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Original Article

Effect of Green Reward Management Practices on Employee Retention in the Athi River EPZs, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Employee retention is crucial for organisational success, particularly in Kenya's Export Processing Zones (EPZs), where turnover rates are higher than the acceptable 10% or below. High turnover rates in the EPZs are often associated with poor working conditions that could be detrimental to employee well-being. Implementation of green reward practices could improve these working conditions by creating a healthy and sustainable work environment. This study examined the effect of green reward management practices on employee retention in the Athi River EPZ. The study was anchored on Social Exchange Theory and adopted a descriptive research design. The study had a target population of 56 EPZs with 20,000 employees as the unit of observation. Cochran's formula was used to obtain a sample size of 377 respondents. Stratified random sampling was used to distribute the sample across departments in the EPZs. Data was collected using a structured five-point Likert scale questionnaire. A pilot study involving 30 participants was conducted to measure the reliability of the research instrument. Descriptive statistics in means, percentages, and standard deviation were employed, while correlation and regression analysis were applied for inferential statistics. The study found that green reward management practices have a positive and statistically significant effect on employee retention ($\beta = 0.435$, $p < 0.001$). The study recommends integrating green reward management practices to improve employee retention in workplaces.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee retention, the ability of organisations to keep employees over time, is increasingly crucial in today's competitive labour market (Krishna & Garg, 2022). From a global perspective, employee retention is a key organizational focus since stable workforces are essential for productivity, innovation, and long-term organizational success (Cen, Qiu & Wang, 2022). In Kenya, retention challenges are pronounced, with turnover rates exceeding the acceptable threshold of 10% (Mulwa, 2024). Sector-specific data reveals alarming figures of 10–20% in the insurance sector (Azinga, Kamaara, & Ombui, 2018), 60.8% at the operational level and 32.3% at the managerial level in the tourism industry (Wambugu, 2019), and up to 28% in NGOs (Hopkins, Njoroge, Joyce, & Kwena, 2017). Kenya's Export Processing Zones (EPZs) have notably witnessed a significant rise in turnover, from 3.52% in 2017 to 22.44% in 2022 (Export Processing Zones Program Report, 2022).

The high attrition in EPZs is largely attributed to low compensation, inadequate benefits, poor recognition, and unfavourable working conditions, creating an environment where employees feel undervalued (Mulwa, 2024). This affects morale, organisational efficiency, and employer reputation, perpetuating further turnover. The impact is particularly severe in labour-intensive industries like textiles and food processing, where human input is essential. Organisations are therefore adopting strategic HR practices that align with employee expectations and organisational goals. One such approach is Green Reward Management (GRM). This practice incorporates environmental sustainability into employee reward structures (Saxena & Khanna, 2024). GRM includes both financial rewards (e.g., bonuses for eco-friendly behaviour) and non-financial recognition (e.g., awards, promotions, and public acknowledgement) aimed at reinforcing green behaviour (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013).

GRM is particularly relevant for Kenya's EPZs, where traditional compensation mechanisms fall short. By embedding sustainability values into rewards, GRM enhances employee motivation, fosters a sense of purpose, and builds psychological contracts rooted in shared values (Das & Dash, 2024). This improves retention and strengthens employer branding in an increasingly eco-conscious labour market. In an era where environmental responsibility is both a moral duty and a strategic imperative, GRM offers a dual benefit of promoting sustainability while stabilising the workforce.

Problem Statement

Employee retention has become a growing challenge within Kenya's Export Processing Zones (EPZs), with turnover rates escalating from 3.52% in 2017 to 22.44% in 2022. Although human capital is essential for maintaining productivity, many firms within the EPZs face persistent challenges in retaining employees, largely due to low pay, limited recognition, and unfavourable working conditions (Mulwa, 2024; Andai, 2015). While traditional reward systems have focused primarily on financial incentives, there is limited integration of sustainability-oriented approaches such as Green Reward Management practices (BeckKrala, 2023),

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especially in the EPZs. This gap raises concerns about the effectiveness of current retention strategies in addressing the evolving values and expectations of the modern workforce, particularly among younger generations who prioritise environmental and ethical considerations.

