

Streamlining Smart HR Digital Platform to Refine Staff Satisfaction and Retention in MTUN Institutions

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, universities often face the challenge of managing human resources (HR) functions efficiently while nurturing staff satisfaction and retention. To address these challenges, this study envisions a smart digital platform serving as a one-stop centre for all HR services, specifically designed for university staff. By integrating features like self-service portals, personalized notifications, and real-time updates, the platform aims to reduce administrative burdens, minimize human error, and foster a greater sense of ownership and connection among staff. Additionally, by delivering timely and accurate information, it increases staff satisfaction and helps universities retain top talent. This innovation not only simplifies HR operations but also aligns with the goal of creating a more supportive, responsive, and engaging workplace for university staff, ultimately contributing to improved organizational performance holistically. The proposed system is designed to meet the dynamic needs of universities, offering scalable solutions that adapt to future technological advancements. Focusing on the Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN) objective by emphasizing the practical and technical education in engineering, technology and applied sciences. As it is believed, a comprehensive and user-friendly system enables the improvement of the entire team performance and leads to goal achievement.

Keywords: Digital transformation, Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN), staff satisfaction, smart HR, higher educational institution, retention

ABSTRAK

Di Malaysia, universiti berhadapan dengan cabaran mengurus fungsi sumber manusia secara cekap sambil memastikan kepuasan dan pengekalan tenaga kerja. Bagi menjawab keperluan tersebut, kajian ini memandangkan ke arah pembangunan sebuah platform digital pintar yang berfungsi sebagai pusat sehenti bagi semua perkhidmatan sumber manusia, yang direka khusus untuk staf universiti. Melalui pengintegrasian ciri seperti portal layan diri, notifikasi tersuai dan kemas kini masa nyata, platform ini berupaya mengurangkan beban pentadbiran, meminimumkan ralat manusia serta meningkatkan rasa tanggungjawab dan keterikatan dalam kalangan staf. Di samping menyediakan maklumat yang tepat dan terkini, sistem ini dapat meningkatkan tahap kepuasan staf serta membantu universiti mengekalkan bakat terbaik. Inovasi ini bukan sahaja memperkemas operasi sumber manusia, malah selari dengan matlamat mewujudkan persekitaran kerja yang lebih menyokong, responsif dan berdaya libat diri, sekaligus menyumbang kepada peningkatan prestasi organisasi secara holistik. Sistem yang dicadangkan ini juga dibangunkan bagi memenuhi keperluan dinamik institusi pengajian tinggi melalui penyelesaian berskala besar yang mampu menyesuaikan diri dengan perkembangan teknologi pada masa hadapan. Fokus ini turut seiring dengan objektif Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN) yang menekankan pendidikan teknikal dan vokasional dalam bidang kejuruteraan, teknologi serta sains gunaan. Dengan adanya sistem yang komprehensif dan mesra pengguna, prestasi keseluruhan organisasi dapat dipertingkatkan dan matlamat dapat dicapai dengan lebih berkesan.

Kata Kunci: Transformasi Digital, Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN), Kepuasan Staf, Kecekapan Sumber Manusia, Institusi Pendidikan, Pengekalan

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs), globally, are experiencing a transformative wave of digital change. While the COVID-19 global pandemic certainly accelerated the changes and usage of online tools and digital management systems, not only for teaching and learning but also within administrative tasks, digital innovation, increasing globalization, and changing expectations on behalf of academic and non-academic staff have also impacted the industry. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN) is currently undergoing this transformation, with an increase in the number of technical universities that offer more practical, industry-relevant education.

The MTUN, in particular, is under growing pressure to increase operational efficiencies while also developing a more satisfied, engaged, and loyal academic workforce. In these examples, management is challenged to achieve its aspirations within constrained administrative resources amid competing, rising stakeholder expectations. In this context, Human Resource Management (HRM) plays an essential role in sustaining HEIs and allowing them to compete in an ever-changing environment.

In addition, current trends indicate that universities are moving toward digitizing their administration with recent efforts to digitize HRM functions to eliminate bureaucratic inefficiencies and increase engagement and satisfaction from staff. Smart HR digital platforms, known for automating, integrating, and enabling data-driven decision-making, are likely to be one avenue for improving staff retention and satisfaction. The intent of this study was to conceptualize a user-friendly intelligent HR platform specifically for MTUN institutions that improved HRM functions and provided staff with an engaging work environment.

As the education sector transitions with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0), digital transformation in HR has become a strategic imperative (Ahmad & Zairani, 2021). To be more efficient, intelligent systems are expected to improve HRM processes, enhance transparency, and empower staff to take accountability for their professional development. Furthermore, this study adds to the discourse of smart HR platforms contextualizing their usefulness for improving the broader staff experience and experiences of the institution.

