

WORKFORCE-ORIENTED EDUCATION SYSTEMS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM AND MALAYSIA

SISTEMAS EDUCACIONAIS ORIENTADOS PARA A FORÇA DE TRABALHO: DESAFIOS E OPORTUNIDADES PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DE RECURSOS HUMANOS NO VIETNÃ E NA MALÁSIA

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Norhasni Zainal Abiddin*

*National Defence University of Malaysia, Malaysia
norhasni@upnm.edu.my

Ihsan Ro'is**

**Universitas Mataram, Indonesia
ihsanrois@unram.ac.id

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Abstract

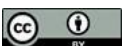
Human Resource Development (HRD) plays a critical role in supporting social progress, workforce readiness, and sustainable development. In emerging economies, workforce-oriented education systems, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), are essential for aligning skills development with labour market needs. This article examines the challenges and opportunities of HRD within workforce-oriented education systems in Vietnam and Malaysia. Using a literature-based review, the study compares national HRD strategies and workforce development approaches in both countries. The findings indicate that Malaysia demonstrates stronger education–industry alignment and skills-based training, while Vietnam continues to face challenges related to workforce readiness and skills development. The study highlights the importance of strengthening workforce-oriented education systems to enhance HRD outcomes in emerging economies.

Keywords: Human Resource Development. Workforce-Oriented Education Systems. TVET. Skills Development. Vietnam. Malaysia.

Resumo

O Desenvolvimento de Recursos Humanos (DRH) desempenha um papel fundamental no apoio ao progresso social, à preparação da força de trabalho e ao desenvolvimento sustentável. Nas economias emergentes, os sistemas educacionais orientados para a força de trabalho, incluindo o Ensino e Formação Técnica e Profissional (EFTP), são essenciais para alinhar o desenvolvimento de competências com as necessidades do mercado de trabalho. Este artigo examina os desafios e oportunidades do DRH dentro dos sistemas educacionais orientados para a força de trabalho no Vietnã e na Malásia. Utilizando uma revisão baseada na literatura, o estudo compara as estratégias nacionais de DRH e as abordagens de desenvolvimento da força de trabalho em ambos os países. Os resultados indicam que a Malásia demonstra um alinhamento mais forte entre a educação e a indústria e uma formação baseada em competências, enquanto o Vietnã continua a enfrentar desafios relacionados com a preparação da força de trabalho e o desenvolvimento de competências. O estudo destaca a importância de fortalecer os sistemas educacionais orientados para a força de trabalho, a fim de melhorar os resultados do DRH nas economias emergentes.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento de Recursos Humanos. Sistemas Educacionais Orientados para a Força de Trabalho. TVET. Desenvolvimento de Competências. Vietnã. Malásia.



1 INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Development (HRD) is a critical component of economic growth, workforce productivity, and organisational competitiveness, particularly in emerging economies. Within the ASEAN region, HRD supports labour mobility, skills development, and regional economic integration, yet significant differences remain in national HRD systems and workforce outcomes across member states. Vietnam and Malaysia present two contrasting yet relevant cases for examining HRD development in ASEAN. Vietnam possesses a large and expanding labour force but continues to face challenges related to labour productivity, skill mismatches, and workforce quality, despite sustained policy attention to HRD at the national level (Tien & Anh, 2019; Tran et al., 2021). Malaysia, by contrast, demonstrates a more mature HRD system supported by long-term investment in education, training, and skills development, although it faces emerging challenges related to talent retention and labour market disruptions (World Bank, 2021).

Beyond their differing stages of HRD development, Vietnam and Malaysia are selected for comparison due to their growing prominence in HRD-related academic publications and policy discourse within the ASEAN context. Both countries have generated a substantial body of HRD research, providing a robust empirical and conceptual foundation for comparative analysis. Examining these two cases therefore enables a meaningful comparison grounded not only in economic and workforce differences, but also in the depth and availability of scholarly evidence. Conceptually, HRD extends beyond Human Resource Management (HRM) by emphasising learning, capability development, and long-term human capital formation at individual, organisational, and national levels (Hamlin & Stewart, 2011; Alagaraja, 2013). National HRD systems play a pivotal role in shaping workforce readiness and economic resilience, particularly in periods of structural change and post-pandemic recovery.

