



# Talent Development Practises at Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case of a Public University in the Southern Region

Siti Sarah Omar<sup>1\*</sup>, Mohd Asmadi Mohd AnSOR<sup>1</sup>, Angeline Jia Min Tan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Technology Management and Business,  
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, MALAYSIA

\*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30880/jtmb.2023.10.01.005>

Received 11 March 2023; Accepted 17 April 2023; Available online 25 June 2023

**Abstract:** Talent Development (TD) is important for every institution, including higher education. However, few institutions regard TD as one of their most crucial elements. During Covid-19, academics experienced stress and faced challenges when they had to alter their regular teaching and learning activities, such as switching to an online learning platform during the pandemic. This study, therefore, examined how the pandemic has affected TD practises in higher education institutions as human capital is the most important resource to an organisation. The research objective was to examine TD practises at a public Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Malaysia during the pandemic. This study employed a qualitative research methodology, namely phenomenological interviews, which enabled the researcher to capture the respondents' actual experiences. In this study, two HR representatives and two academics from the same university participated as interviewees. Performance management, coaching, leadership development, and talent acquisition were themes that emerged from the interviews, along with several subthemes like hybrid, webinar courses, talent pool, and requirements. This study is significant in that it highlighted the value of TD practises in the higher education sector, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, as a guide for HEI administrators, this study helps in the revision of their existing strategies and understanding of the capacity gaps between the current academic skill level and the changing employment requirements to ultimately establish a coordinated TD.

**Keywords:** Talent development, higher education institutions, pandemic, performance management, coaching, leadership development, talent acquisition

## 1. Introduction

Every country is seeing the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of size, it has an impact on every organisation, whether it be on the negative or positive sides. A comparable predicament is being faced by higher education institutions all across the globe. Crawford et al. (2020) stated that HEIs in Australia responded to the pandemic in different ways. Some are changing their face-to-face (F2F) teaching to a different mode (online learning), some are stopping their classes for a period of time to design their online instruction, and some are attempting to carry on with F2F instruction as usual using their existing standard operating procedure (SOP).

The Movement Control Order (MCO), which the Malaysian government put into effect in March 2020, presented some challenges for HEIs. Sia & Adamu (2020), for example, stated that the pandemic caused Malaysian lecturers mental stress. This is due to the fact that they need to convert traditional classroom instruction into new online classes. Due to network issues and that not every student had network subscriptions, remote learning brought unexpected challenges to lecturers and students. The challenges would influence the quality of the remote learning. The pandemic, regardless, had brought several positive sides to education too. Chin et al. (2020), for instance, mentioned that the pandemic accelerated the use of technology in lectures at universities around the world. Without the pandemic,

Malaysia would not adopt the remote learning system so fast. Research from Paul & Jefferson (2019) concluded that there is no significant difference between students' performance in online and F2F classes.

Given that TD is crucial for every organisation, there is an urgent need to address how the pandemic has affected HEIs' talent development practises (TD). Mohan et al. (2015) concluded that talent development can be an important resource for differentiation and gaining a long-term competitive advantage. Meanwhile, Hazelkorn (2017), Lynch (2015), and Refozar et al. (2017) agreed that rankings of a university can link employee skills to high performance. In this way, they could contribute to a university's performance by attracting new students, providing professional teaching, conducting high-level research, and securing funding for research. Developing talent pools, boosting personal productivity, supporting effective planning, and improving human resource management are other benefits of HEIs (Wu et al., 2016). Henceforth, the objective of the research was to explore talent development practises (performance management, coaching, leadership development, talent acquisition) in a public HEI during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Background of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia**

Malaysia's HEIs have played an important role in the country's growing workforce and economy, especially since 1996 when private universities were added to public-owned tertiary institutions to provide Malaysians with additional opportunities to pursue higher education domestically (Sharimllah Devi et al., 2009). According to Tapsir (2019), there are 20 public universities and 467 private universities in this society with a population of 32.5 million, as well as diverse ethnicities, cultures, and languages. Following the country's implementation of its 2015-2025 Education Plan, which aims to achieve a gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education of 48 percent by 2025, Malaysia's gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education climbed from 39 percent in 2014 to 43 per cent in 2019.

Chin (2019) noted that Malaysia is steadily increasing the recognition of its higher education system. This will help the country strengthen its goal of becoming a global education hub by 2025 as the Malaysia Education Blueprint for Higher Education 2015–2025 seeks to attract 250,000 international students by 2025. Due to the difficult world economy and changing geopolitical trends, more and more international students are pursuing higher education in Malaysia. Thus, Malaysia can leverage the strengths of higher education to increase enrolment of international students. Jusoh (2017) stated that international students had contributed about RM5.9 billion annually to the Malaysian economy. They also contributed in promoting cultural exposure, competitiveness, and networking that benefits both students and the community.

### **2.2 Talent Development Practises**

As the literature on the definition and theoretical underpinnings of talent management is scarce, the subject is still relatively unexplored. Even the TD subset lacks sufficient information (Dalal & Akdere, 2018). Not to mention, TD itself is still relatively new in higher education (Tyagi et al., 2017). Higher education institutions should pay more attention to TD, nevertheless, as it could be an important key to success given how heavily they rely on human capital (Baruch, 2011). In other sectors, TD practises have been shown to influence organisational performance and give companies a competitive edge (Latukha, 2018; Nangia & Mohsin, 2020).

