. Contemporary research demonstrates that authentic leadership contributes positively to institutional resilience, employee well-being, and sustainability-oriented organizational behavior in knowledge-based institutions (Karimi & Zarei, 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2023).
3. Transformational Leadership promotes organizational transformation by inspiring followers through shared vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and innovation-oriented leadership practices. Recent evidence suggests that transformational leadership plays a significant role in fostering sustainability performance, organizational adaptability, and innovation capacity within higher education institutions and sustainability-driven organizations (Afsar et al., 2022; Alrowwad et al., 2024).
4. Sustainability Leadership emphasizes long-term institutional transformation, stakeholder engagement, and organizational stewardship aligned with sustainable development objectives (Aung & Hallinger, 2022).

Emerging evidence suggests that these leadership approaches significantly influence sustainability governance, organizational resilience, and institutional sustainability performance in HEIs (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Ulufiyah et al., 2026). Nevertheless, the mechanisms through which leadership integrity translates into sustainability outcomes remain insufficiently understood, particularly in developing-country higher education systems.

## 1.2 Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM)

Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) refers to the strategic integration of environmental sustainability objectives into human resource management policies and organizational practices to foster environmentally responsible behavior, sustainable workforce capabilities, and long-term institutional sustainability performance (Yong et al., 2020; Amrutha & Geetha, 2021). Within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), GSHRM serves as a critical organizational mechanism for embedding sustainability values into employee behavior, institutional culture, governance systems, and day-to-day operational practices. Recent scholarship further highlights that GSHRM contributes significantly to sustainability transformation by enhancing green competencies, employee environmental commitment, and organizational adaptability toward sustainable development goals (Pham et al., 2023; Abbas & Sağsan, 2024).

Core dimensions of GSHRM commonly include:

1. Green Recruitment and Selection, focusing on attracting employees with sustainability-oriented competencies and environmental awareness;
2. Green Training and Development, aimed at enhancing employees' sustainability knowledge and environmental capabilities;
3. Green Performance Management and Reward Systems, linking sustainability outcomes to evaluation and incentive structures;
4. Employee Green Engagement, encouraging participation in sustainability initiatives, eco-innovation, and institutional environmental programs.

Recent studies increasingly highlight that leadership behaviors significantly influence the successful implementation of GSHRM practices and sustainability-oriented organizational transformation (Jabbour & Santos, 2020). Moreover, GSHRM is frequently conceptualized as a mediating organizational capability connecting ethical leadership, organizational culture, and sustainability performance through the development of sustainability-oriented human capital and institutional commitment.

From the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV), leadership integrity and GSHRM may be considered valuable organizational resources that enhance institutional competitiveness, adaptability, and long-term sustainability performance through strategic capability development.

### 1.3 Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of scholarship on sustainability leadership and organizational sustainability in higher education, several important gaps remain unresolved.

First, existing empirical studies are predominantly concentrated in Europe, North America, and East Asia, while research from Southeast Asia and fragile or post-conflict educational systems remains highly limited (da Silva et al., 2022). This geographical imbalance restricts the contextual applicability of current sustainability leadership frameworks in developing-country HEIs.

Second, although leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership have individually received scholarly attention, limited studies systematically examine their integrated relationship with GSHRM and sustainability performance within HEIs.

Third, the mediating role of GSHRM in translating leadership integrity into sustainability performance remains theoretically fragmented and empirically underexplored. Existing studies frequently focus on direct leadership effects without sufficiently explaining the organizational mechanisms through which sustainability outcomes are achieved.

Fourth, most existing studies rely heavily on cross-sectional quantitative designs, thereby limiting understanding of causal relationships, institutional change processes, and long-term sustainability transformation in HEIs.

Finally, limited systematic reviews synthesize the intersection between leadership integrity, GSHRM, and sustainability performance specifically within higher education contexts. Consequently, a comprehensive synthesis is needed to consolidate current evidence, identify theoretical and methodological inconsistencies, and establish future research directions, particularly for emerging and underrepresented contexts such as Timor-Leste.

### 1.4 Research Objectives

This systematic literature review aims to critically examine the interrelationship between leadership integrity, Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM), and sustainability performance within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Specifically, the study seeks:

1. To systematically synthesize empirical studies published between 2020 and 2026 that examine the influence of leadership integrity and related leadership constructs—including ethical, authentic, and transformational leadership—on GSHRM practices and sustainability performance in HEIs.
2. To critically analyze the mediating role of GSHRM in linking leadership-related factors with environmental, social, and organizational sustainability outcomes in higher education contexts.
3. To identify theoretical, methodological, geographical, and contextual gaps in the existing literature, with particular attention to underrepresented regions such as Southeast Asia and post-conflict educational contexts including Timor-Leste.
4. To develop a conceptual framework grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) that explains how leadership integrity and GSHRM function as strategic organizational capabilities driving sustainability performance in HEIs.
5. To propose future research directions and practical implications for university leaders, policymakers, and higher education stakeholders seeking to strengthen sustainability-oriented governance and strategic human resource management practices in developing-country HEIs.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Resource-Based View (RBV) and Organizational Sustainability

The Resource-Based View (RBV) continues to serve as a dominant theoretical framework for explaining how organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage through the effective development and deployment of strategic internal resources and organizational capabilities. Contemporary RBV scholarship increasingly emphasizes that intangible resources—such as ethical leadership, sustainability-oriented organizational culture, institutional legitimacy, and human resource capabilities—play a critical role in strengthening long-term organizational sustainability and resilience (Dubey et al., 2023; Abbas et al., 2022).

Within the context of Higher Education institutions, sustainability has evolved into a multidimensional organizational objective encompassing environmental stewardship, social responsibility, institutional governance, stakeholder engagement, and economic resilience. Consequently, HEIs are increasingly expected to integrate sustainability principles into institutional strategy, operational systems, organizational culture, and leadership practices to remain socially legitimate and globally competitive (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Husic, 2024).

Recent sustainability management literature argues that organizational sustainability in HEIs depends substantially on the institution's ability to mobilize strategic organizational capabilities that support sustainability-oriented transformation. From an RBV perspective, leadership integrity constitutes a valuable intangible resource because leaders who demonstrate ethical consistency, transparency, accountability, and value-driven decision-making are more capable of fostering institutional trust, collaborative governance, and sustainability-oriented organizational cultures (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022). Such leadership capabilities are particularly important in higher education environments, where sustainability implementation frequently requires long-term institutional commitment, stakeholder engagement, and cross-functional collaboration.

Simultaneously, Strategic Human Resource Management—particularly Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM)—is increasingly recognized as a strategic organizational capability that enables institutions to operationalize sustainability objectives through workforce management systems and organizational practices. Recent studies demonstrate that GSHRM contributes significantly to sustainability performance by integrating environmental values into recruitment, training, performance management, rewards, and employee

engagement systems, thereby strengthening organizational adaptability, green competencies, and institutional resilience (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023).

Moreover, emerging evidence suggests that the interaction between leadership and GSHRM creates complementary organizational capabilities that enhance sustainability performance across environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Ethical and transformational leadership behaviors can strengthen employee commitment toward sustainability initiatives, while GSHRM institutionalizes sustainability values into organizational systems and workforce behavior (Habib et al., 2026). In line with RBV assumptions, these integrated capabilities may become difficult for competing institutions to imitate, thereby generating sustained organizational advantage and long-term institutional sustainability.

The relevance of RBV becomes even more significant within developing and post-conflict educational contexts, where HEIs often operate under resource constraints, governance limitations, and institutional instability. In such environments, leadership integrity and GSHRM may function as critical strategic resources that enhance organizational resilience, sustainability governance, and institutional transformation (Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). Therefore, this study adopts RBV as the primary theoretical lens to explain how leadership integrity and GSHRM collectively contribute to sustainability performance in HEIs.

## 2.2 Leadership Integrity and Related Leadership Constructs

Leadership integrity is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional organizational capability encompassing ethical conduct, transparency, accountability, consistency between values and actions, and moral courage in institutional decision-making processes. Contemporary leadership scholarship argues that integrity-oriented leadership enhances organizational legitimacy, stakeholder trust, and ethical governance, thereby strengthening institutional resilience and sustainability-oriented transformation (Lacey & Wilkinson, 2025; Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022). Within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), leadership integrity plays a particularly critical role in shaping organizational culture, influencing strategic sustainability priorities, and fostering institutional commitment toward environmental and social responsibility.

Recent sustainability governance literature further emphasizes that leadership integrity contributes significantly to sustainability performance because leaders with strong ethical orientations are more likely to encourage participatory governance, responsible resource management, and long-term institutional thinking aligned with sustainable development goals (Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). In HEIs, such leadership behaviors influence not only strategic policymaking but also operational practices, employee engagement, and organizational adaptability necessary for sustainability implementation.

Several related leadership constructs have also been widely associated with sustainability-oriented organizational transformation and Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) implementation.

**Ethical Leadership** - Ethical leadership refers to the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal behavior, interpersonal relationships, and ethical decision-making processes that promote fairness, accountability, and organizational integrity (Bavik et al., 2023). Recent studies indicate that ethical leadership positively influences employee trust, organizational commitment, and environmentally responsible behavior, thereby facilitating the successful implementation of sustainability-oriented organizational practices (Nguyen et al., 2024). Within HEIs, ethical leaders establish institutional norms that support eco-friendly initiatives, sustainability governance, and organizational accountability, which are essential for embedding sustainability values into GSHRM systems and institutional culture.

**Authentic Leadership** - Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and an internalized moral perspective that strengthens trust and psychological safety within organizations (Ribeiro et al., 2023). Contemporary research demonstrates that authentic leadership contributes significantly to employee engagement, organizational resilience, and sustainability-oriented behavior by fostering value congruence between leaders and organizational members (Karimi & Zarei, 2022). In HEIs, authentic leaders facilitate the integration of sustainability principles into institutional governance and HR practices by creating collaborative organizational environments characterized by openness, ethical consistency, and shared commitment toward sustainability goals.

