

TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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Abstract:

This systematic literature review examines talent development (TD) as part of the talent management (TM) approach taken by higher education institutions. The aim is to consolidate the conceptualisation of TD, its main themes and challenges, and potential TD research at higher education institutions (HEIs). Scopus and Web of Science databases were used for the article search. Employing a PRISMA protocol and meticulous rejection criteria, 57 articles were ultimately included in the review. The contribution of the review is that it systemises current knowledge about TD within higher education institutions and identifies transverse themes and tensions in the literature. The themes reveal contextual influences, higher education managerialism triggering new skills development, institutional support and alignment, the role of line managers, and underutilised and unstructured talent development. The potential avenues for future research include examining the socio-political and contextual factors that affect TD, adopting a multidimensional approach involving stakeholders and various actors, and exploring the systematic implementation of TD practices.

Keywords: talent development, systematic literature review, university employees, higher education institution

Introduction

The changing world of work is impacting Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and the academic setting can be vulnerable and affected by the so-called ‘war for talent’ – a term introduced by McKinsey & Company (Chambers et al., 1998). Universities are among multiple employers competing for highly skilled professionals, and recent studies indicate that some countries are already experiencing a persistent scarcity of talented individuals in specific academic fields (Brouwer et al., 2024; Sebola, 2023; See & Gorard, 2020). Factors such as globalisation, the heightened mobility of scholars, and the baby-boom generation’s retirement result in a dearth of academic expertise across various fields (van den Brink et al., 2013).

A country’s higher education (HE) sector fuels its international competitiveness and boosts its knowledge community and economy. A region’s gross domestic product per capita rises by 0.4% when the number of universities in that area increases by 10% (Valero & Van Reenen, 2019). HEIs are defined as “universities, university colleges, and other institutions that provide a post-secondary education and which normally involve an element of research and development work” (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007, p. 9). Intellectual capital of HEIs positively impacts their performance primarily through relational and structural capital (de Matos Pedro et al., 2022). HEIs must be managed effectively to attract talented, qualified employees and remain sustainable. However, HEIs find it difficult to attract talented academics “who are not only capable of helming the HEIs but are also respected intellectual or public leaders who can contribute to the development of nations” (Azman et al., 2023, p. 2). To remain competitive and sustainable, universities implement the public management trend of ‘managerialism’, which involves incorporating private-sector managerial approaches into public-sector establishments (van den Brink et al., 2013). This transition from a collegial to a managerial framework has led to alterations in human resource management (HRM) tactics, like talent management (TM), recruitment and selection, development, and individual performance management and retention (van den Brink et al., 2013). In this context, the interest in talent development (TD) has increased due to the competition to employ and develop quality staff to ensure a better future for organisations (Mousa et al., 2022). TD is frequently emphasised as a critical challenge for modern organisations that want to focus on developing the skills and competencies of current employees rather than relying solely on external talent acquisition (Garavan et al., 2012). Moreover, talent and leadership development practices positively correlate with the intent to remain in the organisation and affective commitment (Chami-Malaeb & Garavan, 2013).

In the academic context, talent usually refers to an individual’s scholarly competence as demonstrated by their previous accomplishments, research, teaching, and motivation (van Balen et al., 2012). Moreover, talent is also considered to be an amalgam of three components: “abilities, intrapersonal characteristics, and performance” (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015, p. 192). From the human resource development (HRD) perspective, TD involves “a set of values, activities, and processes” to develop individuals eager to enjoy the mutual benefits that arise from the combination of an individual, an

organisation, and society (Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016, p. 287). Garavan et al. (2012, p. 6) defined TD as “the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organisation has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organisational talent management processes”. TD is integral to advancing faculty members’ academic skills and professional growth while also driving changes to enhance the institution’s effectiveness (Phuong & Chai, 2018).

A significant amount of research focuses on the issues of various HRM tactics used in HEIs (e.g., TM). However, TD is still relatively absent from this literature, despite its importance for organisations and individuals (Kaliannan et al., 2023). Several systematic literature reviews have been published that demonstrate interest in TD. They encompass inclusive TD (Kaliannan et al., 2023), systematisation of the individual theories in TD (Naňáková & Dopita, 2024), thematic categorisation related to the individual, team, and organisational level (Tiwari et al., 2022), TD intervention antecedents and outcomes (Rezaei & Beyerlein, 2018) and the integrative literature review on TD understanding and implications for HRD (Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016). The rationale for conducting this systematic literature review is that TD poses new challenges in the context of HEIs and thus warrants a review of its own that can capture this unique setting through an appropriate methodological lens (e.g., including articles published in educational research) and a contextualised analysis (e.g., on the specificities of HEI jobs and competitive environments). The rationale for the study is substantiated by the claim that there is a significant need for research on TD in HEIs (Nijs et al., 2024) and that the context highly matters in the study of TM-related processes, as it affects their conceptualisation, implementation, and effectiveness (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020).

As one of the flagships of knowledge development, and considering its importance for the country’s growth, the HE sector involves academics with different titles and ranks (Åkerlind, 2005), and administrative and support staff with different development needs (Erasmus, 2020). The paper systematises and integrates the research on TD in HEIs, addressing the current literature gaps, identifying the main thematic areas and challenges, and outlining possible future research avenues. The concept of TD has potential and prompts essential questions about who should receive development opportunities, the extent of their development, and how they are developed. The purpose of this research is to conduct a systematic literature review of TD in the context of HEIs. It aims to explore (1) how TD is defined and conceptualised in the HE context among university employees (academic staff, administrative and support staff); (2) what theories and constructs are examined in the context of TD studies among university employees; (3) what themes and tensions can be identified regarding TD in HEIs; and (4) what further research directions can be identified as a result of this review. This systematic literature review contributes to TD in HEIs with the transverse themes and tensions identification, such as contextual influences, higher education managerialism, triggering new skills development, institutional support and alignment, the role of line managers, and the underutilised and unstructured talent development.

Review Method

The study employed the principles of conducting a systematic literature review, set out by Denyer and Tranfield (2009) in five steps: 1) formulating the research question; 2) locating relevant articles; 3) selecting and evaluating studies; 4) analysing and synthesising; and 5) reporting and using results. Web of Science Core Collection (WoS) and Scopus databases were used to search articles on TD in HEIs published from 1998 to 2024. The year 1998 was the starting point of academic and practitioner discussions, sparked by McKinsey & Company's hot notion of a 'war for talent' (Chambers et al., 1998), and scholarly literature highlights that the TM phenomenon was first mentioned that same year (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015).

The search string contained "employee development", "talent development", "talent management", "gifted employee development", "high performer development", "high potential development", and "talent advancement" in "higher education institutions".¹ The keyword choice was in line with the purpose of the study, research question, and search strings of the systematic literature reviews (Dries, 2013; Tiwari et al., 2022). The initial query produced 854 articles in WoS and 1191 articles in Scopus. We set up the automated tools available in WoS and Scopus, such as filtering articles using the English language, and document types in order to obtain peer-reviewed articles (article or review article or early access). Additionally, after applying the filter of Web of Science categories (management, education, educational research, business, industrial relations labour and public administration) and Scopus subject areas (social sciences, business, management, psychology) in order to narrow the search to relevant categories (Zhu & Liu, 2020) according to the research aims, the number of articles was reduced to 346 in WoS and 669 in Scopus as per December 1st, 2024.