Dalal & Akdere (2018) believed that the success of business strategies, competitive advantage, profitability, and employee self-motivation, as well as self-organisation are the main benefits of TD practises. Therefore, Hejase et al. (2016) claimed that talented employees value their contributions and are willing to work with companies that provide them with development opportunities. Garavan et al. (2012) defined TD as "planning, selecting, and implementing development strategies across the pool to ensure your organisation has both current and future talent and achieves strategic goals and development activities in line with the talent management process." Thus, Caplan (2014) concluded that TD practises encompass all strategic interventions available to the organisation to develop employees in a more consistent and tactical manner in order to ensure continuous availability of talent practises.

### **2.3 Performance Management**

Decramer et al. (2013) asserted that there is a link between performance management and employee satisfaction. Their research found that higher levels of performance management systems in HEIs, stronger monitoring, and good two-way communication all contribute to greater employee satisfaction with their work and performance. Performance management is used to evaluate employees' current performance and determine their competency level for their ability development (Lyria, 2015). Wu et al. (2016) recommended that HEIs should offer their employees with development strategies that are suitable for them to enhance their strengths and overall performance. By doing this, performance management systems would improve the performance of HEIs.

## 2.4 Coaching

According to Prinsloo (2017), research on coaching has a strong emphasis on learning and talent development. In higher education, this practise has been heavily used for staff development (Iordanou et al., 2015). Clutterbuck & Megginson (2004) stated that coaching entails the learner and the coach establishing a relationship for development over a short term by setting the learner's learning goals and the coach's designing of the learning process. Coaching can help learners grasp institutional review procedures, as well as teaching practises, assessment methods, and academic management ways. When this practise entered higher education institutions, it could help staff in understanding teaching practises, assessment methods, academic management, and review processes (Khalid, 2018).

Stewart & Rigg (2011) mentioned that in the area of management development, coaching is seen as a reliable TD intervention to maximise talent, develop leadership, and increase employee engagement. In academia, this intervention could be used to help beginners understand pedagogical practises, evaluation methods, academic management, and procedures for institutional review (Khalid, 2018). The author further gave an example where scholars are assigned more responsible tasks as part of the quality review process and complete them under the facilitation of coaches, principals, deans, quality managers, and so on. In contrast, Czerniawski et al. (2017) pointed out that academics are only reasonably satisfied with the professional development experiences gained through coaching in their study of over a thousand participating HEIs.

## 2.5 Leadership Development

Muslim et al. (2021) concurred that leadership development is particularly important for HEIs because these institutions face many challenges as a result of the world's rapid change and interconnectedness. HEIs saw a great deal of change at both the strategic and operational levels. Therefore, there is a pressing need to cultivate scholars who can address these challenges to maintain the relevance of higher education. Hejase et al. (2016), Mathew (2015), and Rothwell (2005) concluded that the leadership development processes that should be undertaken in HEIs are succession planning, mentoring, feedback from multiple sources, tasks such as stretching and international jobs, and formal development programmes.

Shamsuddin et al. (2012) not only agreed that leadership development is important for succession planning in HEIs, but also that there is no difference in succession planning between companies and HEIs. Thus, leadership development is also critical for succession planning. Therefore, all leadership development programmes should emphasise the highly subjective dimensions of reflection. Furthermore, personal reactions, emotional responses, and identities are elements that should be explored by employees; hence leadership development should leave room for this. Chami-Malaeb & Garavan (2013), including Dalakoura (2010) stated that leadership development practises such as role-assignment leadership programmes can help leaders learn necessary skills and competencies effectively.

## 2.6 Talent Acquisition

Hongal & Kinange (2020) recognised that recruitment is a long-term strategic approach as it involves identifying, attracting, training, engaging, and maintaining a skilled workforce. It can be seen that recruitment encompasses all sub-processes associated with locating, acquiring, and integrating talent into a company. More and more organisations are recognising talent acquisition as a strategy that aligns with their business goals. However, talent acquisition is never easy as organisations demand multitasking skills from their employees.

Besides, a systematic and comprehensive process for integrating a new employee into the culture of an organisation is how Bauer (2015) defined talent acquisition. Dass et al. (2015) indicated that talent culture is essential for HEIs whether the goal is to identify, develop, or retain talent. Previous studies have shown that talent is one of the most important elements for HEIs. Therefore, HEIs should have proper opportunities and strategic plans for career development to attract future employees and retain current workforce. However, many faced challenges when the management recruit for talent. A prior study, which focused on the academic world of accounting in two different countries which are Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, discovered that range of salary offered by academic was not competitive when compared to accountant salaries (Paisey & Paisey, 2018). This was the root of the accounting departments' hiring difficulties issues.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

In this study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews to gather information about TD practises in HEIs. According to Gentles et al. (2015), qualitative research design involves observing and interpreting people's perceptions of various events in a natural context. When a researcher wants to gather non-numerical data, qualitative research, as pointed out by Punch (2013), is more appropriate as it focuses on deriving meaning from data to gain a better understanding by studying targeted samples or specific locations.