2.0 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Malaysia's MTUN institutions play an integral role in providing technical and vocational education aligned with national development goals. The universities are committed to training the skilled, practical, hands-on knowledge in fields such as engineering, technology, and the sciences. Also, the operational issues arising within the MTUN universities could be greater than those faced by other public universities, given their specialised mission. Figure 1 lists universities aligned with the MTUN concept and mission.

In this study the use of Malaysian Technical University (MTU) and Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN) will be interchangeable. This is because both relate to the existing grouping of functional technical universities in Malaysia and which focused on aligning practical, industry led education in engineering, technology or applied sciences. MTUN is the official name of the consortium, which facilitates collaboration and connectivity among the designated universities, while MTU is the common term for the individual universities in the consortium. These universities will need very academic staff, but staff that have had experience and

education with a practical technical focus, who can direct research and development and create business partnerships.



Figure 1. MTUN Institutions.

Ironically, despite their importance, MTUN universities are now facing issues such as staff dissatisfaction, high turnover rates, limited career development opportunities, and excessive administrative burdens. These challenges arose from outdated HR processes, fragmented HR information management systems, and dysfunctional planning for HR and talent management strategies. As noted by Yusoff et al. (2022), many Malaysian public universities have HR systems that result in slow responses to HR issues, limited accountability, and lower morale.

Additionally, the conventional HR methods used in many MTUN universities are not keeping pace with rapid technological change and evolving workforce needs. Outdated manual processes, reliance on paper documentation, and rigid bureaucratic structures are stifling operational flexibility and employee engagement. Given this situation, it's clear that there's an urgent need to embrace digital solutions to enhance HR functions and foster a more responsive and inclusive workplace.

Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that workload, the working environment, and other important factors contribute to stress among academic staff (Khairunesa & Sarala, 2020). With that in mind, we envision a smart digital HR platform that can provide a strategic response to these issues. A smart platform would have the ability to bring all of the HR functions - recruitment, performance management, training and development, and staff wellbeing - into a seamless digital system. Using an automation and data analytics approach, these systems can provide timely feedback, improve communication, and provide evidence-based decisions.

To be competitive and meet their goal of producing technically skilled graduates, MTUN institutions must invest in advanced technologies that enable process efficiencies and also improve the well-being of their staff. There is a worldwide trend towards digitalizing administrative processes, and now would be the best time to implement a centralized, scalable, and smart HR platform for the MTUN environment. This research then proposes and explores the outcomes of a smart HR platform for developing HRM practices in MTUN universities, and the implications of this idea for staff satisfaction and retention.

Furthermore, the governmental policies around digitalization policies from Malaysia's MOHE endorse the transformation of governance in Malaysian public universities (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2021). These policies align with broader national aspirations for Malaysia, as outlined in the MyDIGITAL blueprint, which emphasises accelerating the digital revolution to make Malaysia a digitally driven, high-income nation by 2030. In this context, the movement

toward a smart digital HR platform is both a technological shift and a strategic initiative that should not be overlooked.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The JD-R model, first introduced and developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), offers a strong rationale for supporting employee well-being and performance. It divides work characteristics into two broad categories: job demands and job resources. The job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require effort and, when prolonged, are associated with physiological and psychological costs. Think tall timber work demands, emotional demands, and role ambiguity. Job resources are on the opposite side of the factors that assist employees in achieving work goals, reduce job demands, and encourage employees' personal growth (see figure 2). These could include autonomy, performance feedback, support from colleagues, rewards, and access to digital job resources.

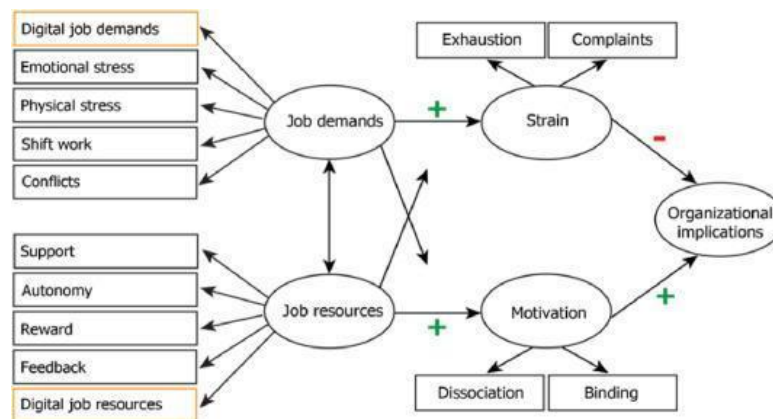


Figure 2. Job Demand-Resource Model.

