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SKILL MISMATCH AND TURNOVER INTENTION AMONG GENERATION Z WORKFORCE IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This paper examines skill mismatch and turnover intentions of the Generation Z (Gen Z) workforce in Malaysia to understand how skills-related issues affect retention. It uses a quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire to collect data from Gen Z employees in different sectors within Klang Valley. Results reveal a relationship between skill mismatch and turnover intention, although weaker than other factors. The most significant factor affecting retention was generational mismatch, which refers to the gap between organizational practices and Gen Z employees' workplace expectations. Educational mismatch also emerged as an important issue, especially in employment conditions where employers and job holders are likely to experience problems across most employment levels. This study gives organizations insight into engaging in effective talent management considering the needs of the ever-evolving Gen Z workforce. The results are a starting point for further studies on retention and engagement strategies in an increasingly changing global labor market.

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Keywords: Skill mismatch, turnover intention, generation Z, talent management, Malaysia

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1. Introduction

Malaysian talent management is shaped by several factors including economic growth, demographic change, and shifts in the demand and/or supply of labor. Malaysia is also trying to become a fully compliant player in the global economy. To do so, Malaysia has recognized the need to formulate and implement management frameworks to manage talent more effectively. Malaysia's labor force is also starting to incorporate the younger members of Generation Z (Gen Z), those who were born in the late 1990s to early 2010s, who possess a different perspective, values, expectations, and aims. This cohort tends to value equality, work-life balance, career advancement opportunities, and alignment between personal and organizational values (Zahari & Puteh, 2023). Nevertheless, there is a substantial gap in the practices and consequently, a talent gap that endangers the sustainability of economic sectors is growing.

As for the widening talent crisis in Malaysia, it is the result of an aging workforce demographic, shifts in technology, an employee-employer mismatch, and more. Technology-savvy, and trainable workers are always in demand, yet Zahari and Puteh (2023) state that organizations do not invest adequately in training and contemporary relevant educational programs. Talent mismatch is the main contributor to the gap and higher turnover rates, as employees seek more compatible employment opportunities, career-wise and skill-wise. They state the contradiction is the increasing job-hopping, especially in the younger, Gen Z workforce, who, as employees, are more prone to leaving their jobs for better opportunities. Malaysia is increasingly faced with the challenge of recruiting and filling positions intended for the Gen Z workforce, given the age demographic and the employee turnover, which is also interrelated to numerous skill mismatches.

The skill differentials of Gen Z employees are quite complicated and require sophisticated assessments following the Person-Environment Fit Theory (Kristof, 1996) which suggests fulfilment of employees is linked predominantly to the alignment of their inner characteristics with the surrounding environment. Previous studies suggest that Gen Z employees have different workplace expectations at the workplace and, unlike their predecessors, prioritize meaningful employment, purpose alignment, technological workplace, and the absence of traditional employment perks (Fuchs et al., 2024; Stiglbauer et al., 2022) Thus, dealing with the mismatch of skills of this generation goes beyond how knowledge and skills are misaligned to the workplace, but also the extent to which values and expectations are managed, and the extent to which cultural alignment is practiced.

Local organizations are struggling to adjust to these new workforce dynamics. As Norreha et al. (2024) pointed out, traditional talent management practices in Malaysia are primarily top-down and focus on long-term employment relationships, which are not aligned with the expectations of Gen Z, who prefer flexibility, quick advancement, and meaningful experiences. Such a gap is manifested in various ways as a mismatch of skills, but the focus goes beyond the absence of technical skills to fundamental gaps in attitudes and expectations at the workplace.

In recent years, the turnover rate of the Gen Z workforce in Malaysia has become a major concern for employers. In a survey conducted by Randstad Malaysia in 2022, 29 percent of Gen Z employees aged between 18 to 25 years reported switching jobs to obtain a better work-life balance. On the other hand, in 2023, global employment dynamics continued to evolve. As stated in the Deloitte Global 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey findings, areas of concern arose in Malaysia for 65 percent of Gen-Z respondents, who

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were also employees in Malaysia, regarding their workloads, which resulted in fatigue, hence seeking new job opportunities. Early in 2024, it was reported that there were evolving expectations regarding resignation and voluntary turnover in Malaysia (SME Asia, 2024). Willis Towers Watson (WTW) calculated an increase from a national average of 16.5 to 18.5 percent between 2022 and 2023 respectively. It is forecasted that the increment will apply to 2024 as well. This data encompasses every workforce in Malaysia; however, the growing population of Gen Z from 2025 onwards will change these statistics, whereby that generation will form the majority of employees in Malaysia. Conversely, this data on turnover rates for 2024 is difficult to obtain due to a lack of statistical evidence or research specifically focused on Gen Z individuals. Still, the overall trend of increasing turnover rate, attached to an increase in Gen Z working individuals, indicates a change in Malaysia's employment atmosphere.