Research Objective

The study sought to examine the effect of green reward management practices on employee retention in the Athi River EPZ zone in Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: Green reward management practices do not have a statistically significant effect on employee retention in the Athi River EPZ zone, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by Blau (1964), explains how reciprocal relationships between employees and organisations influence workplace behaviour. The theory suggests that when organisations offer green rewards, such as sustainability-linked bonuses, recognition, or career development, employees perceive these incentives as investments in their well-being, prompting them to reciprocate with loyalty and long-term commitment (Islam, Jantan, Hamzah, Yusoff, Yusmani Mohd, Chong, & Hossain, 2023; Renwick et al., 2013). However, SET has been critiqued for overemphasising rational reciprocity and overlooking emotional, cultural, and contextual factors, particularly in developing economies like Kenya, where economic needs may outweigh environmental motivations (AlHajri, Salim Amor, 2020). Despite these limitations, SET provides a valuable lens for understanding how green reward management influences retention, especially in labour-intensive sectors such as Kenya's EPZs, where sustainable HR practices are increasingly critical.

Empirical Review

Research across various sectors and countries consistently demonstrates that both financial and non-financial green rewards, such as bonuses, recognition, eco-friendly benefits, and career development, positively influence job satisfaction and retention. In Nigeria, Eno et al. (2024) found that green rewards improved performance, indirectly boosting retention in the food and beverage industry. Similarly, studies in Indonesia by Wicaksari, Saputra, and Rahmah (2024) and Syal et al. (2024) revealed that green rewards and employee engagement significantly enhance retention, especially among Gen Z, with job satisfaction acting as a key mediator. In Egypt's automotive industry, Bekhit et al. (2023) confirmed that recognising sustainability efforts strengthens. Sharma & Agarwal (2021) also reported that green rewards increase commitment and reduce turnover in Indian manufacturing firms. Wen et al. (2018), using a longitudinal approach, showed that sustained green incentives lower turnover intentions, especially when supported by strong organisational environmental values. Although global studies have shown that GRM practices can positively impact employee retention, there is limited evidence on their implementation and effectiveness in the Kenyan context. There are notable efforts within the Athi River EPZs to promote sustainability, such as the construction of eco-friendly industrial facilities, but the implementation of green reward management practices within the zones remains underdeveloped since there is no clear evidence that employees are incentivised through customised benefits based on their environmental contributions.

Conceptual Framework.

The relationship between the variables is shown in this conceptual framework.

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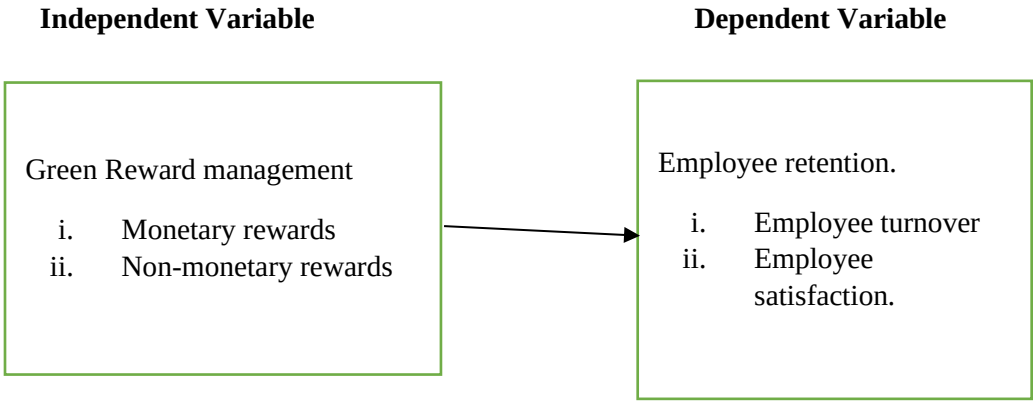
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The primary goal of this research design is to provide an accurate picture of the subject under investigation (Sirisilla & Sirisilla, 2023).

Target Population

The current study targeted a population of 56 operational enterprises with the unit of observation as employees working in operational EPZs within the Athi River Export Processing Zone: an estimated workforce of 20,000 employees (EPZA, 2022).