The conceptual and search boundaries of the review were designed using the SPIDER tool (Cooke et al., 2012) to formulate the eligibility criteria of the articles for the review. The boundaries of the review (and, hence, its inclusion criteria) are the following: (1) sample (S) – academic, administrative, support staff (university staff) of HEIs involved in talent development; (2) phenomenon of interest (PI) – talent development-related practices; (3) design (D) – empirical studies, conceptual papers, reviews; (4) evaluation (E) – concepts, practices, challenges, outcomes and other aspects of talent development in HEIs; and (5) research type (R) – qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies. The systematic literature review protocol, along with eligibility criteria, is demonstrated in Table 1.

Purpose	To have a systematic review of existing literature related to TD in HEIs.
Focus	To review TD as part of the TM approach in the context of HEIs.
Period	1998-2024

¹ The search string used: ("talent develop*" OR "employee develop*" OR "talent manage*" OR "gifted employee develop*" OR "high performer develop*" OR "high potential develop*" OR "talent advancement") AND ("higher education" OR universit* OR academi*)

Portals	Web of Science and Scopus
Research areas	Web of Science categories – management, education, educational research, business, industrial relations labour, and public administration Scopus subject areas - social sciences, business, management, and psychology
Search phrases	“employee development”, “talent development”, “talent management”, “gifted employee development”, “high performer development”, “high potential development”, “talent advancement” and “higher education institutions”
Exclusion criteria	Articles published in languages other than English Conference papers, books and book chapters, monographs, theses, interviews, commentaries, and unpublished works Articles focused on TD of students, contexts outside of HEIs, or topics that deviate from the TD of staff within HEIs.
Inclusion criteria	(1) sample (S) – academic, administrative, support staff (university staff) of HEIs involved in talent development; (2) phenomenon of interest (PI) – talent development-related practices; (3) design (D) – empirical studies, conceptual papers, reviews; (4) evaluation (E) – concepts, practices, challenges, outcomes and other aspects of talent development in HEIs; and (5) research type (R) – qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies.

Table 1. Systematic Literature Review Protocol with inclusion and exclusion criteria.

A PRISMA protocol abbreviated from ‘preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses’ (Bailey et al., 2017; Fan et al., 2021) was used for reporting selected literature for the review, as shown in Figure 1. An eligibility assessment was done to select those articles complying with the research questions and criteria, following which 41 papers were removed due to the lack of relevance to the phenomenon of interest: the irrelevance to the context of the study; generic HR or TM practice discussed without a focus on the TD of university employees; a partial focus on TM and recruitment practices; or classroom, competencies, or professional development for school or student focus (see Figure 1). After screening and using the SPIDER tool, backward and forward reference, and author search, a total of 57 articles were retained for the study.

The selected articles were coded in an Excel table according to the predetermined coding scheme: bibliographic information, research methods, theories, talent definition, TD definition, TD methods, concepts, findings, challenges, limitations, and future research insights. This synthesis matrix was helpful to organise the sample articles into a detailed table and facilitated the identification of themes and synthesis. The analysis involved interpreting concepts across different studies through detailed line-by-line coding, breaking down data into specific codes and then organising them into more advanced theoretical themes. We summarised coding categories and mapped them under the thematic headings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). The next section presents an overview of the studies included (definitions, methods, and theories in the literature), while the following section presents the results of our thematic analysis.

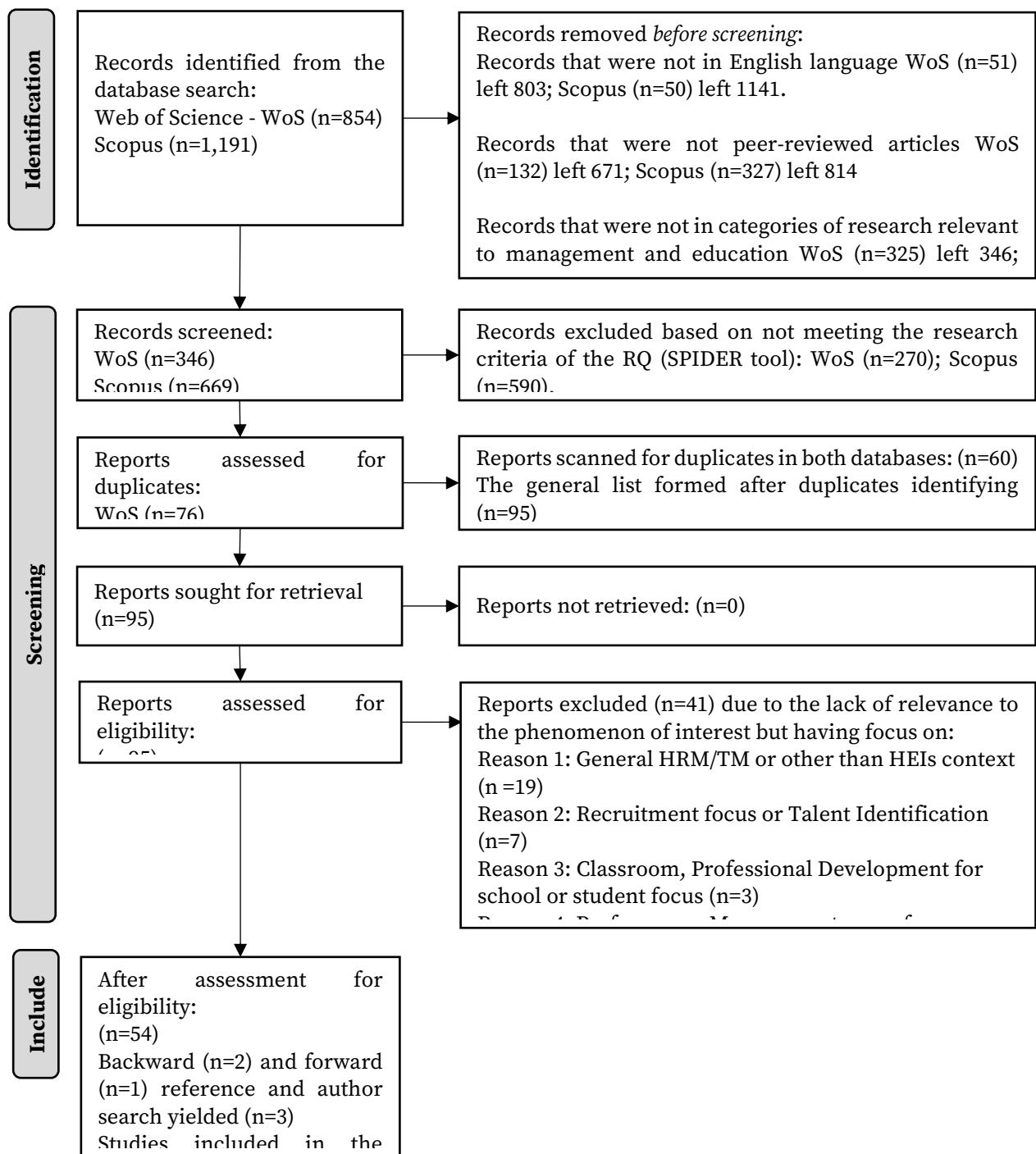


Figure 1. PRISMA flow of identification, screening and inclusion.