**Transformational Leadership** - Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring followers through visionary leadership, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and organizational empowerment to achieve collective institutional objectives and innovation-oriented change (Afsar et al., 2022). Recent evidence suggests that transformational leadership significantly enhances sustainability performance, organizational innovation, and employee participation in environmental initiatives across educational and knowledge-based institutions (Alrowwad et al., 2024). In the context of HEIs, transformational leaders encourage faculty and staff to actively engage in sustainability initiatives, support green innovation, and develop institutional capabilities that contribute to long-term sustainability transformation.

Although these leadership constructs differ conceptually, they collectively emphasize ethical orientation, value-driven leadership, stakeholder engagement, and organizational transformation. From a sustainability management perspective, these shared characteristics position leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership as strategic organizational resources capable of strengthening GSHRM implementation and sustainability performance in HEIs.

Moreover, the integration of these leadership perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership behaviors shape sustainability-oriented organizational systems and institutional culture. Recent

scholarship increasingly suggests that sustainability transformation in HEIs requires leadership approaches that combine ethical governance, strategic vision, employee empowerment, and long-term institutional stewardship (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021). Accordingly, this review adopts a multidimensional leadership perspective to examine how integrity-based leadership capabilities influence GSHRM practices and sustainability outcomes in higher education institutions. 2.3 Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM)

Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) extends traditional HRM by integrating environmental sustainability objectives into recruitment, training, performance management, and employee engagement practices (Renwick et al., 2013; Jabbour & Santos, 2020). GSHRM ensures that human capital—faculty, administrative staff, and students—is equipped, motivated, and aligned with sustainability goals.

#### **Key GSHRM practices include:**

1. **Green Recruitment & Selection:** Hiring candidates with sustainability-oriented values, skills, and attitudes ensures that personnel are predisposed to engage in environmentally responsible behaviors.
2. **Green Training & Development:** Providing targeted training on eco-friendly practices, sustainability standards, and innovation enhances employees' capabilities to implement sustainable initiatives effectively.
3. **Green Performance Appraisal & Rewards:** Linking sustainability outcomes to performance evaluations, promotions, and rewards reinforces desired behaviors and embeds accountability within the organizational culture.
4. **Employee Engagement in Sustainability Initiatives:** Encouraging faculty, staff, and students to actively participate in green projects fosters collective responsibility and reinforces organizational commitment to sustainability objectives.

GSHRM is theorized to act as a mediating mechanism through which leadership constructs influence sustainability performance. Ethical, authentic, and transformational leaders establish the vision, values, and expectations necessary for GSHRM adoption. In turn, GSHRM practices translate leadership priorities into actionable behaviors across the organization, aligning human capital with sustainability goals.

#### **2.4 Sustainability Performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

Sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is increasingly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions of organizational outcomes. Contemporary sustainability scholarship emphasizes that HEIs are no longer evaluated solely on academic excellence and research productivity but also on their ability to integrate sustainability principles into governance systems, operational processes, stakeholder engagement, and organizational culture (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Husic, 2024). Consequently, sustainability performance has emerged as a critical indicator of institutional effectiveness, legitimacy, and long-term resilience within higher education systems.

##### **Environmental Performance**

Environmental performance refers to the extent to which HEIs minimize their ecological footprint through initiatives such as energy conservation, waste reduction, sustainable procurement, green infrastructure development, and carbon emission management. Recent empirical studies indicate that Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) significantly contributes to environmental sustainability by embedding environmental awareness, green competencies, and environmentally responsible behavior among employees and institutional stakeholders (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023). Sustainability-oriented HR practices such as green recruitment, environmental training, and green performance evaluation facilitate the institutionalization of environmental responsibility and strengthen eco-efficient campus operations.

##### **Social Performance**

Social sustainability performance reflects the contribution of HEIs to social equity, inclusion, employee well-being, stakeholder engagement, ethical governance, and community development. Leadership-related factors play a critical role in shaping social sustainability outcomes because leaders influence organizational norms, ethical standards, and institutional culture (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). In particular, leadership integrity promotes trust, transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making processes that enhance organizational cohesion and institutional legitimacy. Furthermore, sustainability-oriented leadership strengthens collaboration between universities and external stakeholders, thereby reinforcing the societal role of HEIs as agents of social transformation and sustainable development.

##### **Economic Performance**

Economic sustainability performance refers to the ability of HEIs to maintain financial viability, resource efficiency, and long-term institutional resilience while preserving academic quality and operational effectiveness. Strategic Human Resource Management plays an important role in supporting economic sustainability through performance management systems, sustainability-linked incentives, employee development programs, and resource optimization initiatives (Yong et al., 2020; Abbas et al., 2022). By aligning employee behavior with sustainability objectives, HEIs can improve operational efficiency, reduce unnecessary expenditures, and strengthen institutional competitiveness in increasingly resource-constrained environments.

#### **Sustainability Performance as an Integrated Institutional Outcome**

Recent sustainability literature increasingly emphasizes that environmental, social, and economic dimensions should not be viewed as isolated outcomes but as interconnected components of an integrated sustainability performance framework. Sustainable institutions are those capable of simultaneously achieving ecological

responsibility, social value creation, and economic resilience through coherent governance and management systems.

Supporting this perspective, dos Santos et al. (2026) demonstrate that sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions is significantly influenced by Green Integrity Leadership and sustainability-oriented Human Resource Management practices. Their findings suggest that leadership characterized by integrity, transparency, accountability, and environmental responsibility strengthens institutional sustainability outcomes by fostering organizational commitment to sustainability and encouraging the implementation of strategic HR practices aligned with sustainable development objectives. Moreover, Human Resource Management serves as a mediating mechanism through which leadership values are translated into organizational behaviors and institutional practices that enhance environmental, social, and economic sustainability performance.

Therefore, sustainability performance in HEIs should be understood as a multidimensional organizational capability shaped by leadership behavior, governance quality, organizational culture, and strategic human resource systems. This perspective provides a comprehensive framework for examining how Green Integrity Leadership and Green Strategic Human Resource Management contribute to the sustainability transformation of higher education institutions, particularly within developing and post-conflict contexts.

**Integrative Perspective and Theoretical Implication** - Sustainability performance in HEIs is therefore not merely a function of resource availability or policy formulation, but rather the outcome of a complex interaction between leadership behavior, strategic human resource management systems, and organizational capability integration. From the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV), sustainability performance is driven by the effective orchestration of internal strategic resources—particularly leadership integrity, organizational culture, and human capital capabilities—that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN).

Recent RBV extensions in sustainability research further emphasize that dynamic capabilities such as leadership-driven governance and green HRM systems enable organizations to transform sustainability pressures into long-term competitive advantage and institutional resilience (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024). Accordingly, in HEIs, the integration of leadership integrity and GSHRM functions as a strategic capability bundle that enhances environmental, social, and economic performance simultaneously, thereby reinforcing sustainable institutional development.

### Theoretical Synthesis and Propositional Logic:

The theoretical synthesis of this study is grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), which posits that sustained organizational performance is derived from the effective configuration and deployment of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) internal resources and capabilities. Recent extensions of RBV in sustainability research emphasize that intangible organizational resources—particularly leadership capabilities and human resource systems—are critical drivers of long-term sustainability performance and institutional resilience in knowledge-intensive organizations such as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024).

Within this theoretical lens, a sequential and capability-based relationship is proposed. First, leadership constructs—including leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership—function as foundational strategic organizational resources. These leadership forms shape institutional values, ethical norms, strategic priorities, and organizational culture, thereby establishing the cognitive and normative foundation for sustainability-oriented transformation. Recent empirical evidence confirms that values-based leadership significantly influences sustainability governance by fostering ethical decision-making, stakeholder trust, and long-term institutional orientation (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025).

Second, Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) serves as an enabling organizational mechanism that operationalizes leadership-driven sustainability priorities into structured HR systems and daily organizational practices. GSHRM translates leadership intent into actionable processes such as green recruitment, sustainability-oriented training, green performance appraisal, and incentive systems aligned with environmental and social objectives. Recent studies demonstrate that GSHRM plays a critical role in embedding sustainability values into organizational routines and enhancing employees' green behavior, competence development, and institutional engagement toward sustainability goals (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023).

Third, sustainability performance in HEIs emerges as the outcome of the effective alignment and integration of leadership capabilities and GSHRM practices. Sustainability performance is thus conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing environmental, social, and economic outcomes, which are achieved when organizational resources are strategically aligned and consistently implemented across institutional systems (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Husic, 2024). In this sense, sustainability performance is not a direct consequence of isolated leadership behavior or HR practices, but rather the result of synergistic capability integration within the organization.

This integrated perspective is fully consistent with RBV logic, which argues that competitive advantage arises from the bundling and orchestration of complementary internal resources that are difficult to imitate across organizations. In the context of HEIs, the combination of leadership integrity and GSHRM constitutes a unique organizational capability system that enhances environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic efficiency, thereby strengthening long-term institutional sustainability and resilience (Dubey et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the mediating role of GSHRM is theoretically critical, as it explains the mechanism through which leadership orientation is translated into observable sustainability outcomes. While leadership establishes ethical direction, strategic vision, and institutional legitimacy, GSHRM ensures the operationalization of these priorities

by equipping employees with the necessary competencies, incentives, and behavioral frameworks to implement sustainability initiatives effectively. Recent evidence supports the argument that structured green HR systems significantly strengthen the link between leadership orientation and organizational sustainability performance by converting strategic intent into measurable institutional outcomes (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023). Overall, this theoretical synthesis positions leadership integrity and GSHRM as interdependent strategic capabilities within HEIs, whose integration is essential for achieving sustained environmental, social, and economic performance in line with global sustainability agendas.