One of the major causes of the talent crunch in Malaysia is the problem of skill mismatch. This is defined as the situation where the skills that an employee possesses are unmatched to the skills demanded for the job, thus results in dissatisfaction and increased intention to leave. Evidence supports the notion that the employees most likely to be job hoppers are those who believe that their skillset is unutilized and underdeveloped. Even though there are gaps in the literature on this phenomenon in Malaysia, literature from other settings is clear that there is a considerable degree of frustration and disengagement that comes as a result of skill mismatches (Chavadi et al., 2021). Consequently, additional skills and employee engagement must be strengthened through targeted training in order to mitigate the gaps in retention of talent in an organization.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the concept of skill mismatch and its relation to the intention to turnover, particularly for Gen Z employees in Malaysia. Consequently, the goal of this research is to provide organizations with an understanding of the skill mismatch phenomenon in relation to their employee's intention to leave in order to assist those organizations in understanding the sector-specific demands of this new and pivotal generation so that talent management frameworks can be formulated. In this regard, this research puts forward the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between skill mismatch and turnover intention among the Gen Z workforce in Malaysia?

RQ2: Which dimension of skill mismatch is the most critical in influencing turnover intention among the Gen Z workforce of Malaysia?

Grasping these relationships can be fundamental in designing effective measures that reduce turnover and enhance employee morale. This paper also fills the research gap by providing insight into the ways academic and practical talent management in Malaysia can be improved. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a foundation for future studies exploring the broader implications of skill mismatches in various sectors, ultimately contributing to the development of a more resilient and competitive workforce in Malaysia.

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Turnover Intention

In an organizational context, turnover intention is the construct that represents the likelihood of an employee voluntarily leaving their job, as self-reported by them, within a specified period. It serves as an antecedent to actual turnover and is influenced by various factors such as job, organizational and environmental factors (Fukui et al., 2020). High turnover intentions may be associated with significant costs to organizations such as recruitment and training expenses, loss of institutional knowledge and lower motivation of the remaining employees (Oh & Chhinzer, 2021).

Previous data and studies have confirmed that job satisfaction is always inversely related to turnover intention. Employees with greater job satisfaction are unlikely to express intentions to leave their respective positions. According to the study conducted by Lyu et al. (2019), abusive supervision has an adverse impact on job satisfaction which has implications for nurses' turnover intentions. Employees who reported feeling satisfied with their job seem to deny the possibility of leaving their jobs. Similarly, Haileyesus (2019) argues that job satisfaction is essential for predicting turnover intention among university staffs. Thus, satisfied employees are less likely to think about leaving their jobs.

Balancing work needs with different job engagements leads to emotional attachment to the organization, which mitigates turnover intention. Güzeller and Çeliker (2019) suggest that strong organizational commitment creates a strong relationship between the employee and the organization, thus discharging a low turnover intention. This indicates that employees that demonstrate strong loyalty to an organization are less likely to consider voluntary resignation. On the other hand, if there is a weak attachment of employees towards the organization, the tendency of these employees to consider leaving the job may be high as they might not have an interest in their work (Rawashdeh & Tamimi, 2019).

The workplace environment has also been found to be a major factor affecting turnover intention. A supportive workplace environment which includes supportive management, effective communication and positive feedback can help build employee satisfaction in the organization which decreases the desire to quit (Rahman et al. 2024). By contrast, Zahari et al. (2020) noted that a strong feeling of stress and frustration at the workplace caused employees to explore opportunities elsewhere. Imran et al. (2020) established a link between job stress and turnover intention and stating that employees under high stress levels are more likely to quit their jobs.

One of the major reasons contributing to turnover intention is a skill mismatch. Jansen et al. (2023) states that employees who feel there is a shift or mismatch between their skills and the needs of the job have reported lower job satisfaction as well as a greater desire to leave the organization. Similarly, Fukui et al. (2020) found that community providers delivering mental health services and experiencing skill mismatches had a high intention to quit. These employees would then be expected to change jobs as they were not sufficiently utilized.

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2.2. Skill Mismatch

In terms of global labor markets, skill mismatch is a matter that requires serious attention, referring to the discrepancy between the skills that employees possess and those required by their jobs. Such mismatch can take various forms, including under-skilling, where employees have fewer skills than required, and over-skilling, where employees hold more valuable skills than are needed for the jobs (Kato & Koizumi, 2023). Dahlan et al. (2023) demonstrate the consequences of skill mismatch not only on the individual level, such as job satisfaction and turnover intention but also at the economic level, such as growth and competitiveness.