This mini review article presents a comparative analysis of Human Resource Development (HRD) in Vietnam and Malaysia, focusing on national HRD policies and workforce development strategies. The study aims to identify key structural differences and policy-relevant insights that can inform HRD development in emerging ASEAN economies.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a comprehensive literature review methodology to examine and compare human resource development (HRD) practices, policies, and challenges in Vietnam and Malaysia. The process involved systematically searching for relevant articles, reports, and book chapters from reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and ProQuest. These databases were selected for their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and academic publications in the fields of business, management, and social sciences. To ensure the quality and reliability of the selected sources, the search was limited to peer-reviewed journals and publications from well-established international organizations, including the World Bank, International Labour Organization, and the Asian Development Bank, which are known for their authoritative research on economic and social issues.

The search used various combinations of keywords such as "human resource development," "human capital development," "skills training," "vocational education," "talent management," "labor market," "Vietnam," and "Malaysia." These keywords were selected to encompass a broad range of topics related to HRD in both countries, as well as to identify studies that directly compare their practices, policies, and challenges. The time frame for the literature search was primarily focused on articles published within the last five years (2018-2023) to ensure the review reflects the most current developments and trends in HRD. However, some seminal works and frequently cited authors were also included to provide a theoretical foundation and historical context.

The selected sources were critically evaluated based on their relevance to the research objectives, methodological rigor, and contribution to the comparative analysis of HRD in Vietnam and Malaysia. The literature review was organized thematically, discussing key aspects of HRD such as skills gaps, training and development initiatives, labor market dynamics, and the role of educational institutions and the private sector in both countries. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the current state of HRD in Vietnam and Malaysia, while identifying gaps and inconsistencies in existing research that this study seeks to address. The review highlighted the limited number of studies directly comparing HRD practices and policies between the two

countries and the lack of research on the impact of global trends such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of the gig economy on HRD in both countries. By identifying these gaps, this study aims to contribute a more in-depth and up-to-date comparative analysis of HRD in Vietnam and Malaysia.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Human resource development opportunities in Vietnam and Malaysia

In both Vietnam and Malaysia, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) represents a key opportunity to strengthen Human Resource Development by aligning skills-based education with labour market needs and industrial transformation. Vietnam benefits from a large and youthful labour force, which provides strong potential for workforce expansion, labour mobility, and participation in regional and global markets. Increased foreign direct investment and international trade agreements, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), have further stimulated demand for skilled labour and encouraged skills upgrading and workforce modernisation (Tien & Anh, 2019). Rapid adoption of science and technology also offers opportunities to enhance workforce capabilities in emerging and high-growth sectors (Hoa, 2020).

Malaysia, in contrast, offers HRD opportunities through its relatively mature institutional framework and long-term policy commitment to skills development. National initiatives emphasising Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), lifelong learning, and workforce upskilling support the development of a knowledge-based and competitive economy (Azizan et al., 2021). Malaysia's openness to international education and training collaboration further strengthens its HRD ecosystem and facilitates global workforce competitiveness.

3.2. Human resource development challenges in Vietnam and Malaysia

Persistent mismatches between vocational education curricula and industry requirements continue to constrain workforce readiness in both countries. In Vietnam,

key challenges include skill shortages, weak foreign language proficiency, and limited practical competencies among workers. Mismatches between education and labour market requirements restrict productivity and participation in global value chains (Song et al., 2020). Training opportunities are often unevenly distributed, with greater access provided to senior managers, limiting broader workforce development and knowledge diffusion (Tran et al., 2021).