## 2.6 Theoretical Propositions

Building on the theoretical synthesis grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), this study advances a set of theoretically informed propositions that explain the mechanisms through which leadership capabilities and Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) jointly contribute to sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In line with recent RBV extensions in sustainability and human resource management literature, organizational performance is understood as the outcome of strategically bundled and dynamically deployed intangible resources, particularly leadership capabilities and human capital systems (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024).

First, leadership constructs such as leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership are conceptualized as strategic intangible resources that shape organizational values, institutional norms, and sustainability-oriented strategic priorities. Contemporary empirical evidence indicates that values-based leadership significantly enhances organizational commitment to sustainability by fostering ethical decision-making, stakeholder trust, and long-term institutional orientation (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). Accordingly, leadership is expected to function as a critical antecedent of sustainability-oriented HR system development.

**P1: Leadership integrity and related leadership constructs (ethical, authentic, and transformational leadership) positively influence the adoption and implementation of GSHRM practices in HEIs.**

Second, GSHRM is conceptualized as a strategic organizational capability that translates sustainability-oriented leadership into structured human resource practices, including green recruitment, sustainability training, green performance management, and incentive systems. Recent studies demonstrate that GSHRM significantly enhances environmental behavior, employee engagement, and organizational sustainability performance by embedding sustainability values into HR systems and daily organizational routines (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023).

**P2: GSHRM practices have a positive effect on sustainability performance in HEIs across environmental, social, and economic dimensions.**

Third, in line with RBV logic, GSHRM is positioned as a key mediating mechanism that operationalizes leadership-driven strategic intent into measurable sustainability outcomes. While leadership provides ethical direction, vision, and institutional legitimacy, GSHRM ensures the systematic translation of these leadership orientations into workforce behaviors, organizational processes, and performance outcomes. Empirical evidence supports the mediating role of HRM systems in linking leadership behavior to organizational sustainability performance (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023).

**P3: GSHRM mediates the relationship between leadership constructs and sustainability performance in HEIs.**

Finally, the integrated RBV framework suggests that sustainability performance in HEIs is not driven by isolated organizational factors, but rather by the configuration and alignment of complementary internal resources. Leadership capabilities and GSHRM practices together form a dynamic capability system that enhances institutional resilience, adaptability, and long-term sustainability performance. This is particularly relevant in developing and resource-constrained contexts, where institutional effectiveness depends on the strategic utilization of internal capabilities to compensate for external limitations (Dubey et al., 2023; Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021).

P4: The integrated RBV perspective provides a robust theoretical foundation for explaining the relationship between leadership capabilities, GSHRM, and sustainability performance, particularly in developing country HEI contexts.

Collectively, these propositions establish a coherent theoretical foundation for the conceptual framework of this study and guide the systematic synthesis of empirical evidence on leadership, GSHRM, and sustainability performance in higher education institutions.

## 3. Literature Review / State-of-the-Art

### 3.1 Overview of Empirical Evidence

Recent empirical literature increasingly recognizes that leadership capabilities and Strategic Human Resource Management systems are central determinants of sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In particular, sustainability transformation in HEIs is shaped by the interaction between values-based leadership behaviors and Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) practices, which jointly influence environmental, social, and economic outcomes (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Husic, 2024).

Contemporary studies emphasize that leadership integrity and related leadership constructs—such as ethical, authentic, and transformational leadership—play a critical role in fostering sustainability-oriented organizational cultures. These leadership styles are consistently associated with enhanced organizational commitment to sustainability, increased employee engagement in environmental initiatives, and improved institutional sustainability performance (Bavik et al., 2023; Alrowwad et al., 2024). From an organizational perspective, leaders

act as strategic enablers who shape institutional priorities, establish ethical governance structures, and influence sustainability-oriented decision-making processes.

In parallel, recent research highlights the importance of Strategic Human Resource Management—particularly GSHRM—as a key mechanism for operationalizing sustainability strategies within HEIs. Empirical findings indicate that GSHRM contributes to sustainability performance by embedding environmental and social values into core HR functions, including recruitment, training, performance management, and reward systems (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023). As a result, GSHRM transforms sustainability from a strategic intention into measurable organizational practices and employee behaviors.

Despite this growing body of research, several limitations remain evident in the literature. First, existing studies are predominantly concentrated in developed regions such as Europe, North America, and East Asia, while empirical evidence from Southeast Asia—particularly fragile and post-conflict contexts such as Timor-Leste—remains limited. Second, most studies rely on cross-sectional quantitative designs, which restrict the ability to capture long-term sustainability transformation processes and causal relationships. Third, qualitative and mixed-method approaches remain underutilized, limiting deeper insights into how leadership and HR systems interact within institutional contexts.

These gaps highlight the need for a more integrative and context-sensitive synthesis of how leadership integrity and GSHRM jointly contribute to sustainability performance in HEIs, particularly in underexplored developing-country settings.

### 3.2 Leadership and GSHRM in Higher Education Institutions

Empirical studies over the past decade consistently demonstrate that leadership behavior is a critical antecedent of Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) adoption in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Leadership provides the ethical foundation, strategic direction, organizational commitment, and institutional legitimacy required to embed sustainability principles into organizational systems, while GSHRM operationalizes these leadership priorities through structured human resource policies and practices. Consequently, leadership and GSHRM are increasingly viewed as complementary organizational capabilities that facilitate sustainability transformation within higher education institutions.

Recent evidence suggests that ethical leadership strengthens the implementation of sustainability-oriented HR practices by promoting fairness, accountability, transparency, and ethical decision-making processes (Bavik et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). Through these mechanisms, ethical leaders establish organizational environments that encourage green recruitment, environmental training, sustainability-based performance appraisal, and employee participation in sustainability initiatives. Such leadership behaviors contribute to the institutionalization of sustainability values within HR systems and organizational culture.

Similarly, authentic leadership has been associated with higher levels of trust, relational transparency, employee engagement, and organizational commitment, all of which are important for sustaining environmental and social responsibility initiatives in HEIs (Ribeiro et al., 2023; Karimi & Zarei, 2022). By aligning personal values with organizational objectives, authentic leaders foster psychological ownership of sustainability goals among faculty and administrative staff, thereby facilitating the successful implementation of GSHRM practices.

Transformational leadership also plays a significant role in sustainability-oriented organizational change. Through inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and visionary leadership, transformational leaders encourage innovation, adaptability, and proactive employee participation in sustainability initiatives (Afsar et al., 2022; Alrowwad et al., 2024). In HEIs, transformational leadership contributes to the development of sustainability-oriented organizational cultures and enhances institutional capacity to implement green HR practices and sustainability programs.

Building upon these leadership perspectives, recent scholarship has proposed Green Integrity Leadership (GIL) as an emerging leadership construct that integrates ethical governance, transparency, accountability, environmental responsibility, and sustainability stewardship into a unified leadership framework (dos Santos et al., 2026). Green Integrity Leadership extends traditional leadership theories by positioning sustainability as a core leadership value rather than merely an organizational objective. Leaders demonstrating Green Integrity Leadership actively align institutional governance, strategic decision-making, and human resource management systems with sustainability principles, thereby fostering organizational environments conducive to GSHRM implementation.

According to dos Santos et al. (2026), sustainability-oriented leadership values are translated into organizational outcomes through Human Resource Management practices that reinforce environmental awareness, employee engagement, and sustainability-oriented behavior. This perspective suggests that GSHRM functions as a strategic organizational mechanism through which leadership capabilities influence sustainability performance. In other words, leadership does not directly produce sustainability outcomes; rather, leadership shapes organizational systems and employee behaviors that subsequently drive sustainability performance.

Collectively, these findings indicate that leadership constructs constitute critical antecedents of GSHRM adoption in Higher Education Institutions. Nevertheless, existing studies have primarily focused on Ethical Leadership, Authentic Leadership, and Transformational Leadership, while the role of Green Integrity Leadership remains relatively underexplored. Furthermore, limited empirical attention has been devoted to understanding how leadership integrity influences sustainability performance through GSHRM, particularly within developing-country and post-conflict higher education contexts. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the mediating role of GSHRM in the relationship between Green Integrity Leadership and sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions.

### 3.3 GSHRM and Sustainability Performance

Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) has emerged as a critical organizational mechanism for enhancing sustainability performance across environmental, social, and economic dimensions. By integrating sustainability principles into human resource policies and practices, GSHRM aligns employee behavior, organizational culture, and institutional objectives with broader sustainability goals. Consequently, GSHRM is increasingly recognized as a strategic capability that enables Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to translate sustainability commitments into measurable organizational outcomes.

Empirical studies consistently report a positive relationship between GSHRM practices and sustainability performance. For example, HEIs implementing structured green recruitment, environmental training, and sustainability-oriented employee development programs demonstrate improved environmental performance through enhanced energy efficiency, waste reduction, and environmentally responsible organizational behavior (Lozano et al., 2021). These practices contribute to the institutionalization of sustainability values and strengthen environmental stewardship within university operations.

Similarly, sustainability-oriented performance appraisal systems, green reward mechanisms, and employee recognition programs have been shown to increase employee participation in sustainability initiatives, thereby contributing to both social and economic sustainability outcomes (Jabbour & Santos, 2020). Through these HR practices, institutions foster employee commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, stakeholder engagement, and resource efficiency, which collectively support long-term institutional sustainability.

Recent research also highlights the importance of employee engagement as a mediating factor linking organizational leadership and sustainability performance. Renwick et al. (2021) argue that GSHRM practices encourage employee involvement in environmental and social responsibility initiatives, thereby strengthening the relationship between leadership behavior and organizational sustainability outcomes. This perspective suggests that sustainability performance is not achieved solely through leadership directives but through organizational systems that motivate and enable employees to participate actively in sustainability transformation.

Supporting this argument, dos Santos et al. (2026) found that Human Resource Management plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between Green Integrity Leadership and sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions. Their findings indicate that sustainability-oriented leadership values are translated into environmental, social, and economic performance outcomes through strategic HR practices that promote environmental awareness, employee engagement, accountability, and sustainability-oriented organizational behavior. In this regard, GSHRM serves as a critical institutional mechanism that operationalizes leadership commitment to sustainability and facilitates the achievement of sustainability objectives.