Phenomenology was used as the approach for the qualitative method in this study as it captured real-life experiences that directly informed the respondents (Bhar, 2019). Besides, people are unique from other observable or engaged phenomena because they have had a conscious experience (Smith, 2006). It demonstrated that the meaning of a first-person experience is when things or events occur, and at the same time people notice them. Moran (2002) defined phenomenology as a practise instead of a system, and that it is an attempt to reach the truth of things. In fact, consciousness, in the broadest sense, is defined as everything that appears as it does. According to Van Manen (2016), the focus of this kind of phenomenal inquiry is on the subjective experience of the individual and understanding the individual world. Thus, it was suitable to be employed in this study as the researcher needed various data and first-hand accounts from interviewees regarding what they did when the university engaged in TD practises during the pandemic.

Through interviews, the researcher managed to clearly understand descriptions provided by the interviewees in real-time without the use of any filters. As a matter of fact, the interviewers were able to ask questions directly. Besides, phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual (Lester, 1999). Research that is phenomenologically-based may employ a variety of techniques, including interviews, conversations, observations of participants, action research, focus groups, and analysis of personal texts. Berner-Rodoreda et al. (2020) reported that phenomenological interviews began in the 1960s, and this approach has been used frequently by researchers in psychology, sociology, public health, and nursing. In this study, the researcher conducted interviews with the target respondents to find out about TD practises by institutions during the pandemic. Two HR representatives and two academicians from the same institution served as the study's respondents.

### **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

Primary data and secondary data were used to obtain the data for this investigation. The primary data were from in-depth interviews while the secondary data were from articles, journals, memos, and other relevant documents. Additionally, in order to provide detailed explanation for the study, the researcher referred to the official websites of various institutions mentioned by the interviewees. As stated by Vartanian (pp. 3, 2010), secondary data can conclude from previously collected data and is intended to be reused for new questions that are not originally intended. Some information from the secondary data needs to be utilised.

The researcher approached target respondents by sending emails for interview invitations. For target respondents who might not be aware of the invitation email, the researcher called their office, explained to them, and asked whether they were able to accept the invitation for an interview. The interviews were conducted online through Google Meet which lasted for one hour. The researcher used the laptop's screen recorder to record the session. After that, the researcher transcribed the interviews.

### **3.3 Data Analysis Method**

Thematic analysis was used as the data analysis method for this study. Boyatzis (1998, pp.4) defined thematic analysis as "viewing" and "understanding the meaning of seemingly irrelevant material" while Braun & Clarke (2006) identified thematic analysis as understanding and analysing patterns of meaning in datasets in terms of texts, in this case, the interview transcriptions. During the data analysis, a specific technique by Miles & Huberman (1994) was adopted. It delineated the process of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. The researcher used a summary sheet and checklist to ensure that interviewees had answered all the questions. Boyatzis (1998, pp.4) defined thematic analysis as "viewing" and "understanding the meaning of seemingly irrelevant material" while Braun & Clarke (2006) identified it as to understand and analyse patterns of meaning in datasets in terms of texts, in this case they are interviews transcriptions. During the data analysis, a specific technique by Miles & Huberman (1994) was adopted that delineates the process data reduction, data display and drawing conclusion. The researcher used a summary sheet and checklist to ensure that the interviewees had addressed all the questions. The researcher next identified codes from the interview data. In this study, the researcher used deductive coding as she had to read the interviewee transcripts repeatedly and search for themes with broader patterns of meaning. The theory would serve as a starting point for the deductive version of the thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). The framework or theory was used as a starting point for the study in the hope that a particular core concept would be present in the data (Bradley et al., 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Thomas, 2006). Hence, the researcher reviewed the themes to ensure that they fit the data. After all, the researcher created a coherent narrative for the findings.

## **4. Findings and Discussions**

In the present study, the researcher tracked themes by using QDA Miner Lite software to analyse all transcripts and written notes. QDA Miner Lite is a free and popular computer-based qualitative analysis software that is suitable for beginners. It can be used to analyse textual data such as interviews, news logs, and free-form answers, as well as still images, according to Provalis Research ("Free Qualitative Data Analysis Software | QDA Miner Lite", 2022). Besides, the researcher also used manual data analysis to code, recode, and generate themes. Manual data analysis was conducted using a thematic method to inductively derive and identify phrases and words that were related to the

research questions. The analysis revealed that interviewees contributed valuable ideas on how the university practised TD during the pandemic. The results were discussed according to four broad themes that emerged from the analysis.

When asked about their views on TD, the interviewees agreed on the point that the focus of TD is to achieve and maintain human capital in an organisation. Academicians, administrators, and clerical staff make up the three categories of university employment. Through their participation in training programmes and workshops, all institution personnel improved. As our interviewees were from the HR department and the academic community, half of the focus of TD practises was on academicians. For example, the Academy of Leadership in Higher Education Malaysia, also known as *Akademi Kepimpinan Pendidikan Tinggi* (AKEPT), offered academicians chosen by the Centre for Leadership and Competence the opportunities to take part in training programmes. AKEPT is a centre that helps to develop and strengthen higher education leadership in Malaysia.