Results

Overview of Studies Included

In total, 57 articles were selected for scrutiny and formed the basis of the review. Although the time frame of the search started in 1998, the selected papers for review were published between 2009 and 2024. The number of chosen articles per year is illustrated in Figure 2. More articles ($n=12$) were published in 2022, demonstrating the growth of interest in research aspects of TD in HEIs. The contributions of the articles are summarised in Appendix 1 and elaborated further below. Despite a slight increase, few papers are still published on the topic of TD in HEIs. As evidenced by Nijs et al. (2024, p. 129), “research on talent development in the context of higher education is sorely needed”.

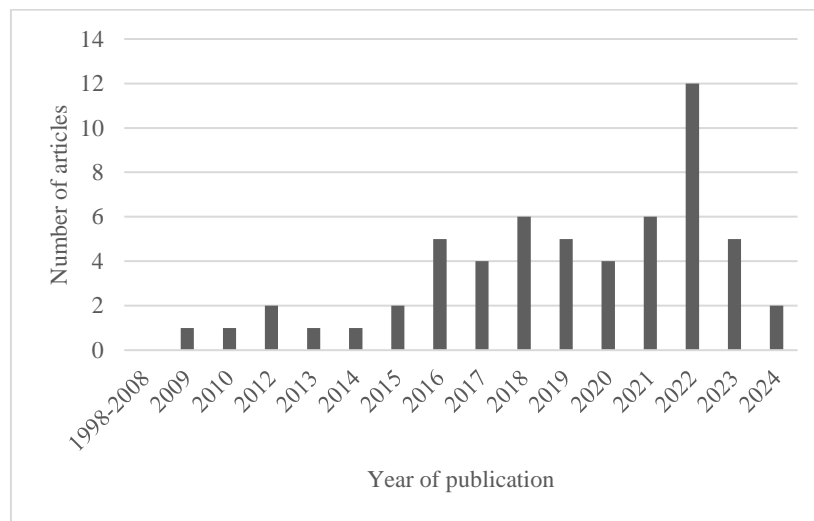


Figure 2. Number of publications per year selected for review.

Talent and Talent Development Definitions Proposed in the Literature

The articles do not provide a unanimous, all-encompassing definition of talent, as no description fits all contexts. Talent is a multifaceted notion that is not static but is context-dependent (Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). Several studies (Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Davies & Davies, 2010; Lesenyeho et al., 2018b; Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Saddozai et al., 2017) delineate talent as a trait contingent upon individual competencies and aptitudes, the surrounding environment, the organisation, and its internal conditions influencing these attributes. Considering the resource-based view theory, talent is regarded as a strategic and valuable resource to achieve a competitive advantage (Abdullahi et al., 2022; Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Ramaditya et al., 2022). Talented academics are crucial assets to ensure that a university remains on its path to meet academic objectives (AlQudah et al., 2023; Mohan et al., 2015). The concept of talent is not defined in some studies. Nevertheless, the examined articles all agree that talented individuals have unique value, make a difference to an organisation, and can help attain institutional goals.

Talent is conceptualised in different ways across academic disciplines and career stages (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). For example, entrepreneurial skills are mentioned as vital competencies for technical fields, while academics in the humanities highlight academic expertise, independence, and autonomy (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). Additionally, regarding career progression, at the beginning of the academic journey, intellectual abilities are emphasised more, while talented employees must prove themselves to be solid researchers. A university's success, ranking, and performance rely on the presence of expert faculty and staff, which thus necessitates investment in their development and retention by organisations (Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mousa et al., 2022).

The development of human capital is influenced by education, training, and the transfer of knowledge, skills, or talent, which is dependent on an individual's ability and willingness to learn (Azman et al., 2016). The reviewed articles mainly provide TD definitions in a general context. For example, TD represents a structured series of learning opportunities aimed at enhancing job-specific knowledge and skills (Mabaso & Dlamini, 2018). However, a different emphasis on leadership roles is provided by Davies & Davies (2010), who consider that TD involves a structured approach to nurturing leadership by defining clear roles, identifying the characteristics of success, ensuring a leadership pipeline, promoting open communication, and regularly assessing progress to address potential skills gaps. Most of the TD definitions provided concentrate on the diverse methods utilised within organisations to improve individual employee abilities (Abdullahi et al., 2022; Davies & Davies, 2010; Musakuro, 2022a; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Shah et al., 2024). TD programmes are designed and executed in response to skill gaps and developmental needs among university staff (Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Eghbal et al., 2017). In HEIs, TD is often referred to as helping individuals develop their skills, knowledge, and potential (Mabaso & Dlamini, 2018; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). Learning and skills development are crucial for talent-focused institutions to connect with HR processes, prioritise resources, and create the right environment for talent to thrive (Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Davies & Davies, 2010).

The concept of TD aligns with motivation theories that involve enhancing attitudes and efforts toward achieving a goal (Mohan et al., 2015; Renkema et al., 2009). Employee development significantly advances when organisations recognise employees eager to learn so that their interests align with developmental activities (Ooi et al., 2022). Organisations that prioritise TD and talent utilisation yield tangible benefits, including enhanced rankings, improved performance, advanced research capabilities, superior instructional methods and learning experiences (Mohammed et al., 2019), accredited publications by staff members, an increase in staff possessing doctorates, a heightened awareness of funding opportunities, and improved postgraduate supervision output (Lesenyeho et al., 2018a).

Research Approaches Used in the Literature

Among the reviewed articles, most of them (n=24) used the qualitative research approach, followed by the quantitative research approach (n=22), mixed method research (n=6), and conceptual papers and reviews (n=5). The studies that took a qualitative approach employed thematic and content analysis, while quantitative studies involved structural equation modelling, multiple regression, and factor analysis. More than half of the articles (n=31) do not mention theoretical stances of TD discussion, basing their research on developmental or managerial practices (i.e. coaching, mentoring, training, and development, etc). Interestingly, the lack of theoretical grounding was also noted in a systematic literature review of TM in hospitality and tourism compared to other fields (Kravariti et al., 2022). The shortage of theory use can also be attributed to the number of qualitative papers (n=24) using thematic and content analysis and guided by talent development practices. The qualitative papers do not always explicitly state the theoretical stance of the research, and are rather guided by an inductive approach (Collins & Stockton, 2018). The overview of the theories used in the sample articles is presented in the table in Appendix 1.

Talent Development Methods Discussed in the Literature

Universities can implement TD programmes to enhance career development policies and ensure a better work–life balance, leveraging working conditions and training to improve lecturers' skills and competencies (Ramaditya et al., 2022). The reviewed articles emphasise the importance of TD in organisations, highlighting various methods, such as formal and informal learning, training and development, coaching, mentoring, induction, challenging assignments, succession planning programmes, networking, leadership development, and career management (Abiwu & Martins, 2022; Hutchins & Kovach, 2019; Lesenyeho et al., 2018b; Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021). Such interventions can help faculties enhance individuals' learning for specific job tasks such as teaching, research and service, leadership, and administrative competencies, and help prepare them for promotion (Hutchins & Kovach, 2019). Formal learning typically pertains to the organised acquisition of knowledge within educational environments, while informal learning occurs through daily embodied activities in non-academic contexts (Van der Klink et al., 2014). Self-directed learning is identified as one of the most frequent development activities (Phuong & Chai, 2018). Academics consider that the highest-ranked learning experiences result from executing teaching duties (Van der Klink et al., 2014). The list of methods identified in the sample articles is presented in Appendix 1 and discussed in Appendix 2. As we have seen in this section, the literature on TD contributes to understanding TD in HEIs in multiple ways (see Appendix 1 and 2) and relies on several research approaches. We now analyse the transverse themes and tensions in the literature.