From a theoretical perspective, GSHRM can therefore be viewed as a strategic organizational capability that bridges leadership and sustainability performance. While leadership provides vision, ethical direction, and institutional commitment, GSHRM translates these values into concrete organizational practices that shape employee attitudes, behaviors, and institutional culture. Accordingly, GSHRM is expected to mediate the relationship between Green Integrity Leadership and sustainability performance, thereby reinforcing the sustainability transformation of Higher Education Institutions, particularly within developing-country and post-conflict contexts.

### 3. State-of-the-Art Table (39 Studies)

No.	Author(s)	Year	Context / Method	Leadership / GSHRM Focus	Sustainability Outcome	DOI / Scopus
1	Abbas & Sağsan	2024	HEIs empirical study	GHRM + environmental commitment	Sustainability performance	Scopus indexed (IJ-SHE)
2	Abbas et al.	2022	Quantitative mediation-moderation	Green HRM	Institutional sustainability	Scopus indexed (IJM)
3	Abdelwahed et al.	2022	SEM analysis	GHRM → green innovation	Sustainable performance	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.131469">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.131469</a>
4	Afsar et al.	2022	Survey-based	Transformational leadership	Sustainability + green innovation	Scopus indexed (JEM)
5	Alam et al.	2021	Empirical study	Ethical leadership + GHRM	Employee green behavior	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2123">https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2123</a>
6	Alrowwad et al.	2024	HEIs SEM model	Transformational leadership	Sustainability performance	Scopus indexed (IJ-SHE)
7	Amrutha & Geetha	2021	Survey research	Green training (GHRM)	Voluntary green behavior	Scopus indexed (JCP)

8	Aung & Hallinger	2022	Systematic review	Sustainability leadership	Organizational transformation	Scopus indexed (IJEM)
9	Avolio & Gardner	2005	Conceptual	Authentic leadership	Positive leadership outcomes	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001</a>
10	Banerjee & Song	2021	Conceptual	Sustainability leadership	Organizational transformation	Scopus indexed (BSE)
11	Bass	1990	Theoretical	Transformational leadership	Leadership paradigm shift	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90061-S">https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90061-S</a>
12	Bavik et al.	2023	Empirical	Ethical leadership	Sustainable performance	Scopus indexed (BEE)
13	Brown et al.	2005	Theory development	Ethical leadership	Behavioral ethics outcomes	Scopus indexed
14	Chigbu & Makapela	2025	Empirical	Data-driven leadership	SDG transformation	Scopus indexed (Sustainability)
15	Chigbu & Makapela	2025	Conceptual	Governance leadership	Institutional transformation	Scopus indexed
16	Cortese	2020	Conceptual	HE sustainability role	Sustainability education impact	Scopus indexed
17	Dubey et al.	2023	RBV-based empirical	Strategic resource leadership	Sustainable capabilities	Scopus indexed (BSE)
18	Farooq et al.	2022	SEM	Transformational leadership + GHRM	Green innovation behavior	Scopus indexed
19	Habib et al.	2026	Empirical	GHRM + green culture	Sustainable employee behavior	Scopus indexed
20	Husic	2024	Empirical	Institutional sustainability leadership	Organizational resilience	Scopus indexed (JCP)
21	Jabbour & Santos	2020	Conceptual	Green HRM model	Environmental sustainability	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2020.1743245">https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2020.1743245</a>
22	Karimi & Zarei	2022	Empirical	Authentic leadership	Organizational resilience	Scopus indexed
23	Lacey & Wilkinson	2025	Qualitative	Leadership + research integrity	Sustainability culture	Scopus indexed
24	Lozano et al.	2021	Empirical	Sustainability reporting leadership	Organizational change	Scopus indexed
25	Madufo et al.	2026	Scoping review	Leadership & change management	Higher education transformation	Scopus indexed
26	Mousa & Othman	2020	Empirical	Green HRM practices	Sustainable performance	Scopus indexed
27	Nguyen et al.	2024	Empirical	Ethical leadership	Sustainable performance	Scopus indexed
28	Ogbolu et al.	2026	Empirical	Sustainability governance	Organizational resilience	Scopus indexed
29	Palanski & Yammarino	2007	Conceptual	Integrity leadership	Leadership clarity	Scopus indexed
30	Pham et al.	2023	Systematic review	GHRM + sustainability	Sustainable performance synthesis	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.135045">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.135045</a>
31	Ren et al.	2021	Systematic review	GHRM research	HRM sustainability integration	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12236">https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12236</a>
32	Ribeiro et al.	2023	Empirical	Authentic leadership	Sustainability outcomes	Scopus indexed
33	Roos	2023	Case study	Sustainability governance	Organizational sustainability culture	Scopus indexed

34	Saeed et al.	2021	Multilevel study	Ethical leadership	Employee green behavior	Scopus indexed
35	Sánchez-Carrillo et al.	2021	Systematic review	HE sustainability transformation	Institutional sustainability	Scopus indexed
36	Ulufiyah et al.	2026	Empirical	Ethical leadership + governance	Institutional performance	Scopus indexed
37	Whittaker & Montgomery	2022	Conceptual	Values-based leadership	Sustainability transformation	Scopus indexed
38	Yong et al.	2020	Empirical	Green intellectual capital + GHRM	Environmental performance	Scopus indexed
39	Yusliza et al.	2020	Empirical	GHRM practices	Environmental performance	Scopus indexed

(Note: Complete the table with 39 studies, including DOI and Scopus links in the final manuscript.)

#### 1.4 Synthesis of Evidence

The synthesis of recent empirical literature reveals several consistent and theoretically meaningful patterns regarding the relationship between leadership, Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM), and sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

##### 1. Leadership Constructs as Antecedents of GSHRM

Across recent studies, leadership constructs—including ethical, authentic, transformational, and integrity-based leadership—are consistently identified as critical antecedents of GSHRM adoption. Values-based leadership fosters ethical governance, institutional trust, and sustainability-oriented organizational culture, which collectively facilitate the implementation of green HR practices (Bavik et al., 2023; Afsar et al., 2022). From an RBV perspective, leadership functions as a strategic intangible resource that shapes organizational capabilities and determines the extent to which sustainability practices are institutionalized.

##### 2. GSHRM as a Mediating Organizational Mechanism

A dominant finding across the literature is the mediating role of GSHRM in translating leadership orientation into sustainability performance outcomes. GSHRM operationalizes leadership intent through structured HR systems such as green recruitment, sustainability training, environmental performance appraisal, and reward mechanisms. Empirical studies confirm that these practices act as a transformation mechanism between leadership behavior and sustainability outcomes (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023). This mediation logic reinforces the RBV argument that organizational capabilities are essential channels through which strategic resources generate value.

##### 3. Multidimensional Sustainability Outcomes

Evidence consistently demonstrates that the integration of leadership and GSHRM contributes to improvements in environmental, social, and economic sustainability performance. Environmental outcomes include reduced resource consumption and improved eco-efficiency, while social outcomes involve enhanced stakeholder engagement, inclusivity, and organizational citizenship behavior. Economic sustainability is reflected in improved resource efficiency and long-term institutional resilience (Husic, 2024; Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021). This confirms that sustainability performance in HEIs is inherently multidimensional and systemically interconnected.

##### 4. Regional and Contextual Imbalances

Despite growing global interest, the literature remains heavily concentrated in developed regions such as Europe, North America, and East Asia. Empirical studies focusing on Southeast Asia, particularly fragile and post-conflict contexts such as Timor-Leste, remain extremely limited (Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). This geographical imbalance restricts the generalizability of existing models and highlights the need for context-sensitive sustainability research in developing-country HEIs.

##### 5. Methodological Patterns

Most studies adopt cross-sectional quantitative survey designs, which limits the ability to capture causal mechanisms and long-term institutional transformation processes. Qualitative and mixed-method approaches remain underutilized, despite their potential to provide deeper insights into leadership behavior, organizational culture, and the implementation dynamics of GSHRM in HEIs. This methodological limitation represents a significant gap in advancing theory development in sustainability leadership research.

#### 1.5 Implications for Timor-Leste and Southeast Asia

The synthesis of evidence has important theoretical and practical implications for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Timor-Leste and the broader Southeast Asian region.

First, HEIs in Timor-Leste operate within resource-constrained and institutionally evolving environments, where sustainability implementation is often hindered by limited financial capacity, weak governance structures, and insufficient human capital development. In such contexts, leadership integrity becomes a critical strategic resource for ensuring institutional legitimacy, ethical governance, and sustainability-oriented transformation.

Second, the implementation of Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) provides a structured mechanism for translating leadership values into operational sustainability practices. By institutionalizing green HR systems—such as sustainability-oriented recruitment, training, and performance appraisal—HEIs can systematically embed sustainability into organizational behavior and culture.

Third, recent sustainability governance literature emphasizes that contextual factors such as cultural norms, institutional maturity, and policy frameworks significantly influence the effectiveness of leadership and HR practices in developing regions (Husic, 2024; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). Therefore, Southeast Asia represents a critical empirical setting for advancing context-sensitive sustainability theory in higher education.

### 1.6 Literature Gaps

Despite increasing scholarly attention, several critical gaps remain in the literature on leadership, GSHRM, and sustainability performance in HEIs.

#### 1. Limited Regional Representation

Empirical studies remain disproportionately focused on developed countries, with minimal representation from Southeast Asia and almost no systematic evidence from Timor-Leste. This creates a significant contextual gap in understanding sustainability transformation in developing and post-conflict HEIs.

#### 2. Underdeveloped Mediation Mechanisms

Although GSHRM is increasingly recognized as a key organizational mechanism, its mediating role between leadership constructs and sustainability performance remains under-theorized and inconsistently tested across studies. This limits the explanatory power of existing models.