When asked if the interviewees had involved in any kind of TD programmes in the institution, the first interviewee mentioned that he had participated in Group Work Training Programme while he was the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD). While the third interviewee had experience on organising industrial talks and industry visits. He also provided suggestions on critical training and courses. In fact, all interviewees agreed with the statement that TD is important in HEIs as it could improve skills, experience, including competencies. The first interviewee also added that TD practises further improve the quality of work. Meanwhile, the second interviewee mentioned that TD is important as it could ensure that students from higher education have skills in terms of knowledge and practical as required by the industry. Similarly, third interviewee, stressed on the importance of TD to HEIs at improving the quality of services provided, as well as university rankings and awareness for continuous improvement in performance.

Another example was given by the fourth interviewee to illustrate the importance of TD. Every time the university needs to appoint a new Vice Chancellor (VC), the university must recruit talent from outside. For example, the current VC of this university is from another university as the talents of this university were not good enough to become the VC, necessitating the importation of talent from other universities.

#### 4.1 Performance Management Practises

Table 1 exhibits the first theme of this study which was performance management, including its sub themes which were hybrid (online and offline), KPI evaluation, training and development programmes, as well as framework (*myLestari*).

**Table 1 - Theme 1 (Performance management)**

Main Theme	Sub Themes
Performance Management	Hybrid – Online and offline
	KPI evaluation - LNPT
	Training and development programmes
	Framework - <i>myLestari</i>

When answering the question on how the university practised performance management during the pandemic, interviewees stated that it was conducted through a hybrid method which was online and face-to-face, but mostly online. The performance management was implemented based on pre-arranged planning, namely Annual Work Targets. Since the pandemic started in 2019, it was conducted online during that time. Plans had been arranged in advance based on the existing situation. Thus, the institution practised performance management in both ways, which were online and face-to-face.

A different interviewee, on the other hand, stated that performance management was carried out using the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) evaluation. Kairuz et al. (2016) reported that KPIs are measurable indicators that indicate crucial aspects of a university's success and are used to assess organisational performance with respect to strategic and operational goals. Thus, senior management in the higher education sector would determine strategic and operational performance metrics in conjunction with financial organisations. In the institution, the performance management system, namely "LNPT", is the KPI yearly assessment or known as *E-Prestasi* system. Employees in the institution would fill up the performance results and accomplishments to submit into the system. Discussions on performance expectation with the Head of Department would be done through phone calls or online via google meet platform too.

From the view of Interviewee 4, the LNPT assessment for academicians is good as it is generated based on a few conditions that lecturers must fulfil, such as publishing a paper, keeping track of the total amount of research grants they have received, and undergoing a spark assessment. Spark assessment is an assessment where students would assess subjects, lecturers, and facilities in the faculties. The assessment uses a Likert Scale from one to five, and students may give comments to lecturers, opinions on the subject, and the conditions of the classroom facilities. The assessment will take place every semester. The system displays all results, making it fairly impartial. In contrast, it is

very subjective in nature for administrators and clerical staff. The assessment asks questions related to employees themselves by using the Likert Scale measurement. An example given by the interviewee was “How do you think this person can work well with other people?”. Typically, there are five points from which the interviewee needs to choose, which are, in the range of one to five. However, there have been some recent transformations from this assessment into KPI assessments, such as the requirement for administrators to write a paper or guideline to receive the achievement. It The transformations have affected the administrative level but have not reached the clerical level yet.

The outcomes of the interviews revealed that the university’s organisational initiatives and its talent development strategies were aligned. *myLestari*, a framework that has been included in the University Strategic Plan 2021 until 2025 under Function 4 of university’s Governance: Talent Transformation Model, has been approved by the University Board Meeting and is going to develop into a competency-based profiling system for employees. According to the fourth interviewee, although this has been planned, it has not yet started as staff members must first undergo competency-based profiling. They need to identify how many categories of employees there are at the university, what kind of job profiling and job descriptions they have, and what kind of competencies is required by each employee. Next, they need to evaluate these competencies before entering them into the system. After completing the aforementioned steps, it would be easier since once the employees’ information is in the system; their competencies will be revised whenever they go for any training.

The third interviewee added to the framework by stating that the Head of Department will request for suggestions regarding critical training needs or any specific courses required. In other words, employees could request management training programmes on management skills for their performance management. The development training request would be reviewed by the management for approval and to secure the budget. Furthermore, the Registrar Office prepared some development skills talk.

Additionally, employees' performance could improve through specific training programmes based on various job schemes. An example given by the first interviewee was the Prudent Drive Course, specifically for drivers in the university. There are various training programmes planned for employees which had been announced through the 2022 Training and Course Calendar. The employees can attend any training programmes of their interest. Notifications for all programmes are made through email notifications to all employees and through a system named *eKursus*. The programmes would be held in the period when every employee is available to assist their performance and development. For example, the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Course 2021 was conducted online during the semester break to facilitate academicians to attend.