Transverse Themes and Tensions in the Literature

Following this overview of the approaches, definitions and methods proposed by the literature on TD in HEIs, we now discuss the transverse themes and tensions in the

selected articles. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the sample of articles. The data were extracted from the examined articles, categorised, and embedded into analytical themes (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The review identified several key themes, including contextual influences on talent development, higher education managerialism, institutional support and alignment, the role of the line manager, and underutilised and unstructured talent development. The transverse themes highlight the complexity and interdependence of factors and concepts shaping TD in HEIs. Appendix 1 maps the examined articles around these themes.

Contextual Influences on Talent Development

Contextual factors and the role of context are appreciated as influential in the study of TM and TD in several studies (e.g. Azman et al., 2016, 2023; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015; van Balen et al., 2012; Van der Klink et al., 2014). The research is conducted in different countries, and the number of articles is indicated as follows per the country: South Africa (n=16), the Netherlands (n=6), Malaysia (n=5), USA, Australia and Ghana (n=3), China, Jordan, Pakistan and Egypt (n=2), India, Indonesia, Iran, Namibia, Nigeria, Vietnam, UK (n=1), cross countries (n=3). The top three countries in these studies are South Africa, the Netherlands, and Malaysia. We can also observe that much of the research is done in the context of emerging markets. TD is critical for academics working in emerging markets because of the HE reforms, national and institutional strategy revisions, and comparatively less focus on research in the context of HE in these countries (Phuong & Chai, 2018).

The 'context' can refer to internal factors, such as institutional strategy and organisational culture, and external factors, such as national culture and HE system factors (Azman et al., 2023). A multi-level approach is recommended to define and research talent, taking into account both the interrelated elements of talent at the individual level, and the impact of factors at the organisational level, considering the interests and talent philosophies of the various actors involved in the process and impacting the system (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). For example, the effectiveness of leadership development is significantly influenced by culture, and multi-level research on the impact of cultural context on leadership is vital, particularly in most Asian countries (Azman et al., 2023). Cross-cultural issues are still largely under-researched and rarely incorporated into development, although this strongly suggests that they should be considered when designing leadership development in various countries (Azman et al., 2023). Contextual factors also shape the methods and policies that are implemented in TD. In the Vietnamese context, relationships with fellow faculty members and learning on the job were identified as two ways to encourage acquiring skills related to faculty roles (Phuong & Chai, 2018). Programmes must be adapted to fit the specific context in which they are implemented (Azman et al., 2023).

Managerialism of Higher Education

HEIs face rising demands to ensure quality and create new perspectives to meet current socio-economic challenges, which call for investments in the development of university staff (Osei et al., 2019). Stakeholders urge academic institutions to improve efficiency and quality (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015) and maximise performance (Ramaditya et al., 2022), putting universities on a trajectory of managerialism and creating a wave of politicised workplaces (Erasmus, 2020). The advent of neoliberalism, new public management, and managerialism has caused a shift at universities, leading them to focus on performance, metrics, and efficient and quantifiable output, and to prioritise managerialism over academic autonomy (Xia et al., 2023). There is a propensity to create HRM systems in HEIs comparable to those employed in commercial enterprises, giving rise to formalised TM, management by objectives, performance appraisal, and an academic 'publish or perish culture' (Xia et al., 2023). TM offers effective approaches to managing employees and dealing with the challenges that organisations encounter due to competition and talent shortage (Mohammed et al., 2020a; Taamneh et al., 2022). The transformation has led to an intensification of academic work because faculties are increasingly pressured to focus on productivity metrics rather than scholarly depth (Xia et al., 2023). Managerialism has penetrated the HE sector globally and influenced some of the traditional ethos, emphasising competition, efficiency, and incentivisation (Xia et al., 2023), and thus conditioning the development of new skills.

In this transition to a managerial model, over-managerialism is indicated rather than collegiality (Erasmus, 2020). Increased managerialism has triggered new skills and established their importance, such as entrepreneurship, cooperation, networking, and leadership, along with conventional academic competencies such as autonomy, an interest in science, and creativity (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). However, the race for effective management has spawned a politicised workplace and a silo mentality, so that some managers abdicate their responsibilities, pursuing their own agendas with possible negative impacts on employees (Erasmus, 2020), including TD intentions and opportunities. Academic staff and professors attempt to organise themselves into groups or unions to influence policies and decision-making, causing favouritism and using their connections to secure influential academic positions (Saddozai et al., 2017). This situation potentially creates a challenge because an overemphasis on managerial aspects might conflict with the developmental goals of the job, necessitating a balance between administrative efficiency and quality. Noteworthy, academics appreciate autonomy and flexible and meaningful work structures, signifying opportunities for growth and development and challenging hierarchical status and control (ChaaCha & Oosthuysen, 2023; Horne, 2017). The system is not adaptable enough to promote and retain employees who have proven their worth. Professors try to retain talented staff, making ambiguous promises they cannot keep. Unfulfilled promises, a lack of flexibility, unclear career prospects, and inadequate facilities for talented staff (van Balen et al., 2012) are issues that can potentially influence talent development. Thus, while managerialism has

generated improvements in efficiency and skills development, it risks undermining developmental needs if not balanced with academic autonomy and collegiality.

Institutional Support and Alignment for Talent Development

TD must be a priority throughout the organisation. An institution's vision, goals, organisational culture, structures, systems, and investments must align with plans for faculty development (Yadav & Monga, 2020). TD is influenced by various factors, including the organisational culture, top management's attitude, and individual employees' willingness to participate (Ooi et al., 2022). Universities must ensure the advancement of education, research, and skills development because finding talent sources and identifying talent needs influence research performance (Eghbal et al., 2017). The senior management team should ensure that academics are given appropriate opportunities to develop and grow (Mohan et al., 2015). The social cognitive theory posits that organisational goals may endorse or hamper academic career development (Barnes et al., 2021). Giving academic employees the support they need will ensure that human resource practices are maintained to sustain employees' attraction, development, and retention, thereby lowering the cost of turnover (ChaaCha & Oosthuysen, 2023). Organisations that want to retain their competitive advantage foster cultures that strongly support long-term employee development initiatives (Rahman & Nas, 2013). This kind of culture encourages and unleashes employees' enthusiasm, dedication, and performance, which in turn helps the organisation to achieve its mission, vision, and financial objectives (Lesenyeho et al., 2018a) and foster an environment where talent can flourish (Davies & Davies, 2010; Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024). Growth promotion via communication, resource allocation, and institutional policy and support can significantly increase the effectiveness of faculty development (Scott et al., 2023). In a favourable climate, and with institutional support, employee feedback on the enhancement of university processes can be invaluable (Saddozai et al., 2017). This integration of institutional support and alignment across various areas, from senior management commitment, policies, and structures to growth-promoting culture, demonstrates its key role in ensuring effective TD strategies in HE.