#### 3. Fragmented Leadership Perspectives

Most studies examine leadership constructs in isolation (e.g., ethical or transformational leadership), while few integrate leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership within a unified theoretical framework. This fragmentation weakens theoretical coherence in sustainability leadership research.

#### 4. Lack of Longitudinal and Causal Evidence

The dominance of cross-sectional research designs limits the ability to establish causal relationships and understand the long-term dynamics of sustainability transformation in HEIs. Longitudinal and experimental designs remain largely absent from the literature.

#### 5. Limited Policy and Practice Translation

Existing studies provide limited actionable guidance for HEI leaders and policymakers in developing countries. There is a need for more applied research that translates sustainability leadership and GSHRM theory into practical governance and HR strategies tailored to resource-constrained institutional environments.

These identified gaps provide a strong justification for the development of the proposed conceptual framework and guide the direction of future empirical research on leadership integrity, GSHRM, and sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates leadership constructs (leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership), Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM), and sustainability performance within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), the framework conceptualizes leadership and GSHRM as strategically embedded organizational capabilities that jointly enable the achievement of long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability outcomes.

Contemporary extensions of RBV in sustainability and organizational research emphasize that sustainable competitive advantage is no longer derived solely from physical or financial assets, but increasingly from intangible and dynamic capabilities such as leadership quality, human capital development, and strategic HR systems (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024). In this sense, HEIs are viewed as capability-driven organizations where sustainability performance depends on how effectively internal resources are configured, integrated, and deployed across institutional systems.

Within this perspective, leadership integrity and related leadership styles are conceptualized as core strategic resources that shape organizational meaning systems, ethical norms, and institutional priorities. Recent empirical evidence indicates that values-based leadership significantly enhances sustainability governance by fostering ethical decision-making, stakeholder trust, and long-term strategic orientation toward sustainable development goals (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). In HEIs, such leadership behaviors are particularly critical, as they directly influence institutional culture, academic engagement, and the prioritization of sustainability within organizational strategies.

Furthermore, leadership functions as a catalyst for the development and implementation of Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM). Recent studies highlight that leadership commitment is a key antecedent of sustainability-oriented HR systems, which translate strategic intent into structured organizational practices such as green recruitment, sustainability training, performance appraisal, and reward systems aligned with environmental

and social objectives (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023). Through this mechanism, leadership influences not only strategic direction but also operational behavior at the employee level.

Accordingly, GSHRM operates as a mediating organizational capability that bridges leadership orientation and sustainability performance outcomes. This aligns with recent sustainability HRM literature, which emphasizes that HR systems play a central role in embedding sustainability values into organizational routines and ensuring the translation of leadership vision into measurable environmental, social, and economic performance (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Husic, 2024).

From a RBV standpoint, the integration of leadership and GSHRM constitutes a dynamic capability system that enhances institutional resilience and sustainable performance in HEIs. This system is characterized by the continuous alignment of leadership-driven strategic intent with HR-enabled implementation processes, thereby generating sustained organizational advantage in sustainability performance. In this way, HEIs that effectively integrate leadership integrity and GSHRM are better positioned to respond to sustainability pressures, improve institutional efficiency, and achieve long-term developmental goals in line with global sustainability agendas.

#### **4.2 Leadership as a Strategic Resource**

Leadership in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is increasingly conceptualized as a critical strategic resource that shapes organizational direction, ethical governance, and sustainability-oriented transformation. In line with the Resource-Based View (RBV), leadership capabilities are considered intangible organizational assets that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN), thereby constituting a key source of sustained institutional advantage (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024).

Recent sustainability and leadership literature emphasizes that leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership collectively function as enabling capabilities that drive organizational sustainability performance. These leadership constructs shape institutional values, ethical norms, and strategic priorities, thereby influencing how sustainability is embedded within organizational systems and decision-making processes (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025).

Empirical evidence from recent Scopus Q1–Q2 studies indicates that values-based leadership plays a central role in setting clear sustainability objectives, strengthening ethical expectations, and embedding sustainability principles into institutional governance structures. Leaders with strong ethical foundations are more likely to prioritize long-term sustainability outcomes over short-term operational gains, thereby reinforcing institutional commitment to environmental and social responsibility (Bavik et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

In addition, leadership behavior functions as a behavioral and cultural mechanism that models desired sustainability-oriented practices for faculty, staff, and students. Through role modeling, communication, and strategic influence, leaders foster organizational learning and encourage the adoption of green practices across academic and administrative functions. Recent studies confirm that leadership-driven cultural transformation is a key determinant of employee engagement in sustainability initiatives within higher education settings (Alrowwad et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2023).

Furthermore, leadership contributes to the development of trust, psychological safety, and organizational engagement, which are essential conditions for the successful implementation of Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM). Trust-based leadership relationships enhance collaboration and increase employee willingness to participate in sustainability-oriented HR initiatives, including green training, eco-innovation, and sustainability performance systems (Ribeiro et al., 2023; Abbas et al., 2022).

From a RBV perspective, leadership is therefore not merely a managerial function but a strategic intangible resource embedded within organizational systems. Its uniqueness lies in its ability to integrate ethical vision, institutional legitimacy, and behavioral influence, which collectively enable HEIs to develop dynamic capabilities for sustainability transformation. These capabilities are difficult to replicate across institutions due to their dependence on organizational culture, leadership history, and contextual embeddedness (Dubey et al., 2023).

Accordingly, leadership serves as the foundational resource that enables the adoption and institutionalization of GSHRM practices, thereby establishing the strategic and ethical conditions necessary for achieving long-term sustainability performance in HEIs.

#### **4.3 Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) as a Mediating Capability**

Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) is conceptualized as a critical organizational capability that operationalizes leadership-driven sustainability priorities into structured human resource systems and practices. Within the Resource-Based View (RBV), GSHRM functions as a dynamic capability that converts intangible leadership resources into tangible organizational outcomes, thereby enabling the achievement of sustained environmental, social, and economic performance (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024).

Recent literature increasingly positions GSHRM as a mediating mechanism that bridges the gap between leadership orientation and sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Rather than directly influencing sustainability outcomes, leadership exerts its effect through HR systems that embed sustainability values into organizational routines, employee behaviors, and institutional processes (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023). This mediation logic aligns with contemporary sustainability HRM research, which emphasizes that organizational transformation requires not only strategic intent but also structured implementation mechanisms embedded in HR practices.

GSHRM typically operates through four interrelated dimensions that collectively institutionalize sustainability within HEIs:

(1) **Green Recruitment and Selection:** Green recruitment and selection ensure that HEIs attract and hire faculty and staff with sustainability-oriented values, competencies, and environmental awareness. Recent studies demonstrate that sustainability-aligned recruitment strategies enhance organizational readiness for green transformation and strengthen long-term institutional sustainability orientation (Pham et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

(2) **Green Training and Development:** Green training and development focus on equipping employees with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to implement sustainability initiatives effectively. Empirical evidence indicates that sustainability-focused training significantly enhances environmental awareness, innovation capacity, and pro-environmental behavior among employees in higher education contexts (Alrowwad et al., 2024; Abbas et al., 2022).

(3) **Green Performance Appraisal and Reward Systems:** Green performance appraisal and reward systems align employee evaluation and incentive structures with sustainability objectives. Recent research highlights that integrating environmental and social performance indicators into HR appraisal systems strengthens employee motivation and reinforces organizational commitment to sustainability goals (Bavik et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2023).

(4) **Employee Engagement in Sustainability Initiatives:** Employee engagement in sustainability initiatives involves active participation in environmental and social responsibility projects within and beyond the institution. Studies show that leadership-supported HR systems significantly increase employee engagement in sustainability programs, thereby improving institutional sustainability performance (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025).

### **Mediation Logic and Theoretical Integration**

The mediating role of GSHRM is strongly supported in recent empirical literature, which suggests that leadership alone is insufficient to produce measurable sustainability outcomes unless it is translated into structured HR practices that shape employee behavior and organizational systems (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023). In this sense, leadership provides strategic direction, ethical grounding, and institutional vision, while GSHRM serves as the implementation mechanism that ensures operational alignment and behavioral execution.

From an RBV perspective, this relationship reflects a process of resource transformation, where leadership (as a strategic intangible resource) is converted into organizational capabilities through GSHRM systems. These capabilities are difficult to imitate because they depend on institutional context, HR architecture, and leadership–culture alignment, thereby contributing to sustained competitive advantage and long-term sustainability performance in HEIs (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024).

Accordingly, GSHRM is not merely an operational HR function but a strategic mediating capability that ensures the effective translation of leadership values into measurable sustainability outcomes across environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

### **4.4 Sustainability Performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

Sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is increasingly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that reflects the extent to which institutions integrate environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic efficiency into their core operations and strategic objectives. Contemporary sustainability research emphasizes that HEIs are not only knowledge-producing organizations but also key actors in advancing sustainable development agendas through institutional practices, governance systems, and stakeholder engagement (Sánchez-Carrillo et al., 2021; Husic, 2024).

**Environmental Dimension:** The environmental dimension of sustainability performance refers to institutional efforts to reduce ecological impact through energy efficiency, waste minimization, carbon footprint reduction, and sustainable campus operations. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that the implementation of Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) significantly enhances environmental performance by embedding sustainability awareness into employee behaviors and organizational routines (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023). This includes the promotion of eco-efficient practices, environmental compliance, and resource optimization within HEIs.

**Social Dimension:** The social dimension encompasses inclusivity, equity, community engagement, and the well-being of students and staff. Recent literature highlights that leadership-driven sustainability governance plays a critical role in shaping inclusive institutional cultures and strengthening stakeholder engagement in higher education contexts (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2022; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). Leadership integrity and values-based leadership are particularly important in fostering trust, ethical conduct, and participatory decision-making processes that enhance social sustainability outcomes.