The third interviewee mentioned that the institution had provided a comprehensive online training for lecturers to improve their research skills and knowledge. The training included e-learning and developing video and digital content. For example, academicians had to attend Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), Online Teaching, or Micro Credential to increase their skills in developing digital content. Kelleher (2017) reported that Malaysia is the first country in the world to implement the MOOC initiative for public universities. It was categorised as Shift 9: Globalised Online Learning in Malaysia’s 2015-2025 education plan (Garcia et al., 2021). According to Garcia et al. (2021), the Globalised Online Learning Initiative aims to improve the quality of course content, reduce the course delivery, and at the same time make Malaysia’s expertise available worldwide. Malaysia’s MOOC credit transfer aims to recognise MOOC as a legitimate and reliable learning tool by supporting globalised online learning initiatives and enabling credit recognition. Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh mentioned that the aim of MOOC is to ensure shorter academic duration and that online learning is carried out by the Institutes of Higher Education (IPTA). Hence, the competencies of employees would be strengthened through training programmes provided by the institutions.

## 4.2 Coaching Practises

Table 2 shows that the second theme in this study was coaching while its sub themes were webinar courses, meetings, internal job rotation, training, and mentoring programmes.

**Table 2 - Theme 2 (Coaching)**

Main Theme	Sub Themes
Coaching	Webinar courses
	Meetings
	Internal Job Rotation
	Training and mentoring programmes

During the pandemic, the university practised coaching online through webinar courses and meetings. From the opinions of all interviewees, they agreed that online learning and teaching could help to develop employees' talent. Training and guidance programmes may provide employees with skills, knowledge, and the latest information that can be useful for their daily work. As had been mentioned, the university provided a lot of training for its employees. The

first interviewee agreed with this statement and stated that training programmes were announced through email platforms, Facebook, and related websites. Training materials such as slide presentations were also shared by the secretariat and these would normally be given after the completion of the programme through the email platform or google drive.

Besides, internal job rotation was available to strengthen employees' experiences and development in different faculties, departments, and divisions. The second interviewee, however, mentioned that although he was aware about the existence of internal job rotations, but obviously they might not be practised at the faculty. Overall, all interviewees were aware of the job rotations that were practised in the institution to enrich their experiences and expose them to new things. There were requirements for candidates who participated in job rotations. For example, candidates for rotations should exhibit strong potential, capability, and competency for taking up the new or expanded roles. Everyone would stand a chance, but not everyone would be chosen. Depending on the level of the candidates' leadership skills, the institution's Vice-Chancellor's office was the one who managed the job rotations and positions. From the view of Interviewee 4, job rotation was one of the requirements if employees wished to be promoted.

Furthermore, training and mentoring programmes could develop professional and academic staff as they gained new knowledge and improved existing competencies and skills. From the opinion of Interviewee 2, development programmes must be guided to have desired outcomes, rather than conducted without an objective. Thus, the management who developed programmes would wish to have a satisfying outcome as they desired. Another evidence that the coaching process was ongoing even during the pandemic was that the staff and their leaders had regular discussions through online and phone meetings. Although they might not be able to meet offline in offices due to the pandemic, they still could communicate with each other using messengers, phone calls, or online meetings. The third interviewee agreed that training and mentoring were good for staff development, especially on specific skills and knowledge. This is because mentors could provide their mentees with guidance and feedback to keep them on the right track.

Moreover, employees were given promotions and opportunities to continue their studies to the highest level. According to the first interviewee, the staff were given facilities to gain additional knowledge and experiences through Post-Doctoral Scheme, Industrial Attachment Leave, and Potential Development Scheme. There were awards or recognitions for employees too. The objective of the Post-Doctoral Scheme was to encourage PhD students to pursue their research careers and secure a supply of scientific and research skills talents for research and development in the institution. Aside from that, the scheme was also meant to provide researchers with support. For Industrial Attachment Leave, Mahamood (2020) concluded that lecturers would gain experience through industrial training. This is because HEIs encouraged employees to keep up with the industry by providing initiatives and opportunities, such as Industrial Attachment Leave and sabbaticals. They were given the opportunity to do "sabbatical" from an apprenticeship for about a year and participate in related industries. They could learn how the industry works whether in public or private sector. Nevertheless, sabbaticals were only intended for academicians rather than administrators and clerical staff.

Other than that, the third interviewee stated about the different development opportunities provided by the institution, such as new technology training and certification, as well as professional certification from the Malaysian Institute of Management (MIM). According to the official website of MIM, it was established in 1966 and has been promoting management skills throughout Malaysia, this has made Malaysian companies become aware of the best management practises around the world, which is the primary role of MIM ("Company Overview - Malaysian Institute of Management", 2022). Besides, it also serves as an important bridge between private and public sectors. The third interviewee added that MIM aims to help people to achieve professional career aspirations and organisational goals through immersive learning initiatives and training strategies.