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The researcher used Cochran's formula for sample size determination due to its simplicity, flexibility, and ability to adjust for large populations (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Divakar, 2021), making it ideal for this study.

$$n0 = \frac{z^{2p(1-p)}}{e^2}$$

Substituting into the formula:

$$no = \frac{(1.96)^2\,(0.5)(1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 3.8416 * \frac{0.25}{0.0025} = 384.16$$

Applying the finite population correction:

$$n = \frac{n0}{1 + (n0 - 1)/N}$$

Where:

- n0=384 (initial sample size
- N=20,000 (population size)

Final Sample Size: 377

This study employed a stratified random sampling technique.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative primary data was collected by using a structured questionnaire administered to sampled employees. The questionnaire had closed-ended questions and items with a 5-point Likert scale with 1: strongly disagree (SD), 2: disagree (D), 3: neutral (n), 4: agree (A), and 5: strongly agree (SA). The structured questionnaire was divided into sections A, B, and C. Questionnaires were administered through the drop-and-pick method. The collected data were coded, classified, and entered into the appropriate statistical program (SPSS version 25) to facilitate analysis, accuracy, and consistency. The researcher utilised both descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, to measure relationships and test hypotheses.

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This subsequent linear regression function was used

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + +e$$

Where:

Y= employee retention

X1 green reward management practices

$\boldsymbol{\beta_0}$ = constant coefficient

$\boldsymbol{\beta_1}$ = regression coefficient for the independent variable

$\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$ = error term

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards in conducting human-centred research. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from respondents. The purpose of the research, the confidentiality of responses, and the right to withdraw at any point were communicated. All data were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Response Rate

The researcher distributed 377 questionnaires to employees working in the Athi River EPZ zone in Kenya, out of which, 32 were not returned, 60 were spoilt and incomplete while 285 were completely filled yielding a response rate of 75.56%, which meets the 60% threshold recommended by Sataloff and Vontela (2021) for reliable survey data.

Table 1: Response Rate

Description.	Value.
Target sample size	377
Complete questionnaires	285
Response rate (%)	75.56%

Demographic Analysis

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide a profile of the sample used in the study. These include age, gender, educational background, and years of experience in the current organisation.

Age

The respondents' age distribution is summarised in Table 4.2. The largest group of respondents (34%) was aged 25-34 years. The population of employees aged 18- 44 makes up over 70% of the population in the Athi River EPZ zone, indicating a younger workforce.

Table 2: Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-24	32	11.2
25-34	91	34.0
35-44	78	27.4
45-54	69	24.2
55 and above	9	3.2
Total	**285**	**100.0**

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Gender

Table 3 illustrates the gender distribution of the respondents. Male participants constituted 50.5% of the sample, females made up 38.9%, and those identifying as other represented 10.5%. Others in this case are individuals who preferred not to disclose their gender. This distribution reflects a relatively balanced gender representation.

Table 3: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	144	50.5
Female	111	38.9
Other/prefer not to say	30	10.5

Educational Background

The educational background of respondents is detailed in Table 4.4. Most respondents held either a diploma (33%) or a bachelor's degree (33.3%), indicating an educated sample.

Table 4: Educational Background

Education background	Frequency	Percent
High school	16	5.6
Certificate	48	16.8
Diploma	94	33.0
Bachelor's degree	95	33.3
Masters/doctorate	32	11.2
Total	**285**	**100.0**

Years of Experience in the Current Organisation

Table 5 summarises the respondents' years of experience in their current organisation. The majority (49.1%) had 1-3 years of experience, indicating that most participants had sufficient tenure and were in a position to provide informed responses on employee retention. The high proportion of employees with 1-3 years of experience suggests that organisations may be facing challenges in retaining employees beyond 3 years.

Table 4: Experience in Years

Experience	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 year	32	11.2
1-3years	140	49.1
4-6 years	80	28.1
7-9 years	33	11.6
Total	**285**	**100.0**

Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The results are summarised using percentages, mean scores (M), and standard deviation (SD).