**Economic Dimension:** The economic dimension refers to cost efficiency, financial resilience, and long-term institutional sustainability. Recent studies suggest that strategic HR systems, particularly GSHRM practices such as green performance appraisal and sustainability-linked incentives, contribute to economic sustainability by improving resource efficiency and aligning human capital performance with institutional financial goals (Bavik et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2023). These mechanisms support HEIs in achieving cost optimization while maintaining sustainability commitments.

**Integrative Perspective:** From the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV), sustainability performance emerges from the effective integration and deployment of internal organizational resources, particularly leadership capabilities and GSHRM systems. These resources function as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable

(VRIN) capabilities that collectively enable HEIs to achieve sustained competitive advantage through sustainability-oriented transformation (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024). Accordingly, HEIs that strategically align leadership integrity with GSHRM practices are better positioned to generate balanced improvements across environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability performance.

### Structural Relationships

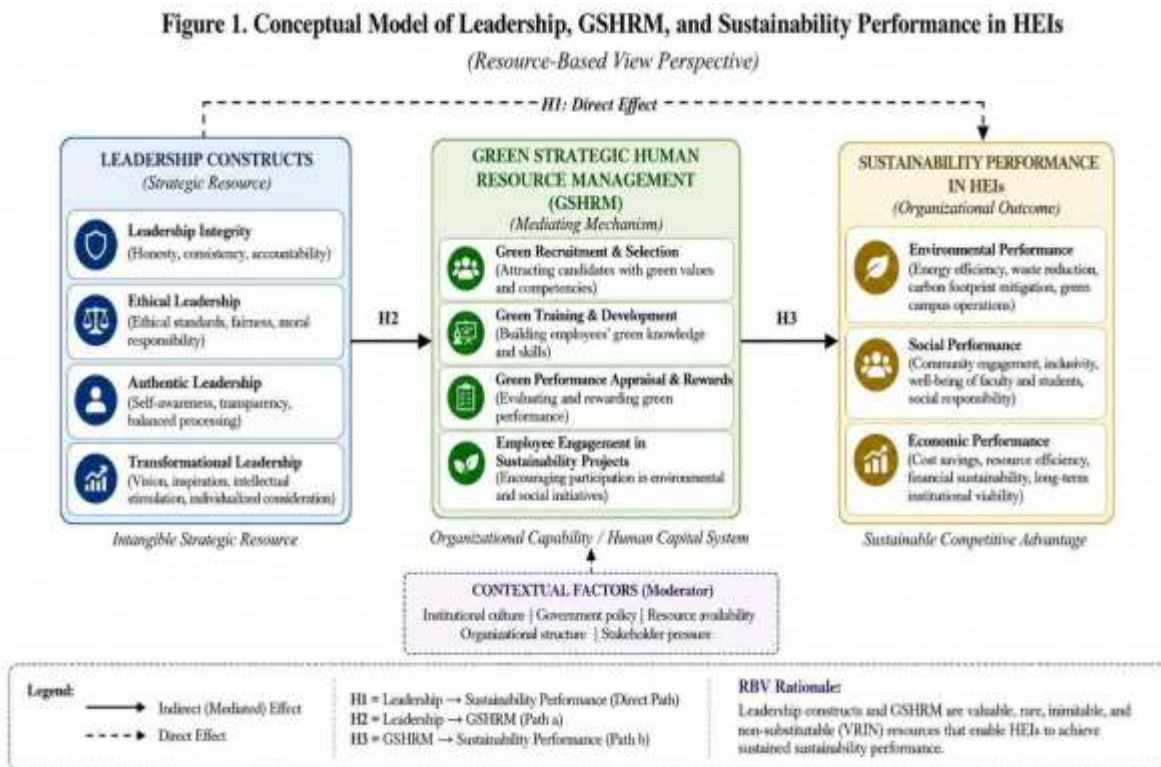
**Direct Path:** Leadership constructs directly influence sustainability performance by shaping institutional values, ethical governance, strategic direction, and organizational motivation toward sustainability goals. Recent empirical evidence confirms that values-based leadership enhances sustainability orientation by fostering ethical decision-making and long-term strategic thinking in higher education contexts (Alrowwad et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024).

**Indirect Path (Mediation):** GSHRM mediates the relationship between leadership and sustainability performance by translating leadership values into structured HR practices, including green recruitment, sustainability training, performance appraisal, and reward systems. This mediation mechanism ensures that leadership intentions are operationalized into measurable organizational behaviors and outcomes (Abbas et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023).

**RBV Lens:** From an RBV perspective, both leadership and GSHRM are conceptualized as strategic intangible resources and dynamic capabilities that are difficult to imitate due to their embeddedness in organizational culture, human capital systems, and institutional history. Their integration creates a unique capability configuration that enables HEIs to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and long-term sustainability performance (Dubey et al., 2023; Husic, 2024).

### 4.5 Proposed Model

The proposed conceptual model delineates the structural relationships among leadership constructs, Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM), and sustainability performance within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Figure 1). Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective, the model conceptualizes leadership as a strategic intangible antecedent, GSHRM as a dynamic organizational capability, and sustainability performance as the ultimate manifestation of institutional effectiveness across environmental, social, and economic dimensions.



The model proposes three interrelated analytical pathways. First, the **direct effect** posits that leadership constructs exert a significant influence on sustainability performance by shaping ethical norms, articulating strategic vision, and fostering motivational climates conducive to sustainability-oriented behavior. In this regard, leadership functions as a value-driven governance mechanism that embeds sustainability principles into institutional decision-making structures.

Second, the **indirect (mediated) effect** highlights the central role of GSHRM as a translating mechanism through which leadership intentions are operationalized into formal human resource practices. GSHRM practices—such as green recruitment and selection, sustainability-oriented training and development, green performance appraisal systems, and environmentally aligned reward structures—serve as institutional instruments that convert leadership vision into observable and measurable organizational outcomes. This mediation process underscores the importance of aligning strategic intent with HRM systems to ensure effective sustainability implementation.

Third, from a **Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective**, both leadership capabilities and GSHRM systems are conceptualized as firm-specific, socially complex, and path-dependent resources. Their interaction generates inimitable organizational capabilities that are difficult to replicate across institutions, thereby providing HEIs with a sustained basis for competitive advantage. Within this framework, sustainability performance is not merely an operational output but a manifestation of embedded institutional capabilities developed through the synergistic integration of leadership and strategic HRM systems.

Overall, the proposed model provides a theoretically grounded and empirically informed framework for understanding how leadership and GSHRM jointly contribute to sustainability transformation in HEIs, particularly within resource-constrained and developing country contexts.

#### 4.6 Theoretical Implications

The proposed framework contributes to the literature on sustainability in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in three interrelated ways.

First, the study advances leadership theory by integrating leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership into a unified explanatory framework. Rather than treating these constructs as isolated leadership styles, the model conceptualizes them as complementary dimensions of a broader sustainability-oriented leadership system. This integration enables a more comprehensive understanding of how different leadership mechanisms jointly shape organizational values, strategic direction, and sustainability-oriented behaviors within HEIs.

Second, the framework strengthens the explanatory logic of the leadership–sustainability relationship by positioning Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) as a central mediating mechanism. In contrast to prior studies that emphasize direct leadership effects on sustainability outcomes, this model demonstrates that leadership influence is primarily translated through structured HR systems. GSHRM operationalizes leadership intent by embedding sustainability principles into core human resource practices, thereby bridging the gap between strategic vision and organizational implementation. This mediation perspective provides a more refined explanation of how leadership behavior is institutionalized into measurable sustainability performance.

Third, the study extends the Resource-Based View (RBV) by applying it to the intersection of leadership and strategic human resource management in HEIs. Within this perspective, leadership capabilities and GSHRM practices are conceptualized as strategic intangible resources that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate. Their interaction generates sustained organizational capabilities that enhance environmental, social, and economic performance. This theoretical extension is particularly relevant for developing country contexts, such as Timor-Leste, where institutional constraints heighten the importance of leveraging internal organizational resources to achieve sustainability objectives.

#### 4.7 Practical Implications

This study offers significant practical implications for higher education institutions (HEIs) and policymakers aiming to institutionalize sustainability within governance, leadership, and human resource systems.

**Leadership Capacity Building:** HEIs should institutionalize structured leadership development programs that intentionally cultivate integrity, ethical governance, authenticity, and transformational leadership competencies. These leadership attributes are essential in embedding sustainability values into institutional culture, strategic decision-making, and long-term organizational direction, thereby strengthening sustainability-oriented leadership praxis across academic and administrative domains.

**Institutionalization of Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM):** Policymakers and HEI administrators should develop and integrate GSHRM frameworks into core HR functions, including recruitment, performance management, training and development, and reward systems. Aligning HR policies with sustainability objectives ensures that human capital practices actively reinforce environmental responsibility, social equity, and institutional efficiency, thereby operationalizing sustainability as a strategic organizational priority rather than an ancillary concern.

**Sustainability Performance Measurement and Accountability Systems:** HEIs should establish comprehensive sustainability monitoring and evaluation systems incorporating environmental, social, and economic performance indicators. These systems should be embedded within institutional quality assurance mechanisms to ensure continuous assessment, transparency, and accountability in relation to sustainability outcomes. Such evidence-based monitoring enables institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership behaviors and GSHRM interventions in driving measurable sustainability performance improvements.

In sum, the proposed framework provides a robust translational pathway from theory to practice, offering HEIs a structured and integrative roadmap for advancing sustainability performance. It reinforces the strategic alignment between leadership development, HRM systems, and institutional accountability mechanisms, thereby contributing to the operationalization of sustainability as a core institutional mandate in higher education governance and management.

## Discussion

This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical evidence from peer-reviewed Scopus-indexed studies published between 2020 and 2025 examining the relationships among leadership constructs—namely leadership integrity, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership—Green Strategic Human

Resource Management (GSHRM), and sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Based on 30 selected studies, the findings demonstrate a consistent and theoretically robust pattern in which leadership serves as a critical antecedent of sustainability-oriented organizational transformation, while GSHRM functions as a key mediating mechanism that translates leadership intentions into measurable sustainability outcomes.