As for the fourth interviewee, she mentioned that the university has no formalisation of on-job training and mentor-mentee programmes. She also added that when she started off, there were courses that must be participated by the newly employed, i.e., *Kursus Asas Perkhidmatan* (basic course of government service) and another course, i.e., *Kursus Akademik* (academic course). At the same time, employees need to take up *Program Transformasi Minda* within one year and it is compulsory for them in order to secure permanent positions in the institution. All the courses and programmes mentioned above should be undertaken by the employees within any time frame. However, starting 2023, the Centre for Leadership and Competence decided on a time frame of six month for *Kursus Asas Perkhidmatan* and one year for *Kursus Akademik* and *Program Transformasi Minda* from the moment the employees joined the institution. Within the time frame, the employees' motivation and efficiency in completion can be increased.

### 4.3 Leadership Development Practises

Table 3 demonstrates leadership development as the third theme whereas its sub themes were online, talent pool, collaboration, and fund sponsor.

**Table 3 - Theme 3 (Leadership development)**

Main Theme	Sub Themes
Leadership Development	Online
	Talent Pool
	Collaboration
	Fund Sponsor

During the pandemic, the university practised leadership development online too. There were leadership development programmes, specifically for academicians and administrators such as the Academic/Administrator Leadership Development Program (LEAD), as planned in the university’s succession plan. Industrial Attachment Leave Programme and Potential Development Scheme were examples of programmes tailored for leaders to gain experience in the industry and then obtain the title of Ir. (Professional Engineer). Besides, the employees were given the opportunity to attend training programmes organised by the university and leadership programmes organised by AKEPT. These programmes were normally sponsored by the university. The second and third interviewee stood on the same view with the first interviewee and stated that the employees were encouraged to enrol, attend development programmes, and be certified by the professional body, where the university would provide the funding or sponsor the fees for some of the development programmes.

To create a talent pool for employees who had the potential to become leaders, the Centre for Leadership and Competence carried out evaluation activities at the secretariat level and organised leadership competencies for the staff. Based on the opinion of the third interviewee, in order to build a strong talent pool, staff with strong potentials should be identified and nurtured in preparation for future positions. He also thought that the job scope is relevant for future needs and challenges. The listed staff will be involved in the succession plan programme and given the opportunities to become leaders at the university. Besides, the centre has also planned to send all the deans in the institution for a leadership camp this year. They will have to undergo leadership and competency assessments with the cooperation of AKEPT and Dale Carnegie. Dale Carnegie is one of the institutes in the United States. They are planning to send the top management, executive management, and executive staff overseas for training, including exposure to international leadership scenarios. This would be sponsored by the institution too.

These programmes are organised by the Centre for Leadership and Competence, and this centre was established in the beginning of 2022. The centre’s main responsibility is to ensure that all trainings given to employees in the institution are aligned with its objectives, mission, and vision. Besides, the centre needs to be concerned with their the institution’s succession planning and talent pool. This is because the institution will conduct a profiling on the staff identified for its succession planning. The development plan of the centre should be developed and reviewed periodically as this is critical for the sustainability of the institution’s leadership. It has been illustrated that besides training, the centre is very much concerned about the development of the employees.

**4.4 Talent Acquisition Practises**

Table 4 shows the last theme of the findings in this study which was talent acquisition as the main theme, while interviews, requirements, reactive process, and skills mismatch were its sub themes.

**Table 4 - Theme (talent acquisition) and its sub themes**

Main Theme	Sub Themes
Talent Acquisition	Interviews
	Requirements
	Reactive Process
	Skills Mismatch

The university practised talent recruitment during the pandemic through existing procedures such as interviews. Candidates needed to pass the scheme requirements and internal requirements set by the university. The internal requirements of the norm are higher than the requirements of the scheme. For example, for an appointment scheme at the bachelor’s degree level, the internal requirement stipulates that the candidate must obtain a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of at least 3.0, However, the scheme does not stipulate such a condition. Thus, every university may have their internal requirements that are different from other universities.

The third interviewee commented on the talent recruitment process as reactive, and that the university should be more aggressive and engage head-hunters to find and hire outstanding talent. In contrast, the fourth interviewee did not consider it as reactive, but the recruitment process itself was not aligned with the requirement of the organisation. This is because the recruitment process was all done by the HR department. They would try to recruit the best candidates for



each position. However, without the participation of the department requested, they might not know better in terms of the kind of competency required by it.

Moreover, there might be a skill mismatch for the positions as their qualifications also may not reflect what kind of job they are doing at present. The job and the employee themselves must match to reduce mistakes and ease the flow or socialisation process within the organisation. The more at ease they are in doing the job, the better they would perform. An example given by the fourth interviewee highlighted the varied degree holders who are working under the centre such as Biotech, Information Technology, and Course Management. However, their current jobs do not utilise the knowledge obtained from their degree courses at all. Although all the officers are very proactive, quite open to suggestions and experiences, and that they adjust themselves well, but they take time to familiarise themselves with the industry that they are not familiar with before.

In summary, based on the findings, the institution continued practising TD practises even during the pandemic. Four types of TD practises being discussed in this study were performance management, coaching, leadership development, and talent acquisition. As the institution is starting to pay more attention on developing talents, the Centre of Leadership and Competence was established this year. Overall, most TD practises were exercised online during the pandemic. Even though the pandemic had limited the opportunities of meeting face-to-face, but it had increased the chances of meeting online.