2.2.1. Previous Studies on Skill Mismatch

An increasing body of literature focuses on the relationship between skill misalignment and turnover intention in employees. For example, Dunan and Novita (2024) reported that skill misalignment significantly correlates with turnover intention and that underutilized employees seek employment elsewhere. This finding aligns with that of Kim et al. (2023), who asserted that firm-specific skills gained through training and development are positively correlated with lower turnover intention. This underscores the necessity for companies to invest in the training and development of firm-specific skills to retain talent.

Farooq (2022) also examined the outcomes of educational mismatches and reported that graduates with educational mismatches and low job satisfaction tended to leave their positions. Xu et al. (2020) conducted questionnaires that showed that Paediatric nurses in China had high turnover intentions, and respondents attributed their high turnover rate to the job scope and having too few skills to satisfactorily perform the job. A more complex investigation of Shevchuk et al. (2019) also found the interrelationships of skill mismatch, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. The authors claim that job satisfaction is the result of a skill mismatch that also generates work-life conflict and in turn reduces job satisfaction and increases turnover intention. Thus, the study clearly demonstrates the relationship between skill mismatch and turnover intention, indicating that closing the skill gap can reduce turnover.

2.2.2. Dimensions of Skill Mismatch

Skill mismatch remains a significant risk to employee turnover intention and job satisfaction. This phenomenon can be classified under several dimensions, which contribute to the challenges faced by employees in the labor market. The first dimension is horizontal mismatch, which occurs when employees find themselves in roles that do not align with their educational backgrounds (underqualified). For instance, graduates from specialized fields may end up in unrelated job sectors, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction and a higher likelihood of seeking alternative employment opportunities (Aigbogun et al., 2024). The other dimension is even more profound; it refers to vertical mismatch, which happens when people have the necessary job qualifications but exceed those of their current occupation. Research has shown that working in positions where they were overqualified is quite normal for many employees. Still, their job satisfaction drops dramatically and the turnover rate increases (Dahlan et al., 2023). This situation is common among young graduates who cannot find jobs that fully utilize their potential and valuable contribution, resulting in frustration and a desire to leave their jobs (Yaseen, 2020).

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Skill obsolescence is also a vital contributor to the skill mismatch. With the expanding industries and emergence of new technologies, some skills are bound to be obsolete and employees need to be trained and developed to sustain (Labrague et al., 2018). Those under skilled employees are more likely to experience turnover intention as they are incompetent. This is particularly relevant in fast-paced sectors such as technology and healthcare, where ongoing education and skill enhancement are crucial for job retention. A recent finding states that the soft skill mismatch needs to be recognized as well since it is one of the forms of mismatch. In the workplace, employers regard soft skills such as effective communication, teamwork and problem-solving as important, alongside technical skills. Some employees are very good in technical matters but do not possess the required soft skills. In such situations where technical skills are required, employees may become frustrated and give up the job (Haider et al. 2020).

Another dimension shaping the workforce and employment is generational mismatch, which has become prominent nowadays, particularly with the entry of Gen Z into the workforce. This generation comes with demands regarding workplace culture, technological proficiency, and adaptability. Younger employees with such expectations from the organization may ultimately be more likely to leave the company (Mayasari et al., 2024). This gap usually leads to dissatisfaction among the young and agitated employees, forcing them to search for other positions that are better or at least different. Technological mismatch implies the gap between employees' skills and the skills required by rapidly evolving technological advancements in the workplace. With the integration of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) into sectors, specific skills are no longer in high demand, and there is a need for cognitive abilities, adaptability and socio-behavioral skills (Goher et al., 2020). This shift creates a significant challenge for employees who may find their existing skills inadequate for new job requirements, leading to frustration and increased turnover intentions. They stated that technological shifts are the most critical factors leading to the difference in educational qualifications and even the skills acquired, which need consistent and continuous education. Consequently, they suggested that employees working in organizations must undergo changes and training, thereby reducing the incidence of technological mismatch.