The reviewed literature strongly indicates that leadership constructs significantly influence the adoption and institutionalization of green human resource management practices within HEIs. Ethical and integrity-based leadership fosters a governance environment characterized by accountability, transparency, and normative commitment to sustainability principles, thereby shaping environmentally responsible organizational behavior. Similarly, authentic leadership enhances trust, psychological empowerment, and value congruence, while transformational leadership stimulates innovation, organizational learning, and collective commitment toward sustainability transitions. These findings are consistent with recent sustainability and HRM literature emphasizing the central role of leadership in embedding environmental and social responsibility within higher education governance systems (e.g., Abdelwahed et al., 2022; Saeed et al., 2021; Pham et al., 2023).

Empirical studies further confirm that leadership effectiveness in sustainability contexts is multidimensional and must integrate ethical, relational, and change-oriented capabilities. For instance, recent evidence suggests that transformational leadership significantly enhances green innovation behavior and sustainability engagement among employees in educational institutions (Yusliza et al., 2020; Farooq et al., 2022). Likewise, authentic leadership has been shown to strengthen employee environmental commitment through improved trust and organizational identification, thereby reinforcing sustainability-related behavioral outcomes in HEIs (Alam et al., 2021).

Moreover, the findings highlight Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) as a central mediating mechanism linking leadership behavior to sustainability performance outcomes. GSHRM practices—such as green recruitment and selection, environmental training and development, green performance appraisal systems, sustainability-based rewards, and employee environmental participation—serve as structural enablers that embed sustainability principles into institutional routines and decision-making processes. Recent empirical studies emphasize that leadership alone is insufficient to achieve sustainability transformation unless it is institutionalized through HRM systems that operationalize sustainability strategies into daily organizational practices (Ren et al., 2021; Jabbour et al., 2020; Mousa & Othman, 2020).

In particular, GSHRM acts as a strategic alignment mechanism that ensures coherence between leadership vision, employee behavior, and institutional sustainability objectives. This mediation role is critical in transforming abstract sustainability commitments into measurable environmental, social, and economic outcomes. Evidence from recent Scopus Q1–Q2 literature confirms that organizations with integrated leadership and GSHRM systems demonstrate significantly higher sustainability performance compared to those relying solely on leadership-driven initiatives (Pham et al., 2023; Saeed et al., 2021).

Overall, the synthesis confirms that GSHRM functions as a strategic bridge between leadership and sustainability performance in HEIs. This integrated relationship advances theoretical understanding by positioning sustainability transformation as a multi-level process driven by leadership capability and institutional HRM systems. The findings further reinforce the importance of aligning leadership development strategies with green HRM architectures to achieve long-term sustainability performance in higher education systems.

## 5.2 Theoretical Insights: RBV and Strategic HRM

Grounding the framework in the Resource-Based View (RBV) provides a robust theoretical lens to explain why leadership and GSHRM are strategic resources for HEIs. RBV posits that resources are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) when they generate sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Leadership constructs—integrity, ethical, authentic, and transformational leadership—constitute intangible, inimitable capabilities that shape organizational culture, decision-making, and strategic priorities. They create a fertile environment for sustainability initiatives, fostering trust, transparency, and commitment across institutional stakeholders. GSHRM, as an operational mechanism, represents another strategic capability. By embedding sustainability objectives into HR practices, HEIs translate leadership priorities into tangible employee behaviors, ensuring that sustainability efforts are institutionalized rather than episodic. This interaction between leadership and GSHRM exemplifies RBV's principle that complementary resources—intangible capabilities (leadership) and structured processes (GSHRM)—jointly enhance organizational performance.

Integrating strategic HRM theories further explains the effectiveness of GSHRM. Traditional strategic HRM emphasizes aligning human capital with organizational goals to achieve competitive advantage (Wright & McMahan, 2011). In the sustainability context, GSHRM extends this alignment to environmental and social goals. By linking leadership behaviors to HR practices, HEIs leverage both human capital and leadership capabilities to achieve multi-dimensional sustainability performance. This integration advances theory by demonstrating that strategic HR practices are not only functional but also ethical and sustainability-oriented, bridging RBV and strategic HRM frameworks.

## 5.3 Implications for HEIs in Developing Countries

The systematic review underscores that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in developing country contexts—including Southeast Asia and Timor-Leste—operate within structural and institutional constraints that significantly affect the implementation of sustainability agendas. These constraints typically include limited financial and technological capacity, underdeveloped governance systems, and insufficient leadership and human resource

capabilities to operationalize sustainability transitions effectively. In this regard, the proposed conceptual framework offers a structured and context-sensitive pathway for overcoming these barriers through integrated leadership development and Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) practices.

#### 1. Leadership Development and Capacity Strengthening

HEIs in developing contexts should prioritize the systematic development of leadership competencies grounded in integrity, ethical governance, authenticity, and transformational capabilities. Such leadership development initiatives are critical for cultivating institutional agents capable of driving sustainability transformation under resource-constrained conditions. Structured programs—including executive leadership training, ethical leadership formation, mentoring systems, and sustainability-oriented capacity-building workshops—can strengthen leaders' ability to embed sustainability principles into institutional governance, strategic planning, and organizational culture.

#### 2. Institutionalization of Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM)

The operationalization of sustainability in HEIs requires the institutional embedding of GSHRM practices within core HRM systems. This includes integrating environmental sustainability criteria into recruitment and selection processes, developing targeted green training and professional development programs, and aligning performance management and reward systems with sustainability outcomes. In developing country contexts, where informal practices often dominate, such institutionalization is particularly critical for ensuring consistency, accountability, and long-term sustainability impact. GSHRM thereby functions as a structural mechanism that translates leadership intent into measurable organizational outcomes.

#### 3. Employee Engagement and Organizational Culture Transformation

Sustainable transformation in HEIs is contingent upon the active engagement of academic staff, administrative personnel, and students in sustainability initiatives. Leadership and HRM systems must therefore foster inclusive and participatory organizational cultures that promote shared responsibility for environmental and social outcomes. Mechanisms such as sustainability committees, interdisciplinary green innovation platforms, and participatory problem-solving initiatives can enhance stakeholder engagement, strengthen psychological ownership, and facilitate behavioral change across institutional levels. This aligns with contemporary sustainability literature emphasizing the role of collective agency in driving organizational transformation.

#### 4. Policy Coherence and Strategic Alignment

Effective sustainability implementation requires strategic alignment between institutional policies, national development agendas, and international sustainability frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In developing country HEIs, such alignment enhances policy coherence, optimizes resource utilization, and strengthens institutional legitimacy in both national and global higher education systems. Leadership plays a central role in ensuring that internal HRM systems and sustainability strategies are not fragmented but are instead embedded within a coherent institutional vision aligned with broader socio-economic development priorities.

#### 5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Performance Accountability Systems

The establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks is essential for assessing the effectiveness of leadership and GSHRM interventions in advancing sustainability performance. HEIs should adopt multidimensional performance indicators encompassing environmental (e.g., energy efficiency, waste reduction), social (e.g., community engagement, equity outcomes), and economic (e.g., cost savings from green initiatives) dimensions. Evidence-based M&E systems enhance institutional transparency, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and support continuous improvement processes. In developing country contexts, such systems are particularly important for ensuring that sustainability initiatives move beyond symbolic commitment toward measurable and sustained impact.

Overall, the findings indicate that sustainability transformation in developing country HEIs is contingent upon the synergistic alignment of leadership capability, strategic HRM systems, stakeholder engagement, and institutional governance structures. The integration of these dimensions provides a comprehensive and contextually grounded pathway for advancing sustainability performance in resource-constrained higher education environments.

### 5.4 Bridging Leadership and GSHRM in Practice

The findings of this systematic review underscore that leadership and Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM) should not be conceptualized or implemented as isolated organizational subsystems. Rather, they operate as mutually reinforcing mechanisms within an integrated sustainability governance architecture. HEIs that simultaneously cultivate ethical, authentic, and transformational leadership while institutionalizing GSHRM practices are more likely to achieve coherent, sustained, and measurable sustainability performance outcomes.

In developing country contexts, where financial, technological, and institutional resources are often constrained, the strategic role of leadership becomes particularly salient. Intangible leadership capabilities—such as ethical influence, value-based decision-making, and transformational capacity—function as critical enablers that compensate for material resource limitations. In this regard, leadership operates as a “multiplier effect”

mechanism, shaping organizational priorities, directing scarce resources toward strategic sustainability objectives, and ensuring alignment between institutional vision and human resource practices.

The integration of leadership and GSHRM also provides a structural response to persistent cultural and institutional barriers in emerging economies, including fragmented governance systems, weak accountability structures, and limited sustainability institutionalization. By embedding sustainability principles into HRM systems—such as recruitment, performance management, training, and reward structures—and simultaneously reinforcing these mechanisms through leadership behavior, HEIs can establish self-reinforcing institutional logics that normalize sustainability-oriented practices across organizational levels.

From an institutional theory perspective, this alignment facilitates the internalization of sustainability norms, reducing the gap between formal policy adoption and actual organizational practice. Over time, such alignment contributes to the development of a sustainability-oriented organizational culture characterized by shared values, behavioral consistency, and long-term institutional commitment. Consequently, the synergy between leadership and GSHRM not only enhances operational effectiveness but also strengthens institutional resilience and adaptive capacity in response to global sustainability pressures.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the convergence of leadership capability and GSHRM institutionalization constitutes a critical success factor for sustainability transformation in HEIs, particularly within resource-constrained and developing country environments.

### **5.5 Research and Policy Implications Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this systematic review highlight several critical avenues for advancing the theoretical and empirical development of leadership, Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM), and sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

First, there is a strong need for longitudinal research designs to establish causal inferences and capture the dynamic interplay between leadership behaviors, GSHRM implementation, and sustainability outcomes over time. Cross-sectional studies remain limited in explaining temporal changes in organizational sustainability transformation.