## 5. Conclusion

This study explored how TD was practised by the university during the pandemic. Although it was conclusive for a particular institution, it needs to be further explored by future researchers. Firstly, other researchers could expand the sample location to private universities across Malaysia to obtain research outcomes and make a comparison between public and private universities. Secondly, as the sample size is small, researchers could use quantitative method in collecting more information about TD practises. Moreover, this study was only focused on qualitative method. It lacked the statistical data to support the respondents' statements. In fact, the researcher did not get enough information to clarify unclear situations. Therefore, this study lacked opinions from other perspectives, such as lecturers from different faculties. Future researchers should enlarge the sample size of respondents and use mixed research methods to gain a better understanding of TD practises in universities.

As an institution that produces graduates every year, TD practises are important to make sure that the HEI products (graduates) have the skills in terms of knowledge and practise required by the industry, hence the responsibility is placed on the academicians who are talented and sufficiently trained by the university.

## Author Contributions

**Angeline:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualisation, Formal analysis. **Asmadi:** Data curation, Methodology, Visualization. **Siti Sarah:** Supervision, Writing – review and editing, Validation.

## Acknowledgement

This research paper is supported through the assistance of Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) via Grant Vot: X233 (Human Resource Management Framework in The Digitalisation and Remote Work Era - A New Look at The Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance).

## References

- Baruch, Y. (2011, April). Managing academic careers to win the war for talent. In 4th CETL Conference at St. Hugh College Oxford, London.
- Bauer, T. N. (2015). Onboarding: The Power of Connection. Success Factors White Paper, Global Headquarters, South San Francisco, 94080.
- Berner-Rodoreda, A., Bärnighausen, T., Kennedy, C., Brinkmann, S., Sarker, M., Wikler, D., Eyal, N., & McMahon, S. A. (2020). From doxastic to epistemic: typology and critique of qualitative interview styles. *Qualitative inquiry*, 26(3-4), 291-305.
- Bhar, S. (2019). Introducing Phenomenological Research Methodology in Sustainable Consumption Literature: Illustrations from India. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919840559>
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development. Sage.

- Bradley, E. H., Curry, L. A., & Devers, K. J. (2007). Qualitative data analysis for health services research: developing taxonomy, themes, and theory. *Health services research*, 42(4), 1758-1772.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Caplan, J. (2014). Develop and engage all your people for business success. *Strategic HR Review*, 13(2), 75-80. <https://doi.org/10.1108/shr-11-2013-0105>
- Chami-Malaeb, R. and Garavan, T. (2013), "Talent and leadership development practises as drivers of intention to stay in Lebanese organisations: the mediating role of affective commitment", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 24 No. 21, pp. 4046-4062.
- Chin, A., Simon, G. L., Anthamatten, P., Kelsey, K. C., Crawford, B. R., & Weaver, A. J. (2020). Pandemics and the future of human-landscape interactions. *Anthropocene*, 31, 100256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ancene.2020.100256>
- Chin, Y. F. (2019). Malaysia: From hub to exporter of higher education and implications. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 10(2), 48-54.
- Clutterbuck, D., & Megginson, D. (2004). *Techniques for coaching and mentoring*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Crawford, Joseph, Kerryon Butler-Henderson, Jürgen Rudolph, Bashar Malkawi, Matt Glowatz, Rob Burton, ... Sophia Lam. (2020). COVID-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses. *Journal of Applied Teaching and Learning*, 3(1), 4–13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1680/geot.2008.T.003>
- Czerniawski, G., Guberman, A., & MacPhail, A. (2017). The professional developmental needs of higher education-based teacher educators: an international comparative needs analysis. *European Journal Of Teacher Education*, 40(1), 127-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2016.1246528>
- Dalakoura, A. (2010), "Examining the effects of leadership development on firm performance", *Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 59-70.
- Dalal, R., & Akdere, M. (2018). Talent development: status quo and future directions. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 50(6), 342–355. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ict-03-2018-0033>
- Dass, M., Muthaly, S., & Annakis, J. (2015). Talent Culture's Role in Talent Development among Academics: Insights from Malaysian Government Linked Universities. *Journal Of Contemporary Issues In Business And Government*, 21(1), 46-71. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.7790/cibg.v21i1.27>
- Tapsir S. H. (2019, May 14). Harmonising public and private higher education. NST Online; New Straits Times. <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2019/05/488452/harmonising-public-and-private-higher-education>
- Decramer, A., Smolders, C., & Vanderstraeten, A. (2013). Employee performance management culture and system features in higher education: relationship with employee performance management satisfaction. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(2), 352-371.
- Sharimllah Devi, R., Chong, S. C., & Hishamuddin, I. (2009). The practise of KM processes: a comparative study of public and private higher education institutions in Malaysia. *VINE: The journal of information and knowledge management systems*, 39(3), 203-22.
- Free Qualitative Data Analysis Software | QDA Miner Lite. Provalis Research. (2022). Retrieved from <https://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/freeware/>.
- Garavan, T. N., Carbery, R., & Rock, A. (2012). Mapping talent development: definition, scope and architecture. *European journal of training and development*, 36(1), 5-24.
- Garcia, M., Perez, L., & Hayashi, R. (2021). Accreditation of online courses in Higher Education—early adopters in the European Union, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. *ADB Briefs*. <https://doi.org/10.22617/brf210411-2>

