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EDITORIAL DESK

The Journal of Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Economy stands as a beacon of scholarly excellence, drawing upon a diverse spectrum of researchers hailing from the expansive West African region and beyond. This volume showcases 14 meticulously researched articles curated from contributors in Nigeria and the United States of America. The genesis of these scholarly endives can be traced back to the auspicious conference convened at the Lagos State University Makanjuola Lecture Hall, held in December, 2023.

These articles, characterized by their depth and precision, underwent rigorous scrutiny during the conference, with over 90 participants actively engaging in critique. Subsequent to this extensive quality assurance regimen and plagiarism checks, only 14 articles successfully met the standards set forth by the esteemed guild of the editorial team, in strict adherence to international best practices.

It is with great pleasure that the Board of Editors announces the second edition of the publication schedule of the journal. Our heartfelt congratulations extend to the authors whose papers demonstrated exceptional merit and successfully navigated the rigorous selection criteria. To future researchers, we extend our encouragement to strive for greater heights in their scholarly pursuits.

The Board of Editors appreciates the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Ibiyemi Ibilola Olatunji Bello, mni NPOM for providing the enabling environment for the conference and her directives to the editorial team for strong quality assurance measures. We believe in your leadership and concerted efforts at ensuring high standards for the journal publication.

Prof. M. O. B. Mohammed, FNAEAP
Editor in Chief

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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY USAGE AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN ERADICATION OF MODERN-DAY SLAVERY IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Modern-day slavery encompasses exploitative practices, including forced labour, human trafficking, and pressured circumstances where students and staff experience deprivation of rights. Eradicating these practices is crucial for creating an institutional environment that upholds human dignity, autonomy, and respect within educational settings. Therefore, the combination of digital technology usage and human resource management (HRM) practices has emerged as a powerful force in combating modern-day slavery. This paper explores the synergy of these two variables in the operative and managerial functions of HRM practices by conceptual theory rooted in virtue ethics and human rights principles for eradicating contemporary forms of exploitation. It explored secondary sources using a review of related literature to gather data, which was analysed using content analysis to highlight the transformative potential of HR digital tools in fostering ethical HRM practices. Furthermore, the paper recommends clear imperatives for educational institutions to proactively integrate ethical considerations into administrative practices, aligning with global efforts to eradicate modern-day slavery as the institution navigates the digital age. This paper catalyzes on fostering a heightened sense of responsibility, ensuring that ethical values guide decision-making processes across all dimensions of institutional administration.

Keywords: Digital technology usage, human resource management practices, modern-day slavery

Introduction

Universities face many different challenges as the higher institution landscape changes and technological innovation meets ethical responsibility. Digital technology has become an inseparable part of institutional life, altering conventional processes and opening up previously unimaginable opportunities. The merging of digital technology and human resource management (HRM) practices forms an intriguing connection within this innovative environment. However, as universities work through this integration (Stabell, 2020), a very important necessity becomes apparent: the eradication of modern-day slavery that is saliently prevalent within the walls of academic institutions. An overview of technology's transformative power and its ability to act as a catalyst in the continuous fight against modern-day slavery gives a new perspective and an overall shift in the academic paradigm (Craig, 2014).

According to Greer (2014), contemporary society is still plagued by modern-day slavery, a scourge that resonates with historical injustices and casts a stark shadow even within the ivory towers of academia. Exploitative activities like forced labour, human trafficking, intimidation, and subservience characterise modern-day slavery. Slavery in the modern era is against moral principles and human rights (Craig, 2014). This paper investigates the disturbing reality of ongoing exploitation in educational institutions, which serve as a cultural

unit of a larger society by acknowledging that, there is contemporary slavery in academic settings and highlighting how important it is for institutions to address this problem head-on and take innovative approaches to its eradication. The role of HRM in higher institutions is evolving to become more strategic in combating modern-day slavery and going beyond their conventional administrative duties. This transformation is distinguished by a commitment to fostering a positive workplace culture and synchronising the labour force with the ethical values of the organisation (Wilhelm et al., 2022). The central question of this investigation is the relationship between HRM practices and the need to eradicate modern-day slavery in universities. HRM can be a catalyst for transformation, particularly when it comes to integrating digital technology. This offers a chance to confront and eradicate the exploitation that taints the university community.