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Table 6: Green Reward Management Practices

Statements on green reward management practices	N	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
The organisation acknowledges employees' contributions to environmental initiatives.	285	16.47%	67.02%	5.96%	5.26%	5.26%	3.84	.942
Positive environmental contributions are rewarded monetarily (incentives and bonuses) and non-monetarily (recognition)	285	10.88%	83.51%	5.61%	0	0	4.05	.403
Green reward management initiatives contribute to a sense of belonging within the organisation.	285	27.72%	66.67%	5.61%	0	0	4.22	.534
Green incentives offered by the organisation have influenced your decision to stay.	285	38.95%	49.82%	11.23%	0	0	4.28	.653
Average							**4.10**	**.633**

The descriptive statistics provide clear evidence that Green Reward Management (GRM) practices are visible and valued by employees working in the Athi River EPZs. The consistently high mean scores across the items reflect a workforce that perceives their organisations as genuinely recognising and rewarding environmentally responsible behaviour. This suggests a growing alignment between individual employee values and organisational sustainability goals.

83.49% of the respondents agreed that environmental contributions were rewarded monetarily and through non-monetary means such as recognition. The fact that most respondents also agreed that green rewards foster a sense of belonging (Mean = 4.22) further emphasises that GRM can strengthen employees' emotional and psychological connection to the organisation. Over 88% also indicated that green incentives influenced their decision to stay with the organisation (Mean = 4.28, SD = 0.653), highlighting that employees are no longer driven solely by traditional compensation or job security but by alignment with broader environmental values and ethical reward structures. While fewer respondents (16.47% strongly agreed, 67.02% agreed) noted that their organisations acknowledged environmental efforts (mean = 3.84, SD = 0.942).

The findings imply that green rewards may function as a non-monetary driver of engagement, potentially reducing HR costs linked to attrition and low morale. The demographic data complement this view. With over 70% of respondents under the age of 44, and nearly half with 1–3 years of tenure, the workforce in the EPZ is relatively young and mobile. This demographic is often more environmentally conscious and values-driven, meaning they are likely to respond more positively to green initiatives. The high approval ratings of GRM practices reflect the effectiveness of the initiatives and a generational preference for sustainable work environments.

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Table 7: Descriptive Analysis on Employee Retention

Statements on employee retention	N	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
I am satisfied with my current job and the overall work environment.	285	11.2%	61.4%	22.1%	0%	5.3%	3.73	.86
I am likely to continue working in my current organisation for the next two years.	285	11.2%	55.8%	21.8%	11.2%	0	3.67	.82
The organisation's commitment to environmental sustainability significantly influences my decision to stay with the company	285	22.1%	55.8%	22.1%	0	0	4.00	.67
The implementation of Green HRM practices has contributed to a more satisfying work experience.	285	5.6%	71.9%	16.8%	0	5.6%	3.72	.81
Average							**3.78**	**.79**

Table 7 shows the descriptive analysis on employee retention, revealing that most respondents (72.6%) agreed they were satisfied with their current job and work environment, with a mean score of 3.73 (SD = 0.86). Over two-thirds (67%) indicated they were likely to remain in their current organisation for the next two years (Mean = 3.67, SD = 0.82). Notably, 77.9% agreed that the organisation's commitment to environmental sustainability influenced their decision to stay, reflected in a high mean of 4.00 (SD = 0.67). 77.5% of the participants agreed that the implementation of Green HRM practices had contributed to a more satisfying work experience (Mean = 3.72, SD = 0.81). These findings provide strong evidence that sustainability-driven HR practices not only enhance job satisfaction but also serve as a powerful driver of employee loyalty and long-term retention.

The findings also suggest that the workforce values both a supportive work environment and a sense of alignment with organisational values. High levels of job satisfaction and intentions to remain indicate a healthy organisational climate, which is vital for reducing turnover-related costs and disruptions in productivity. The retention figures suggest that the EPZ zone workforce, particularly in Athi River, may be relatively stable, especially when employees perceive their organisation as well-managed and purpose-driven.

Correlation Analysis

The purpose of this analysis was to find out whether there existed a relationship between green reward management practices and employee retention. The researcher, therefore, conducted a Pearson Correlation to ascertain the strength of the relationship between the two variables.

Table 5: Green Reward Management and Employee Retention.