Educational mismatch differs from all other factors in that it considers the mismatch between the education qualifications of an individual and the requirement of the job. This factor could either manifest itself as over-education, where employees possess higher education for their jobs, or under-education, where employees have lower educational qualifications than required (Kihong, 2018). This mismatch leads to lower job satisfaction and salary penalties which further indicate that there is a tendency for educational mismatch to negatively affect both (Somers et al., 2018). For example, health and engineering graduates reported having a lower educational mismatch level than those from less specialized programs (Jonbekova, 2015). Educational mismatch causes lower self-esteem and a greater intention to turnover as these employees will search for other jobs that will fit them better (Veselinović et al., 2020). The continuous collaborative effort of educational institutions and employers is added by Kucel and Vilalta-Bufí (2019) to point out that educational mismatch can be resolved through making sure that the taught curricula are aligned with the needs of the labor market for smooth entry from the institution into the workforce by graduates.

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2.3. Theoretical Framework

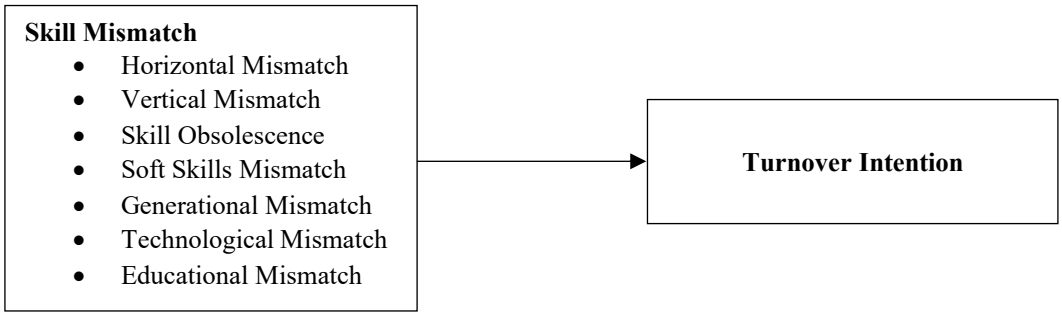

Figure 1. Theoretical framework

The diverse characteristics of skill mismatch among Generation Z employees require the theoretical integration of many recent frameworks. Recent studies by Merdiaty (2024) and Novel and Tresna (2024) highlight the significance of values-based alignment in forecasting employee outcomes, drawing upon Holland's Theory of Career Choice (Holland, 1997) and Person-Job Fit Theory (Edwards, 1991). This alignment is especially crucial for Generation Z employees, who exhibit increased sensitivity to the consistency between company culture and personal fit compared to earlier generations (Kästner & Mattutat, 2024).

Generational Cohort Theory (Mannheim, 1952) offers more theoretical foundations for understanding how each historical experiences influence workplace expectations. Generation Z, having encountered widespread technology, economic instability, and social activism, approaches employment with unique value orientations that prioritize authenticity, social responsibility, and work-life integration (Mishra & Pandey, 2024). When work environments do not support these values, it can lead to generational mismatch, which can cause individuals to have turnover intention and other withdrawal behaviors. A study by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (2023) on the skills mismatch breaks down vertical mismatch (qualification-job level incongruence), horizontal mismatch (field of study alignment), and developing categories such as technology mismatch and soft skill mismatch. Nonetheless, conventional frameworks may insufficiently reflect the complex nature of modern workforce dynamics, especially with Generation Z's prioritization of values alignment and meaningful employment (Widodo et al., 2025).

3. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between skill mismatch and turnover intention among Generation Z workforce in Malaysia. The target population consisted of Generation Z individuals who were born between 1995 to 2010, aged 18-27, and now employed in various organizations within the Klang Valley region. Klang Valley was chosen for its strategic location because it is Malaysia's main business center, with a wide range of industries and over 20 percent of the country's workforce (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). This geographic focus guarantees exposure to diverse organizational cultures and employment practices reflective of Malaysia's dynamic economic environment (Liew, 2023).

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From the sample size, at least 103 people needed to respond. Nevertheless, owing to limitations in data collection and accessibility issues during the study period, 64 respondents participated, constituting 62 percent of the intended sample size. Convenience sampling was utilized via online distribution networks, admitting the inherent constraints of representativeness but confirming its suitability for the current study. To participate, the respondents should be in the age 18 to 27, employed for at least three months, working in Klang Valley, and agreeing to participate voluntarily.

Data collection took place during one week using Google Forms. The structured questionnaire consisted of three sections; demographic (9 items), skill mismatch measurement (24 items across seven dimensions), and turnover intention measurement (8 items). All substantive items employed 5-point Likert scales (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) to maintain measurement consistency and facilitate parametric statistical analysis. The dimensions of skill mismatch were operationalized utilizing validated instruments from contemporary literature; horizontal mismatch (Somers et al., 2018), vertical mismatch (McGuinness et al., 2017), skill obsolescence (Jonbekova, 2015), soft skills mismatch (Haider et al., 2020), generational mismatch (Özer & Perc, 2020), technological mismatch (Goher et al., 2020), and educational mismatch (Teshome, 2024). Turnover intention was assessed using questions modified from validated measures (Kucel & Vilalta-Bufi, 2019), concentrating on the intention to leave the current organization within 12 months.