Malaysia faces different but equally significant HRD challenges. Skill mismatches and shortages of technically competent workers persist, particularly in manufacturing and high-technology sectors (Abdullah, 2009). Workforce aging further complicates HRD efforts, as older employees often struggle to adapt to rapid technological change and digitalisation (Akinyemi & Abiddin, 2013). In addition, concerns related to talent retention and limited expansion of international HRD collaboration pose risks to sustaining workforce competitiveness in the long term (Sparrow et al., 2016). Table 1 shows the literature search on the progress of human resource development in Malaysia and Vietnam.

Table 1

Literature search on the progress of human resource development in Malaysia and Vietnam

Author, Year	Objectives	Country	Method	Sample	Theme	Main Findings
Hoa, N. T. (2020).	To look into the current situation of human resources in Vietnam	Vietnam	Literature Review	-	The landscape of human resources in and current challenges and solution of human resources	As a result of insufficient investment in training and weak competitiveness, businesses continue to incur training expenditures as the evaluation of training programmes also reveals gaps in their effectiveness. Preparing the workforce to fulfill and profit from international commitments is a prerequisite for the quality of Vietnamese human resources in the context of expanding international integration.
Tien, N. H., & Anh, D. B. (2019)	To study the issue in developing highly qualified	Vietnam	Synthesis analysis	Vietnamese government in human resource	The challenges of the Vietnamese government	- Vietnam has a lot of people resources, however their professionalism is inadequate. - Limited supply of qualified workforce.

	human resources.			development participating CP-TPP.	in human resource development.	
Song, N., Hanh, P., Cuc, M., & Tiep, N. (2020)	To study the factors influencing human resource for SMEs in the 4th Industrial Revolution.	Vietnam	Survey and interviews	Workers in SMEs in Thai Nguyen.	Challenges in HRD among workers in SMEs.	Thai Nguyen's employees in SMEs in particular, and Vietnam's human capital in general, lack not only professional knowledge but also problem-solving, leadership, and communication abilities in the 4th Industrial Revolution era.
Azizan, N., Pangil, F. and Zin, M.L.M. (2021)	To present an overview of human capital development in Malaysia	Malaysia	Literature review and document analysis	-	Overview of human capital development in Malaysia	- The fundamental platform for human resources capital reformation is the education and training system. - The government has taken various efforts to make sure that the education and training system is capable of improving the quality and accessibility of intellectual and skilled human capital in order to support the shift toward knowledge-intensive operations, ensure continued economic growth, and remain competitive on a global scale.
Widarni, E. L., & Wilantari, R. N. (2021).	To identify the importance of health and education data influence Malaysia's economic growth prior to COVID-19.	Malaysia	Quantitative Threshold Autoregressive	Secondary data from the World Bank	Role of training in human capital development	- Organizations must recognize and appreciate workers as their most precious asset. - Economic growth is influenced by and affected by health and education. As education strengthens a nation's human capital, it could also enhance human resources productivity and influence community performance.
Ismail, A., & Abiddin, N. Z. (2014).	To find out the issues and challenges of TVET education towards human capital development	Malaysia	Literature Review	-	Issues in human resources development	Malaysia employed around 12 million people in 2010, however only roughly 28% of them were highly trained, while 60% worked for small and medium-sized businesses. In 2013, there were 80,107 registered engineers in Malaysia, including 10,901 professional engineers.
Abdullah, H. (2009)	To study the challenges towards effective	Malaysia	In-depth interviews	HR managers	Challenges towards effective HR management	- The employment and retention of technical experts and a competent workforce is