		Green Reward Management
Employee Retention	Pearson Correlation	.502**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
	N	285

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

Table 8 shows that green reward management had a strong positive and statistically significant correlation with regard to employee retention (r=0.502, p <.001). The findings imply that employees are more likely to stay when reward management practices are tied to green initiatives,

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hence the significant linking of rewards with environmentally sustainable practices to improve retention. These findings are in line with findings from Bekhit et al. (2023), who also found a positive correlation between green rewards and employee retention.

Regression Analysis

This study is derived from a broader study that examined the effect of green HRM practices on employee retention within the Athi River EPZ zone. The initial analysis employed a multiple linear regression model to assess individual and multiple contributions of these practices to retention. In light of the findings, this paper focuses exclusively on GRM practices to provide a more in-depth analysis of its unique contribution. For this purpose, the relevant coefficient from the original model is extracted and interpreted differently, while the model summary is retained.

H_{01}: Green reward management practices do not have a statistically significant effect on employee retention in the Athi River EPZ zone, Kenya.

Table 9: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.522[a]	.272	.262	.41425

a. Predictors: (Constant), Green reward management practices, PMQS, TDQS, and RSQS

According to Table 9, the R^2 value of 0.272 indicates that Green HRM practices explain 27.2% of the variation in employee retention. While this suggests that other factors also play a role, this result is statistically significant and highlights the importance of sustainable HR policies. Despite the low variation, the model was significant, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Coefficients

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.521	.247		6.156	<.001
	Green RM	.435	.049	.484	8.795	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Employee retention

From the analysis, a standardised beta coefficient (β = 0.484) and a p-value of less than 0.001 show that GRM practices demonstrate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship with retention. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.435) indicates that a one-unit increase in Green Reward Management leads to a 0.435-unit increase in employee retention. The high t-value (8.795) reinforces the strength of this effect. Green Reward Management has a strong and statistically significant effect on employee retention ($\beta = 0.435$, $p < 0.001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{01}). These findings indicate that employees are rewarded for their participation in environmental sustainability, which contributes highly to their stay. This affirms that sustainability initiatives are not just environmental imperatives but also strategic HR levers. GRM is viewed as a core component of employee value propositions, not just as a peripheral CSR activity in the EPZs.

The results are understood through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (SET). According to SET, employees assess their relationship with the organisation based on the reciprocity of benefits. When organisations go beyond financial compensation and acknowledge employees' eco-friendly behaviour, they create a perception of organisational support and fairness, prompting

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employees to reciprocate with loyalty and commitment. These findings align with previous studies conducted in various global contexts. For example, Ahmad (2015) found that organisations that recognise and reward employee contributions to sustainability tend to retain their workforce more effectively. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2021) reported that green rewards in India's manufacturing sector increased employee motivation and reduced turnover.

The regression model obtained from the output was;

$$\text{Employee retention} = 1.521 + 0.435\text{GRMP}$$

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that Green Reward Management has a strong and statistically significant effect on employee retention within Kenya's Athi River EPZs. With an R^2 value of 0.272, it is evident that GRM explains a substantial portion of the variation in employee retention. The high standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.484$) and significant p-value ($p < 0.001$) further confirm the strength of this relationship. These results reinforce the importance of integrating sustainability into reward systems. Recognising and incentivising eco-conscious behaviour enhances employee satisfaction and long-term commitment.

Recommendations

The findings of this study carry important practical implications for HR managers and policymakers within Kenya's EPZ sector. The strong and significant influence of Green Reward Management on employee retention suggests that embedding environmental sustainability into HR strategies is ethically sound and strategically beneficial. HR practitioners should consider implementing structured green reward systems (both monetary and non-monetary) that recognise employee contributions to environmental goals. Policymakers at the EPZ Authority could encourage or mandate sustainability-linked HR practices as part of compliance or certification standards. By integrating green rewards into mainstream HRM, organisations are more likely to improve employee satisfaction, build loyalty, and reduce turnover, thus fostering a more committed and environmentally responsible workforce.

The study recommends that qualitative studies can be done to capture in-depth employee perspectives and motivations behind their retention decisions, since the current study relied on quantitative data. Comparative studies across different sectors beyond the EPZs may also reveal sector-specific dynamics and broaden the applicability of the findings.

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