Role of Line Managers in Talent Development

TD emerges thanks to leadership and a commitment to developing academic talent in HE (Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Lesenyeho et al., 2018b), but line managers can also play a significant role that can affect TD negatively or positively (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). Institutions interested in development opportunities can contemplate how to convey human resource strategies through effective communication between managers and employees in order to strengthen line managers' influence on employees' intention to engage in development activities (Renkema et al., 2009). Managers should not only demonstrate their concern for the career development of their workforce, they should also make it a clear organisational policy, because employees' perceptions of their professional growth impact their intentions to leave, and are reciprocated (Rahman & Nas, 2013). In Dutch academic organisations, research demonstrates that support, coaching, and guidance for professors are frequently

impromptu and subject to a laissez-faire supervision style common in these institutions and based on the assumption of a 'self-propelling' academic career (Thunnissen, 2016). However, many early-career academics consider this approach unsatisfactory (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). Guidance and contact with a supervisor are influential in the development process, and the absence of a coach or mentor is often indicated as a reason for leaving (van Balen et al., 2012; van der Weijden et al., 2016).

The role of an immediate leader or department head cannot be undervalued (Erasmus et al., 2017; Horne et al., 2016), while it has been noted that appointed managers may lack managerial ability (Erasmus, 2020). Line managers' decisions and HRD policies can open up access to formal training opportunities (Van der Klink et al., 2014), and managers must assume responsibility and accountability for the outcomes of managing talent in their respective units and departments (Amushila & Bussin, 2021). Supervising managers who are serious about the growth of their staff have made significant investments in junior academics through strategies like succession planning and fast-tracking (Horne, 2017). Chairs of departments with strong leader-member relationships reported that they had adjusted their working procedures to make best use of the skills of their workforce while still maintaining a workload balance across the department (Horne, 2017). Line managers are responsible for identifying training gaps, analysing needs, determining the types of intervention, and ensuring their effectiveness (Gumede & Govender, 2022). Supervisors and leaders have a significant role in obtaining the resources necessary for training and ensuring the transfer of training and skills back to the workplace (Horne et al., 2016).

Unstructured or Underutilised Talent Development

TD practices are unstructured and ad hoc, based on a narrow, unilateral approach, and do not address all talent components (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). Findings demonstrate that biased, inconsistent TD programmes for academic staff result in unhappy employees (Mohamed Jais & Ghani, 2021; Saddozai et al., 2017). Most departments tend to have biased approaches (Saddozai et al., 2017) and fragmented policies regarding development, performance, and promotion (Thunnissen, 2016). Policies can advocate and outline training and skills development provisions; however, the pool of mentors is constrained and insufficient due to the low rank of academics (Azman et al., 2016). TD is subject to inconsistent results, as positive responses were reported in quantitative studies, and limited presence in qualitative studies (Musakuro, 2022a). Due to financial limitations, universities spend insufficient time on induction or orientation programmes to integrate employees into their systems and processes, with limited resources to support staff in training and development (Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021). Some methods are not utilised, such as job rotation and succession planning for leadership roles (Mohammed et al., 2020a).

There are also issues concerning unstructured TD within universities, including administrative and support staff. For example, university support staff is underexposed to development intervention, while development intentions that depend on psychosocial

determinants need to be stimulated (Renkema et al., 2009). Although the details of professional exit interviews are withheld, research results also observe few opportunities for advancement within the university administration (Amushila & Bussin, 2021). In addition, there is a lack of infrastructure for TD and insufficient opportunities for early-career academics (Lesenyeho et al., 2018a). Postdoctoral researchers also comment on insufficient training courses and assignments (van der Weijden et al., 2016).

One of the critical characteristics of TD is formal career-planning sessions for academics, and universities need to implement such programmes (Abiwu & Martins, 2022). However, lack of career development is one of the main reasons employees leave their jobs (Amushila & Bussin, 2021). The availability of research funding, secondments, teaching awards, and development opportunities can make up for the limited career opportunities on campus and foster a sense of purpose, direction, and unity with the home institution (Neri & Wilkins, 2019). Nevertheless, administrative and support staff have less defined career development pathways and fewer options for enriching tasks and extending their responsibilities (Renkema et al., 2009). Crucially, postdoctoral researchers have to strive for greater visibility within their organisations, and universities should be more transparent and open about their future career opportunities, both inside and outside of academia, given that postdoctoral researchers appear to be caught between their ambitions and a lack of academic career opportunities (van der Weijden et al., 2016). In the Dutch context, universities are unwilling to communicate clear pathways to talented staff, while career systems are rigid and tend to restrict opportunities for academic talents, as tenured positions only become available when someone leaves the institution (van Balen et al., 2012).

Succession management can help organisations overcome the risks of leadership succession (Amushila & Bussin, 2021) and support the transition when a senior member leaves, opening up the development of high-potential employees (Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021). Nonetheless, research results indicate challenges in implementing succession planning, along with a lack of systems, and universities are not ready to fill positions as they become vacant (Mohammed et al., 2020a; Musakuro, 2022a; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021). Limited succession planning takes place in institutions, and there is no guarantee that internal candidates can secure a promotion (Jackson & Allen, 2022). In some cases, the lack of a systematic framework for succession planning leads to ineffective, non-transparent, and inconsistent criteria for choosing programme participants (Azman et al., 2023). Many deans cannot implement succession planning due to uncertainty and the inability to select potential leaders. There is a tendency to select candidates that are a mirror image of the leading manager. The absence of a well-defined, systematic succession-planning framework in universities, coupled with leadership biases in candidate selection, poses significant challenges to ensuring leadership continuity and internal promotion, leaving institutions ill-prepared to fill key positions effectively.

The outlined challenges contribute to cyclical patterns, where TD is underutilised and unstructured, resulting in insufficient support for employee skills development and

growth. The issues relate to policy gaps, a limited pool of mentors, a lack of managerial ability, inadequate induction, unclear career pathways, and limited succession planning. As these deficiencies interact with each other, they function both as cause and effect, so that they are fed back into the TD system and form a loop that hinders universities from establishing a structured approach. The themes identified in the analysis of the selected articles reveal an interplay of factors that shape how talent is developed in HEIs. While distinct, each theme influences and is influenced by others, creating a dynamic system where dimensions interact with and influence talent development. This interconnectedness stimulates a holistic approach to understand the multifaceted nature of TD where no single theme operates in isolation, but where they converge to provide a comprehensive picture of TD.

Discussion

The above literature review aimed to explore how TD is defined and conceptualised in HEIs, examine the theories and constructs applied in TD studies within this context, identify key themes and tensions related to TD in HEIs, and propose future research directions. Research on TD is scant, as also evidenced by Kaliannan et al. (2023), and we observe a similar situation related to research on the HEI context. Nevertheless, the distinctive characteristics of HEIs, such as competitive pressures, contextual influences, and unique job structures, call for a more contextualised exploration of the TD process that can enhance our understanding of its effectiveness and the challenges involved. This review identifies five distinct, interlinked transverse themes that present the tensions involved in conceptualising and implementing TD at HEIs.

Contextual factors play a role in defining the concept of talent in a specific academic setting, making the notion of talent multifaceted and context-dependent. Previous research has shown that there are several approaches to the talent concept, including approaches describing talent as an object (talent as a characteristic of people), or a subject (talent as people), as inclusive (talent as all employees), exclusive (talent as high performers or those with high potential), or hybrid (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Phuong & Chai, 2018; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) state that diverse interpretations of talent may co-exist within the same organisation, as various abilities, skills, and attitudes are required. Studies acknowledge that adapting TD programmes across different educational settings and environments is critical. For instance, cultural factors influence leadership and succession planning, and the socio-political environment often shapes HEI implementation of development programmes (Azman et al., 2023).