The dynamic force by which digital technology is reshaping HRM practices cannot be overlooked in the coordinated efforts to end modern-day slavery as it emerges as an ethical beacon. This study explores the usage of cutting-edge digital tools, such as artificial intelligence and advanced analytics, management software, and applicant tracking systems which so far offer undetected opportunities for locating, stopping, and dealing with instances of exploitation eating up the academia. Educational institutions must face the facts of contemporary slavery by negotiating the moral integration of digital technology into HRM. The implementation of these tools strategically has the potential to revolutionise HRM practices in academic institutions by strengthening ethical norms, preventing exploitation, and protecting human rights Kuzior *et al.*, (2023). Narrowing the focus, the urgency to ethically integrate digital technology into HRM core practices in operative and managerial functions within universities becomes apparent. Raharjanto (2021) argued that it underscores the strategic leveraging of digital technology as a pathway to eradicating modern-day slavery. The synthesis of HRM practices and digital tools creates a trajectory towards fostering *institutional* environments that actively champion ethics, human rights, and the eradication of exploitative practices.

Ethical Theory

Numerous ethical theories have been put forth over the years. Some of these include virtue, which holds that an action's morality is determined by the character of the person performing it, deontology, which holds that an action's morality is determined by its adherence to a set of rules, and consequentialism, which holds that an action's morality is determined by its outcome or consequences. All of these led to the development of ideas and models about the adoption and acceptance of technology from the standpoint of decision-making, which is connected to the ethical theory of moral behaviour. The Ethical Technology Adoption Framework of Davis (1986) thus draws upon ethical theories of virtue ethics theory, which originated with Socrates and was later developed by Aristotle (1566), coining in human well-being and happiness as keyed on virtue and excellence; utilitarianism; and deontology, which centred around the action of morality with a gritty view of its consequences. The Ethical Technology Adoption Framework aims to promote ethical HRM practices while balancing the ethical obligations of organisations utilising digital technology. Furthermore, it conforms to the principles of human rights, acknowledging the significance of safeguarding individuals from exploitation and maintaining dignity in the workplace (Bansal & Heath, 2023).

The components of the Ethical Technology Adoption Framework include ethical integration in HRM practice that focuses on principled implementation, which ensures that digital technology in HRM is implemented with a set of ethical principles guiding its use (“Digital Transformation Adoption: An Extended Step-by-Step Framework,” 2023). This involves

considerations such as transparency, fairness, and respect for human rights (Tabiu, 2023); Human-centric design expounds on technology for empowerment by emphasising the development and usage of digital tools in HRM that empower employees, protect their rights and contribute to a positive workplace culture. Human-centric design ensures that technology enhances rather than hinders ethical HR practices (Flores *et al.*, 2020). Ethical Data Governance: Establishes protocols for ethical data governance within HRM. This involves safeguarding employee data, ensuring privacy, and protecting against potential misuse of information (Hillman, 2022; Delacroix and Montgomery, 2020); Inclusive Decision-Making is an all-encompassing approach that encourages inclusive decision-making processes involving all stakeholders, including HR professionals, employees, students and external experts. This ensures that the adoption of digital technology aligns with diverse perspectives and ethical considerations (Fluyt *et al.*, 2023); continuous ethical auditing incorporates mechanisms for regular ethical assessments of the impact of digital technology on HRM practices. This involves ongoing evaluations to identify and address any emerging ethical challenges or unintended consequences (García-Marzá, 2017; Mökander, 2023). Applying the Ethical Technology Adoption Framework to the topic of digital technology, HRM practices, and modern-day slavery provides a structured approach to exploring how institutional organisations can ethically leverage technology to eradicate exploitative practices. This conceptual theory emphasises the need for conscious, ethical decision-making in the adoption of digital tools within HRM, particularly when addressing the sensitive issue of modern slavery.

Concept of Digital Technology Usage

Digital technology usage has revolutionised human resource management (HRM) practices, transforming traditional approaches into streamlined, efficient, and data-driven processes. One of the key areas where digital technology has made a significant impact is recruitment. Digital platforms, such as job portals and professional networking sites, have become integral for sourcing and connecting with potential candidates (Kirilmaz, 2020). Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms help analyse resumes, predict candidate suitability, and even conduct initial screening interviews (“Will Artificial Intelligence (AI) Replace Human Resource (HR) Jobs Completely?” 2023). Beyond recruitment, digital technology plays a crucial role in employee engagement and performance management. HRM systems and software enable the seamless tracking of employee performance, facilitating regular feedback and performance reviews. Real-time data provided by these systems allows HR professionals to identify trends, recognise high-performing employees, and address issues promptly. This contributes to a more agile and responsive approach to talent management (Jong *et al.*, 2023).