Also, in the context of MTUN universities, the JD-R model is particularly relevant due the large demands placed upon academic and technical staff. They are playing multiple roles as teacher, researcher, administrator, and industry interactor. This balancing act can result in burnout, unhappiness on the job and sometimes even attrition if they can't lean on organizational resources. By introducing a smart digital HR system, organisations can leverage the JD-R model as a key resource for jobs. For example, self-help portals could offload administrative burden, freeing-up staff to focus on their core academic or technical responsibilities. Furthermore, instant performance feedback and digital recognition systems can enhance motivation and engagement. It enables employees to grow and upskill by providing access to professional development modules and customised career planning tools.

A study by Hashim et al. (2023) found that digital HR systems significantly influence power users' perceptions of autonomy and support in Malaysian public organisations. This change resulted in less stress and better job retention. The platform's strength in delivering up-to-date and timely information can clear up any uncertainty regarding job demands, and leads to a favourable psychological well-being.

Furthermore, job resources, according to the JD-R model, not only buffer the negative effects of job demands but also promote positive outcomes, such as engagement, productivity, and innovation. In MTUN colleges, a smart HR system can be a determining factor in establishing a resource-rich working environment that contributes to these outcomes. By situating the platform within the JD-R model, this research highlights how technology can both alleviate job stressors and enhance motivational conditions. This dual result is crucial to maintaining a committed, high-performing workforce in MTUN organisations.

4.0 METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The study suggests a qualitative approach that could be employed in the existing literature by conducting a thematic analysis of all empirical and conceptual studies published from 2020 to 2025. The sources for the bibliography were drawn from reputable scholarly databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. To limit our search scope, the keywords 'smart HR platforms', 'university staff retention', 'technical universities' and 'digital HR systems in Malaysia' were used by the researchers. Also, researchers focused our inclusion criteria on works that were concerned with higher education and Malaysian Technical Universities (MTUN). In total, 32 peer-reviewed articles have been reviewed and classified into three themes: digital transformation, HRM in universities, and staff satisfaction, with a particular focus on the Malaysian context. The key point is that, rather than testing a hypothesis, our aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how digital HR platforms affect staff satisfaction and retention.

As a side note, with respect to our inclusion and exclusion criteria, the authors reviewed only the body of knowledge on digital HR solutions in higher education, most likely in home and developing countries.

On the other hand, researchers prioritized studies that were specific to MTUN or similar institutions in terms of their structure and objectives. Researchers excluded sources that lacked empirical data, relevant conceptual frameworks, or were not available in English or Malay. Researchers applied the Thematic Analysis Procedure, analyzing the collected literature using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis method: getting familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing the report. The major themes that emerged included:

4.1 Administrative Burden Reduction

A consistent challenge for MTUN institutions is the high administrative burden on staff, in part due to outdated systems and manual procedures. These outmoded ways of doing things not only make tasks take longer but also increase the odds of human error, miscommunication, and procedural delays. Research conducted by Zulkefli & Rahman (2023) finds that organizations which converted from traditional HR to a digital HR system experience significantly lower levels of administrative duplication and employee complaints, etc. The ease of use of online leave requests, automated approval workflows, and digital document storage has reduced the need for HR staff to process day-to-day tasks. This is a big change, as staff will now be able to manage all their own information and administrative submissions, enabling them to focus more on their academic and career development. This is how powerful autonomy is in this specific application.

4.2 Enhanced Engagement and Satisfaction

Employee Engagement is Key to Organizational Success! Smart HR programs enhance this engagement by fostering trust and creating transparency, by giving real-time insight and feedback on performance, by recognizing opportunities, and by recognizing staff importance.

Academic staff who use interactive HR platforms tend to trust their institution's management more and experience better communication (Lee et al., 2022). Personalized dashboards, training and development opportunities, alerts, attendances, recognition and rewards systems, and ex cetera are features that would enable and support a positive work culture. In MTUN educational institutions, staff often work cross-functionally across different units and functions. A smart HR platform serves as a neutral platform to encourage cooperation effectively and create a sense of unity.

4.3 Predictive Workforce Analytics

Incidentally, one of the most exciting features of smart HR platforms is predictive analytics. Utilizing the incredible insights that artificial intelligence and big data offer, these HR systems can even predict trends such as potential resignations, lack of skills development or departments in need of risk management. An experiment conducted by Nasir et al. (2021) found that at several Malaysian universities where smart HR analytics tools were tested, the use of predictive models led to a 15–20% reduction in voluntary turnover.