Higher education managerialism has influenced the development of new skills, steering universities to a performance-based approach involving accountability and competition, which requires developing leadership and entrepreneurial capabilities alongside traditional academic competencies. Meanwhile, new managerialism also focuses on metrics, such as publication output, thus creating tensions between academic freedom and performance management (Deem, 1998; Xia et al., 2023). Still, there is a need to

implement systems that allow employees to excel by providing developmental opportunities and fostering motivation through appropriate policies and support (McDonnell et al., 2017). In turn, institutional support provides the cornerstone for TD, shaping opportunities for growth and development. Considering resource constraints, institutional management is under pressure to provide appropriate development opportunities (Scott et al., 2023). For example, institutional policies, systems and support have been recognised as obstacles to career development (Barnes et al., 2021). When an organisation does not provide clearly defined paths and trajectories, it may hinder the conversion of perceived support into intentions. The influence of management support on development intention might be improved by a better alignment between human resource strategies and manager–employee communication (Renkema et al., 2009). Unfortunately, some HEIs do not view training and development as a strategic tool that could enhance company performance; rather, they see it as a task that must be completed or a routine activity that wastes time and money (Taamneh et al., 2022).

TD is not only an HRD function; line managers should also be responsible for developing talent (Ramaditya et al., 2022). Research results demonstrate that employees are unhappy with management that implements biased and inconsistent TD programmes for academic staff (Mohamed Jais & Ghani, 2021; Saddozai et al., 2017). The administration often fails to grasp the broad dimensions of TD, its proper implementation, and the benefits (Erasmus, 2020). The limitations placed on managers to locate, train, and mobilise staff in particular areas have been described as ‘policy paralysis’. It has also been claimed that unrealistic hopes are created “because there are few job opportunities for upward mobility” (Erasmus, 2020, p. 91). The extent of the support institutions offer can influence how line managers nurture talent and how structured or unstructured TD programmes are.

However, many HEIs face challenges when confronted with unstructured, underutilised TD programmes that lack a formal development and career advancement framework. The challenges include ineffective training and development (Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021), insufficient resources, a shortage of talented leaders, and succession planning (Azman et al., 2023). Succession planning needs to be implemented systematically (Mohammed et al., 2020a). When senior members leave, institutions struggle to promote junior-level employees to senior positions (Musakuro, 2022a). It has been observed that managers who lacked adequate leadership abilities did not support the growth of their subordinates (Erasmus et al., 2017). Although identifying a leader is only one part of the process, development interventions, career advancement, mentoring, and coaching are required to nurture a good leader (Mohamed Jais & Ghani, 2021). The interplay of the transverse themes illustrates that TD in HEIs is a complex, dynamic process that requires a systematic approach to address the contextual, institutional, and managerial factors. Addressing the challenges in one area can have a ripple effect on another, highlighting the need for an integrated, holistic TD strategy for HEIs.

Suggestions for Further Research and Theoretical Implications

TD is still underrepresented in research topics (Garavan et al., 2012; Kaliannan et al., 2023; Nijs et al., 2024; Rezaei & Beyerlein, 2018), and further TD research is needed in HEIs. This section presents the potential research avenues and theoretical implications of the study. First, future research studies could apply a multi-level approach and systems-theoretical lens to comprehensively understand TD, its antecedents, practices, and feedback loops in HEIs. Considering the lack of TD policies and programme implementation, positive and negative feedback loops can be explored in the frames of the TD to find an equilibrium. To gain a thorough perspective on the TD system, the focus on external and internal contextual factors and a multidimensional approach to TD is encouraged (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015), taking into account the role of culture, external market demands, and their influences on practices (Rahman & Nas, 2013). Future research could investigate how national, socio-economic, and cultural contexts influence the design and implementation of talent development programmes. More empirical research is welcomed to examine the effectiveness and actual value of TD practices applying a multi-perspective approach (Thunnissen, 2016) and investigating how to systematically implement TD to facilitate targeted change management (Erasmus et al., 2017). A comparative analysis of the causes and effects of the TD of academic cohorts in HE should include various academic job levels in future research to build a holistic view (Lesenyeho et al., 2018b). It is also necessary to consider the interests and talent philosophies of various actors (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015) involved in TD. Given that HEIs are recognised as key drivers in fostering sustainable development, previous literature highlights the significant role of internal and external stakeholders in the development and recognition of the HEIs (Oliveira et al., 2024; Pedro et al., 2020). To obtain a more comprehensive perspective on TD and how it can best align with stakeholders' goals, research should also be expanded to include HE management, employees, students, and HRM departments via focus groups and interviews (Lesenyeho et al., 2018a).

Second, future research could examine the evolution of TD policies and use longitudinal archival data and interviews. For example, case studies have proven valuable, and their multi-level study design can deepen understanding (McDonnell et al., 2017). It is crucial to address theoretical fragmentation and the lack of theories in relevant research approaches to reinforce the conceptual development of the TD field. The examined articles indicated a lack of generalisability and a small scope due to their limited sample sizes, encouraging studies that consider a more significant number of universities. There is also a need for quantitative research, development of constructs (McDonnell et al., 2017), and evaluation of measurement instruments to ensure validity and reliability (Mohammed et al., 2020b). Future research could collect qualitative data from subordinates within the dyad to validate and strengthen the pertinent exchange behaviours linked to staff development (Horne, 2017).

Third, research could also take an institutional stance to examine how potential external pressures placed on universities may result in what is known as an isomorphism between

organisations operating in the same environment and three types of forces – coercive pressures, normative pressures, and mimic pressures (Taamneh et al., 2022). Investigating the employment relationship of talents in more detail would be stimulating, including the factors that explain whether or not a contract breach occurs and what happens when it does (Thunnissen, 2016). TD and university governance can represent future avenues for research, and the relationships between governance and practices could be explored. Collecting data about potential stressors and mental health, teaching hours, and marking quantity is necessary to get a clearer picture of increasing workloads (Gerhardt & Karsan, 2022) and ways to enhance TD considering job demands and resources.

Fourth, technological and social forces are reshaping the work landscape in many domains, including development (Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). Forthcoming TD research should identify future-oriented skills and methods that help create a flexible, technologically advanced workforce in academic and non-academic sectors. Research could help create flexible strategies for developing competencies that would result in highly valuable and added talent (Mohan et al., 2015). Additionally, further research can examine developmental projects, learning and development interventions, and social justice perspectives (Hutchins & Kovach, 2019). It is recommended that researchers from the fields of HRM, organisational psychology, strategic management, and public administration collaborate on a multidisciplinary study to address issues such as who is talented in HE, how to develop and evaluate talent performance, and the variables influencing the composition of the talent pool in various organisational settings (Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019).

Practical Implications

The study represents practical significance for HRD, university management, stakeholders, and public policymakers, who play crucial roles in reinforcing TD policies in HE. There is an implication that HRD professionals and university management should reflect on critical areas for intervention and focus on the need for strategic policy enhancement and a comprehensive approach to TD. Despite the benefits of TD presented in the examined articles and the review, TD is often viewed as unstructured or underutilised. There is a call for clarity and transparency in growth-related programs, career paths, and sustainable development of staff. The significance of developmental practices and a focus on internal talent is underlined to achieve benefits such as cost advantages and productivity (Oppong and Oduro-Asabere, 2018). Consequently, investment in developing internal talent pools or leadership pipelines is crucial for organisational performance. Institutions without a defined strategy for developing specific employee groups should establish a developmental plan and career growth pathways (Renkema et al., 2009). Strategising future objectives should align with TD to determine whether individuals can perform at leadership level, evaluate them for promotion, and examine their ethics and values (Davies & Davies, 2010). TD programmes play a significant role in improved performance, research capabilities, and enhanced instructional methods, leading to higher retention, with the success rate of developing

academics being more significant than outsourcing talent from open markets (Oppong & Oduro-Asabere, 2018).