Moreover, the integration of digital tools in learning and development programmes has become increasingly prevalent. Online training platforms, webinars, and e-learning modules empower employees to upskill at their own pace. This not only fosters continuous learning but also aligns with the evolving needs of the workforce in a rapidly changing digital landscape (Dickter & Jockin, 2018). Time and attendance tracking have also undergone a digital transformation. Automated systems, such as biometric attendance and digital timesheets, not only save time but also reduce errors associated with manual tracking. This ensures accurate payroll processing and compliance with labour regulations (“Automated Biometric Attendance Management System,” 2018). Digital technology has brought about a paradigm shift in employee communication and collaboration. Cloud-based platforms and communication tools facilitate real-time collaboration among team members, regardless of geographical location. This has become particularly crucial in the context of remote and hybrid work models, allowing HR professionals to nurture a sense of belonging and connectivity

among employees. Additionally, data analytics and big data have emerged as powerful tools in HRM. By analysing vast amounts of data, HR professionals can gain valuable insights into employee behaviour, preferences, and trends. This data-driven approach aids in strategic decision-making, such as workforce planning, talent acquisition strategies, and diversity and inclusion initiatives (Mazour, 2018).

Concept of Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices

A conceptual review of human resource management (HRM) practices within the educational institution revolving around operative and managerial functions with digital technology tools plays a pivotal role in streamlining processes. Operative functions primarily involve the day-to-day activities essential for managing personnel, while managerial functions focus on strategic planning and decision-making. In the context of educational institutions, these functions are critical for effective administration and fostering a conducive working environment (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Operative functions in HR within a higher institution include recruitment, onboarding, attendance tracking, and payroll management. Digital HR tools facilitate a seamless recruitment process, from posting job openings online to screening applicants efficiently. Nawaz (2020) added that applicant tracking systems (ATS) help manage candidate data, making it easier for HR professionals to shortlist suitable candidates. Once hired, digital tools aid in onboarding processes, ensuring a smooth transition for new employees. Attendance tracking is another area where digital tools prove invaluable. Automated systems help monitor employee attendance, track leaves, and maintain accurate records. This not only enhances efficiency but also minimises errors associated with manual attendance tracking. Payroll management is a critical operational function, especially in a higher institution where diverse roles and responsibilities exist. Digital tools automate payroll calculations, tax deductions, and compliance, reducing the likelihood of errors and ensuring timely and accurate payments to faculty and staff. On the managerial side, HR functions involve strategic planning, performance management, and employee development. Digital tools contribute significantly to these aspects by providing data-driven insights. Performance management tools enable continuous feedback, goal setting, and performance reviews. These tools facilitate a more dynamic and transparent appraisal process, contributing to employee development and engagement. Strategic planning is enhanced through the use of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS). These systems consolidate data on workforce demographics, skills, and performance, enabling HR managers to make informed decisions. Additionally, Akshay and George (2016) argued that HR analytics tools offer insights into trends, helping universities plan for future staffing needs and skill requirements. Employee development is further supported by learning management systems (LMS) that enable the creation and delivery of training programs. These tools foster a culture of continuous learning, aligning employee skills with evolving demands in academia (Brion, 2020).

Modern-day Slavery

Modern-day slavery within the educational institution is a complex issue that demands attention and concerted efforts to address it. This distressing phenomenon goes beyond traditional notions of slavery and manifests in various forms, including forced labour, human trafficking, and exploitation. Understanding modern slavery within universities requires a nuanced exploration of the key facets involved (Dipietro, 2016). One facet of modern-day slavery in educational institutions revolves around labour practices, particularly concerning vulnerable groups such as migrant workers or those in low-wage positions. Universities, like any large institution, often rely on a diverse workforce, and some individuals may find themselves subjected to exploitative conditions. This can include inadequate wages, excessive working hours, and poor working conditions, creating an environment akin to modern-day

servitude (Brickell Bellows, 2016). Therefore, effective usage of digital technology tools identified in this study goes a long way in curbing subtle modern-day slavery of exploitation of Job candidates from kickbacks, bribery and corruption given to corrupt HR personnel to shortlist such individuals as the preferred candidates at the expense of the qualified candidates when technology is adopted during job selections and job interviews. Moreover, instances of human trafficking infiltrating academic settings have to do with individuals coerced or deceived into situations where they become victims of exploitation of rape or undue financial advantage of victims. Universities, with their global networks and diverse populations, can unwittingly become venues for the perpetuation of these heinous practices. (Walden, 2023).

A critical aspect of combating modern slavery in universities involves raising awareness and fostering a culture of vigilance. Educating higher learning institutions about the signs of exploitation and providing mechanisms for reporting suspicious activities are crucial steps in creating a protective environment. Additionally, according to Walden (2023), university organisations must scrutinise their supply chains to ensure that products and services procured are free from any association with forced labour or exploitation. Collaboration is key in the fight against modern slavery within academia (Dipietro, 2016). Universities, as centres of knowledge and influence, can collaborate with NGOs, government agencies, and other institutions to share best practices, conduct research, and develop policies that safeguard against exploitation. Sorna and Reza (2023) lent their voice to combating modern-day slavery by advocating institutional authorities to join forces with, stakeholders to establish a united front against modern slavery and work towards eradicating it from educational institutions.