Not to mention, in instances of MTUN where losing technical staff can have a real, crippling effect on the operation of his institution and industry efforts, these predictive tools are priceless. They enable targeted actions, such as custom outreach, targeted training, and benefits redeployment, to help employees who might be at risk.

4.4 System Scalability and Integration

MTUN is a group of universities that, while sharing a common agenda aligned with a national goal to promote technical education and innovation, vary widely in their management maturity, digital framework preparedness, and human resource capabilities. For this, in creating and rolling out a smart HR system throughout the universities, it is necessary to emphasize scalability, modularity, and interoperability so that the implementation is not just successful but also sustainable.

In this context, scalability means the platform's capacity to scale up on the near side of the institutions by onboarding more users and handling larger volumes of data, without hindering the momentum of scaling. Flexibility allows the institution to select HR components based on its own needs and capacities. For example, a highly functioning HR department might opt for the full suite of advanced features, such as AI-led recruitment decisions, workforce modelling and planning, and performance dashboards. A campus with limited capacity might start with basic modules such as digital payroll, leave management, and manual employee records.

According to Farid and Ariffin (2025), these modular smart systems help gradually realise cost savings and provide institutional continuity with central policies. They further point out that modularity enables institutions to address local issues while adhering to national HRM strategies, giving each institution a balance of flexibility and centrality, which is especially important in a college or university with varying degrees of operational independence.

To position the smart HR platform from a systems-holistic viewpoint, it should integrate well with existing national digital frameworks, such as MyGovUC (Malaysian Government Unified Communication), and with public service databases administered by the Public Service Department (JPA) or the Ministry of Higher Education. This will enhance data interoperability, ensure regulatory compliance, and enable smooth automation of reports on audits, staff movements, and workforce analytics.

In addition, this merger can reduce redundancy and help ensure real-time data synchronization that is important for maintaining up-to-date records as it relates to contract staff, academic

promotion and inter-campus transfers. The digitization and consolidation of HR records available across MTUN institutions will also enable governance processes, enhance transparency, and improve institutional accountability. These features are imperative for the performance-based funding and outcome-based education (OBE) metrics now emerging in Malaysia's higher education arena.

Furthermore, the system architecture should align with international information security standards (e.g., ISO/IEC 27001) that govern the protection of sensitive personnel data and comply with national regulations such as the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) 2010. This will lend credibility to HR operational processes and would be especially helpful for external assessments required by regulatory bodies, accreditation bodies, and other stakeholders.

In conclusion, the research emphasizes that an intelligent HR platform with scalability and integration features not only improves operational efficiencies, but also allows HRM practices to strategically align across MTUN institutions. These parameters are fundamental to transitioning HR departments from an administrative function to a strategic force for institutional excellence and digital transformation.

5.0 DISCUSSION

In Malaysia's higher education context, specifically for technical universities under MTUN, many are currently trying to balance operational effectiveness with workforce sustainability. HR functions at these institutions can be particularly complex, given the nature of staff roles, multi-campus environments, and sometimes painful bureaucracy. As noted in the introduction, this research is intended to provide an HR management paradigm shift with a centralized smart platform, not just to resolve existing problems of inefficiency but to improve employee satisfaction and long-track retention.

It is often common for larger public universities in Malaysia to present problems with HR departments, which are often bogged down by antiquated systems and paperwork, and organizational culture to be reactive rather than proactive. HR departments can lose a lot of time on administrative duties such as paperwork, leave management, payroll processing, and performance reviews. For employees, this means longer service times, poor communication, and a sense of disconnection from administration. Such situations can damage trust, reduce transparency, and impact job satisfaction (Rahim & Awang, 2021).

Moreover, employee turnover, particularly among younger academic and technical staff, is increasingly influenced by the overall workplace environment and experience rather than by remuneration alone. When universities do not create a digitally oriented, responsive workplace where employees feel supported and able to thrive, their best employees leave for private-sector competitors or international institutions that embrace sophisticated HR technologies.

Our Smart HR Platform presents a complete suite of modern HR services for MTUN. It consolidates administrative processes and tasks into a simple platform that enables features such as online leave requests, leave approvals, access to electronic payslips, training and upskilling options, performance review appraisals, employee notifications, and student and lecturer support mechanisms.

Moreover, the integration of these services reduces the number of offices and disconnected platforms to navigate, enhancing the user experience and reducing the hassle of connecting with several parties, leading to a more coherent experience and giving staff ownership of their careers and administrative functions. The Smart HR Platform can also offer several advantages in fostering employee ownership and involvement, because if you're able to manage records

and performance management, and apply for positions independently, that shows institutional trust and acknowledgement. This aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the motivational advantages of using workplace resources that provide autonomy, clarity, and opportunities for development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Lee et al. (2022) have found that institutions have reported improved employee engagement, reduced administrative stress, and increased perceptions of transparency when using such a platform. In terms of MTUN, where many staff members often balance multiple roles, this transition is likely to further improve morale and productivity.