	management of HR activities in manufacturing firms.					one of the crucial challenges in HRD in Malaysia. - The senior staff is not equipped to handle the growing reliance on machines as well as the swift evolution of technology
Van Hiep, N. (2021).	To suggest a system of continuously implemented alternatives to produce extensive high-quality human resources.	Vietnam	Literature Review	Secondary data	The background of human resources development in Vietnam	- The largest asset Vietnam currently has would be its younger worker population and huge labour resource. - According to estimations, 54 million residents would be working as hired employees in the range of age 15 and over in 2019.
Tien et al (2021)	To examine the challenges surrounding the development of human resource management for Vietnamese businesses	Vietnam	Observation Interviews	Management staffs at selected companies	The challenges in human resources in the selected companies	- There is a considerable gap between commercial demand and vocational graduates. - Each year, thousands of students graduate. - Nevertheless, there is still a labor shortage for a diverse range of job positions
Tran et al. (2021)	To find out human resource development in Vietnam	Vietnam	Literature Review	Secondary data	systematic examination of critical NHRD issues	- Many multinational corporations (MNCs) send their employees abroad for intensive training. - Only senior and middle managers are frequently the only ones who are subjected to these chances. - This unbalanced distribution of possibilities may have a negative impact on employee's morale.

4 DISCUSSION

These findings highlight the critical role of vocational education and skills-based training in addressing HRD challenges, particularly in supporting workforce adaptability, employability, and lifelong learning in Vietnam and Malaysia. One major challenge, particularly evident in Malaysia, is workforce aging, which requires organisations to reassess traditional age-based assumptions in human resource practices. To address this issue, HR professionals should prioritise performance-based assessments over age-based evaluations and promote continuous career development opportunities within

organisations. Encouraging intergenerational collaboration can further enhance knowledge sharing, adaptability, and organisational learning.

Globalisation presents both challenges and opportunities for HRD in Vietnam and Malaysia. Organisations in both countries must adapt recruitment, training, and expatriate management practices to remain competitive in increasingly internationalised labour markets. This includes aligning HR policies with technological advancements, regulatory requirements, and cultural differences across operating environments (Ismail & Abiddin, 2014). Providing adequate support for expatriates and ensuring HR personnel possess knowledge of international employment regulations can mitigate risks associated with cross-border workforce mobility.

Technological change, particularly in the context of digitalisation and Industry 4.0, further intensifies HRD challenges. In Vietnam, skill shortages, limited practical competencies, and uneven access to training restrict workforce readiness, while in Malaysia, older workers often struggle to adapt to rapid technological shifts. These challenges underscore the need for targeted reskilling and upskilling initiatives that emphasise practical skills, adaptability, and lifelong learning. Effective HRD strategies should therefore focus on strengthening education–industry linkages, expanding access to training beyond managerial levels, and ensuring workforce development aligns with evolving industrial needs.

At the organisational level, HR executives play a critical role in optimising workforce structures and supporting economic transformation. Systematic workforce assessments can help identify imbalances and skill gaps, enabling more effective recruitment, training, and career guidance strategies. Transparent communication of HRD priorities and strategic initiatives is essential to encourage employee engagement and participation in workforce development efforts. Collectively, these approaches can enhance human capital quality and strengthen HRD outcomes in both Vietnam and Malaysia.

5 CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that Human Resource Development (HRD) outcomes in Vietnam and Malaysia are closely linked to the effectiveness of vocational and

workforce-oriented education systems. Skills gaps and mismatches in both countries highlight the importance of aligning education and training with labour market demands through skills-based and work-based learning approaches. Stronger collaboration between educational institutions, industry partners, and HRD professionals is essential to ensure that curricula emphasise practical competencies, employability skills, and workforce adaptability.

The results further suggest that workforce-oriented education plays a critical role in addressing demographic and technological challenges, particularly in supporting reskilling, lifelong learning, and age-inclusive workforce development. Initiatives such as apprenticeships, internships, and work-based learning programmes can enhance education–industry alignment and improve workforce readiness in both countries. Overall, strengthening vocational and workforce-oriented education systems is key to enhancing HRD effectiveness and sustaining human capital development in emerging economies. Future research may examine the effectiveness of workforce-oriented education and HRD interventions across different sectors and contexts, including the role of digital technologies in supporting skills development and lifelong learning.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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