Summary

This study underscores the significance of integrating digital technology usage with core HR functions in eradicating modern-day slavery and fostering ethical employment practices in all institutions of learning to create a robust framework for safeguarding human rights within the workforce. Digital technologies like automation, data analytics, and artificial intelligence are reshaping HRM in the modern world. Leveraging these tools can improve recruitment procedures, ensuring thorough scrutiny to detect potential signs of exploitation. These technologies also make it easier to keep an eye on staff well-being, which helps to stop cases of forced labour and abusive working conditions. HR operative and managerial functions are streamlined by contemporary digital HR tools, such as advanced applicant tracking systems (ATS) and management software. These tools enable efficient tracking of employee records, ensuring compliance with terms and conditions of service in the higher institutions, labour laws and ethics are followed. Moreover, these tools empower HR professionals to spot irregularities in work arrangements, providing a proactive approach to preventing modern slavery within the university system (Akshay & George, 2016; Nawaz, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendation

A multi-faceted approach to eradicating modern-day slavery in educational institutions through the integration of digital technology and human resource management (HRM) practices includes:

Educational initiatives to implement educational programmes for staff, students, and faculty to raise awareness about modern slavery, ethical employment practices, and the role of digital technology in mitigating exploitation should be set up. Curriculum contents on ethics and modern digital technology tool usage in relevant courses will instill a sense of responsibility among future professionals.

In addressing modern-day slavery, HRM should ensure transparent recruitment processes by

utilising digital platforms to ensure that all job opportunities are openly advertised and selection criteria are clear. More so, installing advanced applicant tracking system software will go a long way towards streamlining recruitment while minimising the risk of potential exploitation. The educational institution management, in conjunction with HR, should install whistleblower mechanisms by establishing anonymous reporting mechanisms using digital tools to encourage university members to report any suspicious activities related to modern slavery. However, the management needs to ensure that individuals feel safe and protected when reporting concerns, fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.

Data analytics tools for monitoring within the institutions of learning help HRM monitor employee well-being and detect patterns that may indicate potential exploitation issues. They also engage in regular data analyses for anomalies in work patterns, unexpected changes in behaviour, or other signs of distress. In addition to ensuring supplier due diligence to curb corruption in the system, digital technology usage should therefore be extended to manage and monitor supply chains, conducting thorough due diligence to ensure suppliers adhere to ethical standards. Taking advantage of technology to trace the origins of goods and services will therefore minimise the risk of inadvertently supporting exploitative practices in educational institutions.

Using collaboration and research to eradicate slavery in academia, it is suggested that educational institution management foster interdisciplinary research collaborations within the university to explore innovative ways digital technology can be employed to combat modern slavery and encourage partnerships with external organisations, leveraging shared expertise and resources.

It is suggested that AI or automated systems be installed to adhere to ethical guidelines and not contribute to or perpetuate modern slavery. This becomes effective with regular auditing and assessment of the ethical implications of automated processes within educational institutions. In the same vein, conducting regular audits of HRM processes and technology applications to ensure compliance with ethical standards should not be overlooked in implementing continuous assessments of the effectiveness of initiatives in eradicating modern-day slavery and adjusting strategies based on findings.

Engaging in international collaborations within institutions of learning, sharing best practices, and collectively working towards the eradication of modern slavery in higher education. Participating in global initiatives and conferences focused on ethical HRM and technology. Developing and enforcing clear policies within the educational institution that explicitly condemn modern slavery and outline consequences for non-compliance. Integrating ethical considerations into the overall educational institution policy framework, ensuring alignment with international standards. By integrating these recommendations, universities can actively eradicate modern-day slavery while upholding ethical HRM practices and leveraging the capabilities of digital technology.

In conclusion, the effective integration of digital HR tools into the operative and managerial functions of HR within an educational institution enhances efficiency, accuracy, and strategic decision-making. This therefore requires educational institutions to navigate the complexities of human resource management, as technology becomes imperative for staying agile and responsive to the dynamic needs of academic institutions in eradicating the menace of modern-day slavery, exploitation, forced labour, subservience, bribery, and corruption practices, including contractor- staff, student-lecturer, and student-student, thereby bringing

sanity and discipline into academia. Collective effort is essential to upholding the principles of human dignity and ensuring that institutions of learning serve as beacons of enlightenment and justice. Lastly, timely intervention offered as communication channels by digital platforms in learning institutions serves as a support for victims reporting abuse, ensuring a safe space for individuals to voice concerns without fear of reprisal.

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