One of the main challenges the smart platform tackles is the overwhelming administrative burden on both HR staff and end users. Manual systems are inherently prone to errors, particularly when HR teams are short-staffed or racing against tight deadlines. Issues such as incorrect payroll entries, misplaced applications, and duplicate processes can undermine an institution's credibility and erode staff trust. By automating repetitive daily tasks and standardizing processes with built-in workflows, the platform significantly cuts down on these inefficiencies and improves staff engagement levels. Research by Zulkefli and Rahman (2023) found that automation in public university HR departments slashed processing times by up to 60% and significantly reduced administrative errors.

Additionally, real-time communication is another important capability of the proposed system. Whether it's a nudge on contract renewals, another update on leave statuses, or an alert about an upcoming training session, real-time and personalized notifications increase situational awareness and help to eliminate the situational lag that University staff often wrestle with. In larger institutions with several departments and campuses, real-time capabilities are a critical component to ensuring consistency and reliability in communication. In various MTUN institutions, where technical training and industry partnerships often necessitate more agile administrative support, real-time capabilities are vital to improving workflow and the timeliness of staff actions.

MTUN universities also have a unique responsibility when it comes to getting graduates ready for prosperity in Malaysia's rapidly progressing sectors including engineering, applied sciences, and emergent technologies. Achieving this requires universities to recruit and retain the right people. It means attracting and engaging not only traditional academics but also technologists, industry leaders, and researchers. A smart human resources platform can help with this and can offer a flexible, scalable, and people-centric HR policy. Moreover, it could help MTUN universities understand how people engage with their organisations, their training and development needs, and retention trends. MTUN leaders will have meaningful data to adjust their recruitment and training programmes or to understand targeted policy adjustments. Predictive analytics can also serve as an advanced tool for leaders, enabling early predictions of potential staff turnover or other signs of dissatisfaction (Nasir et al., 2021).

Moving forward, having smart HR systems will facilitate overall occupational health and safety practice, meaning that instead of looking at just measures of output like publications, grades, and the like, universities would start to look at measures of internal culture (eg., engagement, innovation, participation, and opportunity for professional growth). Qualitative measures that can help create not just an efficient workplace but one that is sustainable and prepared for the future.

6.0 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS IN MTUN SCOPE

The findings of this study have significant implications for MTUN institutions. First, the adoption of smart digital HR platforms supports the national higher education strategic plan, which

emphasizes innovation, governance reform, and digital empowerment. MTUN's vision of providing practical, industry-relevant education can be supported more effectively by adopting people-focused HR structures and practices and implementing efficient, transparent processes.

Second, these platforms would act as social enablers of new cultural changes. Digital HR tools will shift the ways staff members relate to their work and with each other, challenge notions of digital literacy and encourage accountability. This cultural change is vital, especially in technical institutions, which exhibit high inertia due to entrenched practices. Third, smart HR platforms are scalable and could be implemented as a system-wide application across all MTUN universities, providing a central opportunity for data analytics at the close of the proposed policy implementation while offering flexibility at the campus level. Data from integrated systems would directly influence national education policy and funding.

Finally, this study makes explicit the need for human centricity in digital transformation. As noted previously, technology is an important enabler. The success of digital systems ultimately depends on the extent to which the platform meets the genuine needs and interests of MTUN staff regarding career growth, job opportunities and job security, and work-life balance.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Implementing smart digital HR platforms at MTUN universities is a rational strategy to address perennial staff management challenges. Based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, the study signals that these platforms ease the administrative burden and may positively engage institutional involvement in motivation and engagement. Given MTUN institutions are focused on enhancing national developments in applied sciences and engineering, "strong bases" and intelligent systems will be key. Smart digital HR platforms can play a valuable role in human resources management by providing a unified, scalable, and data-driven approach. This may serve to enhance staff satisfaction, lower staff turnover and enhance MTUN institutional performance, since motivation includes organizational involvement as an element.

Moving forward, policymakers and university leaders should prioritize investing in digital HR infrastructure as part of broader governance reforms. Testing pilot programs, implementing user-centred design, and creating continuous feedback mechanisms will help ensure commitment to the long-term changes required for technology to be successfully adopted and embedded in future roles. In summary, the research argues there is a need for blowback on HRM in Malaysia in the higher education sector, in that technology and people need to be linked to form empowering futures in educational institutions.

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