Limitations

Before moving to the conclusion, we must first acknowledge certain limitations of our systematic literature review. First, the review was conducted using only two databases, WoS and Scopus, and the articles searched were in English. Using more databases (e.g., Google Scholar) and other languages could have led to more articles being retrieved, even though every database has its own limitations (Giustini & Boulos, 2013). Nevertheless, we believe that our backward and forward searches allowed us to retrieve a sufficient volume of articles. Second, the present review retrieved articles only from peer-reviewed journals, thereby excluding 'grey literature' and conference proceedings. Thus, there is a possibility that some relevant articles may have been omitted. Third, we decided to conduct a systematic literature review (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009) as it was the method most aligned with our research goals. However, we believe that other review methods could have been applied to the topic of TD in HEIs. For instance, a critical review could have shed light on more tensions and paradoxes in this literature, whereas a meta-analysis could have provided more robust answers as to the effectiveness of TD in HEIs. Fourth and finally, we decided to limit our review to TD, which is often practised and conceptualised as a part of the broader perspective of TM – as was also observed in the articles retrieved for the review. Thus, focusing solely on TD may have prevented us from exploring the interactions between TD and other forms of TM in HEIs.

Conclusion

TD is considered to be one of the most crucial TM practices, and there is a need for an inclusive and systematic approach to its implementation (Kravariti et al., 2022). This systematic literature review addresses the conceptualisation, theories and methods, transverse themes and tensions along with future research prospects of TD in HEIs. The interest in TD has grown, but TD is still an area that is underexamined in the context of HEIs. The review contributed to identifying the transverse themes and tensions, such as contextual influences on talent, managerialism in higher education, institutional support and alignment on TD, the role of line managers, and unstructured and underutilised TD. It is essential to foster support through leader-member exchange, a community of practice, collegiality, and knowledge sharing. Individual factors such as career stages, role clarity, and personal and career objectives also matter for the TD route of academics. Cultivating and implementing developmental opportunities seems like a path forward for HEIs to help scholars become excellent academics. Fundamentally, TD should be prioritised across HEIs, and organisational culture, structures, procedures, and investments should be aligned with goals for faculty growth. HEIs must address the gaps by creating a coherent TD framework that aligns institutional goals and staff development. This review underscores a holistic and contextually driven approach to TD, which is essential to the long-term success of HEIs and staff.

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Appendix 1. Overview of the Studies Included in the Review.

Topics		Authors
Overview: Definitions of talent		Abdullahi et al., 2022; Amushila & Bussin, 2021; AlQudah et al., 2023; Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Davies & Davies, 2010; Lesenyeho et al., 2018b; Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Mohan et al., 2015; Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019; Mousa et al., 2022; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Phuong & Chai, 2018; Ramaditya et al., 2022; Saddozai et al., 2017; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015; van Balen et al., 2012
Overview: Definitions of talent development		Abiwu & Martins, 2022; Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Azman et al., 2016; Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Davies & Davies, 2010; Lesenyeho et al., 2018a; Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024; Mabaso & Dlamini, 2018; Musakuro, 2022a; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohan et al., 2015; Phuong & Chai, 2018; Ramaditya et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2024; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015
Overview: Theories used to analyse talent development in HEIs	Human capital theory	Azman et al., 2016; Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Rahman & Nas, 2013
	Theory of planned behaviour	Renkema et al., 2009
	Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT)	Saddozai et al., 2017; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015
	Organisation-Task-Person (OTP) training needs analysis model	Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024
	Social exchange theory	Abdullahi et al., 2022; Azman et al., 2016; Ooi et al., 2022; Rahman & Nas, 2013
	Leader-member exchange theory	Horne, 2017; Horne et al., 2016
	Resource-based view	Abdullahi et al., 2022; Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Ramaditya et al., 2022; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021
	Institutional theory	Jackson and Allen, 2022; Taamneh et al., 2022
	HRM-process model	Thunnissen, 2016
	Psychological contract	
	Ability-motivation-opportunity framework	Bradley, 2016; Erasmus et al., 2017
	Social learning, path-goal theories	Scott et al., 2023
	Adult learning	Scott et al., 2023; Gumede & Govender, 2022

Overview: development used in HEIs:		Systems theory	Barnes et al., 2021; Osei et al., 2019
		Social cognitive theory	Osei et al., 2019
		Social identity	Osei et al., 2019
		Attachment theory	Coetzee et al., 2019
		Knowledge-based view of the firm	Abiwu & Martins, 2022
	Talent methods	Induction	Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Barnes et al., 2021; Gumede & Govender, 2022; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Van der Klink et al., 2014; Xia et al., 2023
		Training and development	Abdullahi et al., 2022; Abiwu & Martins, 2022; AlQudah et al., 2023; Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Azman et al., 2016; Azman et al., 2023; Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Bradley, 2016; ChaaCha & Oosthuysen, 2023; Eghbal et al., 2017; Erasmus, 2020; Galbraith et al., 2012; Gerhardt & Karsan, 2022; Gumede & Govender, 2022; Horne, 2017; Horne et al., 2016; Hutchins & Kovach, 2019; Lesenyehyo et al., 2018a; Lesenyehyo et al., 2018b; Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Mohan et al., 2015; Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019; Mousa & Ayoubi, 2022; Musakuro, 2022a; Musakuro, 2022b; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Ooi et al., 2022; Oppong & Oduro-Asabere, 2018; Osei et al., 2019; Phuong & Chai, 2018; Rahman & Nas, 2013; Ramaditya et al., 2022; Renkema et al., 2009; Saddozai et al., 2017; Scott et al., 2023; Shah et al., 2024; Taamneh et al., 2022; Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015; Van der Klink et al., 2014; van der Weijden et al., 2016; Xia et al., 2023; Yadav & Monga, 2020
		Mentoring	Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Azman et al., 2016; Bradley, 2016; Davies & Davies, 2010; Erasmus, 2020; Galbraith et al., 2012; Gumede & Govender, 2022; Horne, 2017; Hutchins & Kovach, 2019; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Musakuro, 2022a; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Osei et al., 2019; Phuong & Chai, 2018; Sancheznieto & Byars-Winston, 2021; Scott et al., 2023; van Balen et al., 2012; van der Weijden et al., 2016; Xia et al., 2023
		Coaching	Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Davies & Davies, 2010; Gerhardt & Karsan, 2022; Gumede & Govender, 2022; Horne, 2017; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Musakuro, 2022a; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Osei et al., 2019; Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015; van der Weijden et al., 2016