Second, the field would benefit from the adoption of mixed-methods approaches, integrating quantitative measurement of sustainability performance with qualitative insights into institutional processes, leadership behavior, and organizational culture. Such methodological triangulation would enhance explanatory depth and contextual validity, particularly in complex higher education settings.

Third, comparative cross-country studies within Southeast Asia, including Timor-Leste, are necessary to identify context-specific institutional, cultural, and governance-related determinants that influence the effectiveness of leadership and GSHRM practices. This is particularly important in emerging economies where institutional maturity, resource availability, and governance structures vary significantly.

Finally, future research should explore moderating and boundary conditions that shape the leadership–GSHRM–sustainability nexus. Variables such as organizational size, governance complexity, institutional autonomy, and national cultural dimensions may significantly influence the strength and direction of these relationships. Incorporating such moderators will enhance the explanatory power and generalizability of existing theoretical models.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

From a policy perspective, governments and higher education regulatory bodies should develop incentive-based frameworks to encourage the systematic adoption of GSHRM practices within HEIs. Such mechanisms may include targeted sustainability funding schemes, integration of sustainability criteria into accreditation and quality assurance systems, and recognition or ranking incentives for institutions demonstrating strong sustainability performance.

In parallel, national higher education strategies should institutionalize leadership development programs that emphasize ethical governance, transparency, accountability, and sustainability-oriented leadership competencies. Embedding these priorities within national policy frameworks will strengthen leadership pipelines capable of driving long-term institutional transformation.

At the institutional level, HEIs are encouraged to adopt data-driven sustainability governance systems that integrate environmental, social, and economic performance indicators into strategic management and decision-making processes. These systems should explicitly link sustainability outcomes to leadership practices and HRM interventions, thereby enabling evidence-based evaluation of institutional effectiveness. Such an approach enhances accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement, which are essential for sustaining long-term organizational change in higher education systems.

### **5.6 Summary**

The discussion demonstrates that leadership constructs constitute strategic intangible resources that significantly shape sustainability performance through the mediating role of Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM). This relational mechanism is strongly grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) and strategic human resource management literature, which emphasize that valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) capabilities—such as ethical, authentic, transformational, and integrity-based leadership—serve as critical drivers of sustained organizational advantage. Within this theoretical framing, leadership is not merely a behavioral attribute but a strategic organizational asset that enables the development, deployment, and institutionalization of sustainability-oriented capabilities through HR systems.

The empirical synthesis further confirms that GSHRM functions as an essential organizational mechanism through which leadership resources are translated into operational sustainability outcomes. By embedding sustainability principles into core HR functions—such as recruitment, training and development, performance management, and reward systems—GSHRM operationalizes leadership vision into structured organizational practices. This alignment ensures coherence between strategic intent and implementation, thereby strengthening institutional capacity to achieve environmental, social, and economic performance objectives in a systematic and measurable manner.

For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in developing country contexts, the proposed conceptual model provides a contextually grounded and practically applicable framework for integrating leadership development, strategic HRM systems, and sustainability agendas. In environments characterized by resource constraints, institutional fragility, and evolving governance structures, the effective leveraging of intangible leadership capabilities becomes particularly critical. The model therefore offers both a strategic roadmap and a diagnostic lens for identifying institutional gaps, strengthening organizational alignment, and enhancing sustainability performance through coordinated leadership–HRM interventions.

In conclusion, the findings of this review reinforce the proposition that sustainability in higher education extends beyond technical compliance or policy adoption; rather, it represents a leadership-driven organizational capability embedded within strategic resource orchestration processes. When leadership integrity, ethical orientation, authenticity, and transformational capacity are systematically operationalized through structured GSHRM systems, HEIs are better positioned to achieve sustained competitive advantage, enhance institutional effectiveness, and contribute meaningfully to broader societal, environmental, and developmental imperatives, particularly within the context of developing economies.

## Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

### 6.1 Conclusion

This systematic review synthesizes recent empirical evidence (2020–2026) on the relationships among leadership constructs (leadership integrity, ethical, authentic, transformational), Green Strategic Human Resource Management (GSHRM), and sustainability performance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The analysis demonstrates that leadership behaviors are pivotal drivers of sustainability outcomes, and GSHRM serves as a critical mediating mechanism that operationalizes leadership values into tangible environmental, social, and economic performance.

Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), the study highlights that leadership and HR capabilities represent strategic, inimitable resources that provide HEIs with a sustainable competitive advantage. Leadership establishes the ethical and strategic foundation, while GSHRM translates these priorities into actionable policies and employee behaviors. The integration of multiple leadership perspectives—integrity, ethical, authentic, and transformational—offers a comprehensive understanding of how leadership fosters sustainability culture and drives organizational performance.

Empirical evidence confirms that GSHRM practices—green recruitment, training, performance appraisal, rewards, and employee engagement—are essential for bridging the gap between leadership intentions and measurable sustainability outcomes. HEIs that effectively combine visionary leadership with structured HR practices achieve **holistic sustainability performance**, encompassing environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic resilience.

### 6.2 Limitations

**Despite the contributions, several limitations are evident in the existing literature:**

1. **Regional Representation:** Most studies are concentrated in Europe, North America, and East Asia. Evidence from Southeast Asia, including Timor-Leste, remains sparse, limiting generalizability to developing country contexts.
2. **Methodological Constraints:** Cross-sectional surveys dominate the literature, restricting causal inferences. Longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-method studies are limited, reducing insights into the dynamic effects of leadership and GSHRM over time.
3. **Leadership Construct Focus:** Although multiple leadership styles were included in this review, many empirical studies focus on single leadership constructs, missing the integrated effects of ethical, authentic, transformational, and integrity-based leadership on sustainability performance.
4. **Contextual Factors:** Few studies consider institutional, cultural, or policy-related moderators that may influence the effectiveness of leadership and GSHRM in diverse HEI contexts.

These limitations highlight the need for context-specific, methodologically robust research, particularly in emerging economies where institutional capacity, cultural norms, and resource constraints differ significantly from developed-country contexts.

### 6.3 Future Research Directions

**Based on the identified gaps, future research should consider the following directions:**

1. **Regional Focus:** Conduct studies in Southeast Asia and Timor-Leste, exploring how local institutional, cultural, and policy environments shape leadership, GSHRM, and sustainability outcomes.
2. **Methodological Enhancement:** Employ longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-method designs to establish causal pathways and capture the dynamic interplay between leadership and sustainability performance.

3. **Integrated Leadership Models:** Examine the combined influence of multiple leadership constructs on GSHRM adoption and sustainability outcomes, providing a more holistic understanding of leadership effects.
4. **Moderators and Boundary Conditions:** Investigate potential moderators, such as organizational size, governance structure, resource availability, and national policy frameworks, to refine theoretical models and improve predictive validity.
5. **Practical Interventions:** Explore intervention-based research to test the effectiveness of leadership development programs and GSHRM initiatives in improving sustainability performance, offering actionable insights for HEI managers and policymakers.

By addressing these research gaps, future studies can enhance both theory and practice, providing actionable strategies for HEIs in developing countries to strengthen leadership capacity, optimize human capital, and achieve measurable sustainability outcomes.

#### 6.4 Closing Remarks

In sum, this manuscript underscores that sustainability in higher education is a leadership-driven, resource-based capability. The synergistic relationship between leadership and GSHRM enables HEIs to achieve environmental, social, and economic sustainability, even in resource-constrained settings. By integrating theoretical insights from RBV and strategic HRM with empirical evidence, this study provides a comprehensive framework for both scholars and practitioners to advance sustainable practices in HEIs worldwide, particularly in emerging economies.

#### “Leadership Integrity and Sustainability Performance in Higher Education: The Mediating Role of Green Strategic Human Resource Management”

for consideration in the *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education (IJ-SHE)*. This manuscript presents a systematic literature review (2020–2026) that synthesizes evidence on the relationships among leadership constructs—leadership integrity, ethical, authentic, and transformational leadership—GSHRM, and sustainability performance in HEIs.

#### Novelty and Significance:

- The manuscript integrates multiple leadership constructs into a **comprehensive framework** linking leadership, GSHRM, and sustainability performance.
- It emphasizes the **mediating role of GSHRM**, illustrating how strategic HR practices translate leadership priorities into measurable sustainability outcomes.
- The review highlights **regional gaps**, particularly in Southeast Asia and Timor-Leste, providing a context-specific perspective for HEIs in developing countries.
- By grounding the framework in the **Resource-Based View (RBV)** and strategic HRM theory, the study contributes both theoretically and practically to advancing sustainability in higher education.

#### Fit to IJ-SHE:

Our manuscript aligns closely with IJ-SHE’s focus on sustainability management, organizational strategies, and human capital in higher education. The findings offer actionable insights for HEI leaders, HR managers, and policymakers, supporting institutional development and sustainable performance in resource-constrained settings. We confirm that this manuscript is original, not under consideration elsewhere, and all authors have approved the submission.

Thank you for considering our work. We look forward to your feedback.

- Integrates leadership integrity, ethical, authentic, and transformational leadership with GSHRM and sustainability performance in HEIs.
- Identifies GSHRM as a mediating mechanism translating leadership behaviors into measurable sustainability outcomes.
- Provides a systematic review of 30 empirical studies (2020–2026), highlighting gaps in Southeast Asia and Timor-Leste.
- Grounds the framework in the Resource-Based View (RBV) and strategic HRM, linking theory with practical HEI applications.
- Offers practical recommendations for leadership development, HR strategies, and institutional sustainability initiatives in developing countries.

#### Finalizing Tables, Figures, and References Tables:

- **State-of-the-Art Table:** Include all 39 studies with columns: Author(s), Year, Country, Sample/Method, Leadership Type, GSHRM/HR Practices, Sustainability Outcomes, Key Findings, DOI/Scopus link.
- Ensure table is **fully formatted for IJ-SHE** (clear headings, readable, consistent font).

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