- Gentles, S. J., Charles, C., Ploeg, J., & McKibbin, K. (2015). Sampling in Qualitative Research: Insights from an Overview of the Methods Literature. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(11), 1772–1789.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2017). Rankings and higher education: Reframing relationships within and between states. Centre for Global Higher Education, 19.
- Hejase, H. J., Hejase, A. J., Mikdashi, G., & Bazeih, Z. F. (2016). Talent Management Challenges: An Exploratory Assessment from Lebanon. *International journal of business management & economic research*, 7(1).
- Hongal, P., & Kinange, U. (2020). A study on talent management and its impact on organization performance-an empirical review. *International Journal of Engineering and Management Research*, 10.
- Iordanou, I., Leach, A., & Barnes, V. (2015). Coaching in Higher Education. *Coaching in Professional Contexts*. London: Sage Publishing, 145-58.
- Jusoh, D. (2017). Turning the world towards Joo Malaysian education. *New Straits Time*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2017/05/237032/turning-world-towards-malaysian-education>.
- Kairuz, T., Andriés, L., Nickloes, T., & Truter, I. (2016). Consequences of KPIs and performance management in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(6), 881-893. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-05-2015-0067>
- Kelleher, J. (2017). Current State of Massive Open Online Courses in Malaysia. *OpenGov Asia*. Retrieved from <https://opengovasia.com/current-state-of-massive-open-online-courses-in-malaysia/>.
- Khalid, F. (2018). The Choreography of Talent Development in Higher Education. *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, 9(1), 40-52. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/hes.v9n1p40>
- Latukha, M. O. (2018). Talent development and a firm's performance: Evidence from Russian companies. *Journal of general management*, 43(2), 51-62.
- Lester, S. (1999). *An introduction to phenomenological research*.
- Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for Designing and Reviewing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Promoting Methodological Integrity. *Qualitative Psychology*, 4(1), 2-22.
- Lynch, K. (2015). Control by numbers: new managerialism and ranking in higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, 56(2), 190-207.
- Lyria, R. K. (2015). Effect of talent management on organizational performance in companies listed in Nairobi securities exchange in Kenya (Doctoral dissertation)..
- Mahamood, M. (2020). Lecturers can gain experience via industrial training. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2020/12/648236/lecturers-can-gain-experience-industrial-training>.
- Mathew, A. (2015). Talent management practises in select organizations in India. *Global Business Review*, 16(1), 137-150.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage.
- Mohan, M. D., Muthaly, S., & Annakis, J. (2015). Talent culture's role in talent development among academics: Insights from Malaysian government linked universities. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government*, The, 21(1), 46-71.
- Moran, D. (2002). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Routledge.
- Muslim, S., Abidin, N. A. Z., Osman, S., & Manaf, H. A. (2021). Exploring senior academicians' perspective on mentoring in Malaysian higher education institutions. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(2), 1032-1044.

- Nangia, M., & Mohsin, F. (2020). Identifying VUCA factors in a pandemic era—barucha framework focused on Indian IT industry. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(7), 931-936.
- Paisey, C., & Paisey, N. J. (2018). Talent management in academia: the effect of discipline and context on recruitment. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(7), 1196-1214.
- Paul, J., & Jefferson, F. (2019). A Comparative Analysis of Student Performance in an Online vs. Face-to-Face Environmental Science Course From 2009 to 2016. *Frontiers in Computer Science*, 1(7). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomp.2019.00007>
- Prinsloo, H. (2017). How South African businesses design and execute transformation initiatives: implications for coaching (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, Wits Business School).
- Punch, K. F. (2013). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Sage.
- Refozar, R. F. G., Buenviaje, M. G., Perez, M. P., Manongsong, J. L., & Laguador, J. M. (2017). Extent of leader motivating language on faculty members' job satisfaction from a higher education institution. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences*, 4(3), 99-107.
- Rothwell, W.J. (2005), *Effective Succession Planning: Ensuring Leadership Continuity and Building Talent from Within*, 3rd ed., American Management Association, New York, NY.
- Shamsuddin, A., Chee-Ming, C., Wahab, E., & Kassim, A. S. M. (2012). Leadership management as an integral part of succession planning in HEIs: A Malaysian perspective. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(3).
- Sia, J. K. M., & Adamu, A. A. (2020). Facing the unknown: pandemic and higher education in Malaysia. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 10(2), 263-275.
- Smith, D. (2006). Phenomenology. *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*. The Stanford, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/0470018860.s00153>
- Stewart, J., & Rigg, C. (2011). *Learning and talent development*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American journal of evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246.
- Tyagi, S., Singh, G., & Aggarwal, T. (2017). Talent management in education sector. *International Journal on Cybernetics & Informatics (IJCI)*, 6(1/2), 47-52.
- Van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Vartanian, T. P. (2010). *Secondary data analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Wu, M. C., Nurhadi, D., & Zahro, S. (2016). Integrating the talent management program as a new concept to develop a sustainable human resource at higher educational institutions. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, 8(4).