Career development	Abiwu & Martins, 2022; Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Azman et al., 2023; Barnes et al., 2021; ChaaCha & Oosthuysen, 2023; Coetzee et al., 2019; Eghbal et al., 2017; Erasmus et al., 2017; Erasmus, 2020; Gerhardt & Karsan, 2022; Horne, 2017; Horne et al., 2016; Hutchins & Kovach, 2019; Lesenyeho et al., 2018a; Lesenyeho et al., 2018b; Mabaso & Dlamini, 2018; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Mohan et al., 2015; Musakuro, 2022a; Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Ooi et al., 2022; Phuong & Chai, 2018; Rahman & Nas, 2013; Renkema et al., 2009; Saddozai et al., 2017; Sancheznieto & Byars-Winston, 2021; Shah et al., 2024; van Balen et al., 2012; van der Weijden et al., 2016; Xia et al., 2023; Yadav & Monga, 2020
Networking	Davies & Davies, 2010; Hutchins & Kovach, 2019; Lesenyeho et al., 2018b; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Ramaditya et al., 2022; van Balen et al., 2012; Van der Klink et al., 2014; van der Weijden et al., 2016
Challenging or stretching target assignments	ChaaCha & Oosthuysen, 2023; Horne, 2017; Horne et al., 2016; Mabaso & Dlamini, 2018
Succession planning	Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Azman et al., 2023; Erasmus et al., 2017; Erasmus, 2020; Galbraith et al., 2012; Horne, 2017; Jackson & Allen, 2022; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohan et al., 2015; Musakuro, 2022a; Musakuro, 2022b; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Oppong & Oduro-Asabere, 2018; Saddozai et al., 2017
Leadership development	Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Azman et al., 2023; Davies & Davies, 2010; Erasmus et al., 2017; Erasmus, 2020; Galbraith et al., 2012; Hutchins & Kovach, 2019; Jackson & Allen, 2022; Mohamed Jais & Ghani, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Mohammed et al., 2020b; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Oppong & Oduro-Asabere, 2018
Transverse: Contextual influences on talent development	Abiwu & Martins, 2022; Azman et al., 2016; Azman et al., 2023; Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015; van Balen et al., 2012; Van der Klink et al., 2014; van der Weijden et al., 2016
Transverse: Managerialism of higher education	Erasmus, 2020; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Osei et al. 2019; Ramaditya et al., 2022; Saddozai et al., 2017; Taamneh et al., 2022; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015; Xia et al., 2023
Transverse: Institutional support and alignment for talent development	Abiwu & Martins, 2022; Azman et al., 2023; Bradley, 2016; Barnes et al., 2021; ChaaCha & Oosthuysen, 2023; Coetzee et al., 2019; Davies & Davies, 2010; Eghbal et al., 2017; Erasmus, 2020; Horne, 2016; Horne, 2017; Hutchins & Kovach, 2019; Lesenyeho et al., 2018a; Lesenyeho et al., 2018b; Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024; Mohan et al., 2015; Ooi et al., 2022; Phuong & Chai, 2018; Rahman & Nas,

	2013; Ramaditya et al., 2022; Saddozai et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2024; Sancheznieto & Byars-Winston, 2021; Scott et al., 2023; Thunnissen, 2016; van Balen et al., 2012; Yadav & Monga, 2020
Transverse: Role of line managers in talent development	Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022; Bradley, 2016; Erasmus et al., 2017; Gumede & Govender, 2022; Horne et al., 2016; Horne, 2017; Lesenyeho et al., 2018b; Mohan et al., 2015; Mousa & Ayoubi, 2022; Rahman & Nas, 2013; Renkema et al., 2009; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015; Thunnissen, 2016; van Balen et al., 2012; Van der Klink et al., 2014; van der Weijden et al., 2016
Transverse: Unstructured or underutilised talent development	Abdullahi et al., 2022; Abiwu & Martins, 2022; Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Azman et al., 2016; Azman et al., 2023; Bradley, 2016; Erasmus et al., 2017; Erasmus, 2020; Galbraith et al., 2012; Jackson & Allen, 2022; Horne et al., 2016; Lesenyeho et al., 2018a; Mohammed et al., 2020a; Mohamed Jais & Ghani, 2021; Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019; Musakuro, 2022a; Musakuro, 2022b; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021; Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Omotunde & Alegbeleye, 2021; Phuong & Chai, 2018; Renkema et al., 2009; Saddozai et al., 2017; Sancheznieto & Byars-Winston, 2021; Taamneh et al., 2022; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015; Thunnissen, 2016; van Balen et al., 2012; van der Weijden et al., 2016

Appendix 2. Talent Development Methods Discussed in the Studies Included in the Review.

The studies included in this review covered a diverse range of TD methods, as detailed below.

- *Induction* is the first developmental encounter for new employees at work, to get to know the organisational policies, structures, specific practices, and routines (Amushila & Bussin, 2021; Gumede & Govender, 2022; Van der Klink et al., 2014; Xia et al., 2023). The lack of induction or orientation programmes may be one of the reasons why people leave their jobs (Amushila & Bussin, 2021), as employees cannot adapt to the workplace.
- *Training and development* are critical in HRD approaches to enhance employees' capabilities, knowledge, experience, and competencies (Abiwu & Martins, 2022; Gerhardt & Karsan, 2022; Musakuro, 2022b; Taamneh et al., 2022). Universities implement on-the-job and off-the-job training programmes (Xia et al., 2023). The significance of off-the-job training is that it enables academics to obtain knowledge and expertise from outside professionals (Ooi et al., 2022).
- *The mentoring process* involves guiding and assisting new employees to navigate challenging transitions by facilitating their progress, inspiring, leading, and providing them with training within the organisation (Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021). However, many universities face limitations in establishing a pool of suitable mentors (Azman et al., 2016).
- *Coaching* includes interaction with a professional coach, and the purpose is to support employees to perform better at work (Abiwu & Martins, 2022; Gerhardt & Karsan, 2022; Gumede & Govender, 2022). Coaching talent requires sufficient time (Mohammed et al., 2019), and it is necessary to increase employee engagement and achieve TD goals such as problem-solving capabilities and strategic thinking (Amushila & Bussin, 2021).
- *Career development* opportunities are prominent for personal growth and fulfilment, as they fulfil the psychological need to develop the necessary competencies for sustained employability and express the concept of self at work (Barnes et al., 2021; Coetzee et al., 2019). From an organisational perspective, career management involves intervention strategies and practices that plan and shape the development and progression of employees to align with the organisation's TM needs, ensuring a talent flow to create and maintain the required talent pool (Barnes et al., 2021).
- *Networking* can involve relationships within or beyond the university and function as a catalyst for informal learning (Van der Klink et al., 2014). Postdoctoral researchers and novice academics consider networks as essential in preparation for future careers and labour markets (van der Weijden et al., 2016).
- *Challenging or stretching target assignments* effectively develop junior academic staff (Horne, 2017). However, increasing workloads and administrative processes imply challenges and add to the workload of academic staff members (ChaaCha & Oosthuysen, 2023). These challenges can make it difficult for academic staff to focus on their research and teaching, which can harm their job satisfaction and productivity.
- *Succession planning* revolves around implementing a methodical process that aids in evaluating and developing employees to enhance performance (Erasmus, 2020; Galbraith et al., 2012; Jackson & Allen, 2022; Musakuro, 2022a; Musakuro & De Klerk, 2021). The strategy for succession planning involves creating a framework tool to identify potential replacements for senior members within the organisation.
- *Leadership development* refers to developing social capital and building networked relationships among individuals to enhance organisational effectiveness (Azman et al., 2023). In the context of HEIs, these programmes should target the professional development of deans, chairs of departments, and academics. Leadership development programmes are structured events that may take place off the job to meet for shared learning and development experiences that vary in content and delivery methods (Azman et al., 2023).