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic profiles of respondents and overall trends in skill mismatch and turnover intention. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire items. Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to explore the relationship between skill mismatch and turnover intention. In contrast, regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which skill mismatch predicts turnover intention among Gen Z employees.

4. Findings and Discussion

According to the analysis, most of the respondents were between the ages of 24 and 27, comprising 56.3 percent of the total respondents and over 56.3 percent were female respondents. A high percentage of 75 percent reported having a background primarily in the Business and Management area, with 57.8 percent possessing less than one year of working experience. The majority, 57.8 percent, possessed a bachelor's degree. Concerning employment status, 42.2 percent of the respondents were engaged in full-time employment, with the majority of 64.1 percent occupying entry-level positions. 31.3 percent of the respondents were employed in other industries such as fashion, gig economy, construction, and sales and marketing while 15 percent of them are government servants. Lastly, a significant proportion of respondents, 67.2 percent, indicated earning a basic salary between RM1500 to RM2000.

Table 1. Reliability coefficients for the variables

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Skill Mismatch	24	0.777
Turnover Intention	8	0.877

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Table 1 shows the reliability of the items used to measure skill mismatch and turnover intention. As for the skill mismatch, the 24 items have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.777, which means the items are reasonably consistent in measuring the variable. For turnover intention, eight items have a higher Cronbach's alpha of 0.877, indicating high consistency in measuring this variable. Generally, both measurements have acceptable reliability, so the items used are reliable for further analysis.

The identified correlation pattern explains theoretically significant insights regarding the dynamics of the Generation Z employees. According to Table 2, the moderate positive correlation between skill mismatch and turnover intention ($r = .275^*$, $p<.05$) corresponds with the predictions of Person-Environment Fit Theory, indicating that perceived incongruence between individual characteristics and job requirements stimulates withdrawal intentions (Haynes & Lowman, 2023). Nonetheless, the very moderate correlation value suggests that skill mismatch constitutes one element among an increased number of factors affecting turnover decisions among Generation Z employees.

Table 2. Pearson's correlation matrix for studied variables

Correlations									
Vr.	**HM**	**VM**	**SO**	**SSM**	**GM**	**TM**	**EM**	**SM**	**TI**
HM	1								
VM	.013	1							
SO	.445**	.370**	1						
SSM	-.198	-.003	-.059	1					
GM	.269*	-.351**	-.202	-.220	1				
TM	.202	.055	.071	.524**	.402**	1			
EM	.696**	.111	.675**	-.160	.112	.172	1		
SM	.739**	.311*	.670**	.113	.332**	.594**	.785**	1	
TI	.196	.045	.315*	.200	.469**	-.121	.305*	.275*	1

Note: N=60, *p < 0.05, **p<0.01, Vr=Variable, HM=Horizontal Mismatch, VM=Vertical Mismatch, SO=Skill Obsolescence, SSM=Soft Skill Mismatch, GM=Generational Mismatch, TM=Technological Mismatch, EM=Educational Mismatch, SM= Skill Mismatch, TI=Turnover Intention.

The significant relationship between skill obsolescence and turnover intention ($r = .315^*$, $p<.05$) is particularly remarkable, indicating Generation Z's increased emphasis on ongoing learning and skill enhancement. This finding aligns with Aljofan et al. (2024) indicating that younger employees value career advancement and skill development more than traditional job security. The relationship indicates that when Generation Z employees' sense that their skills are becoming obsolete, they actively pursue alternative employment options that more effectively facilitate their professional development goals. The educational mismatch correlation ($r = .305^*$, $p<.05$) supports theoretical assumptions concerning the significance of academic qualification-job alignment. Generation Z employees, having undergone significant educational investment, demonstrate sensitive to the underutilization of their qualifications. This relationship shows that this generation wants to do something that is important and makes the most of their education and intelligence.

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Table 3. The relationship between skill mismatch (horizontal mismatch, vertical mismatch, skill obsolescence, soft skill mismatch, generational mismatch, technological mismatch and educational mismatch) with turnover intention

Model	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	Sig
1 (Constant)		.000
Horizontal Mismatch	.008	.978
Vertical Mismatch	-.365	.119
Skill Obsolescence	-.177	.528
Soft Skill Mismatch	.080	.725
Generational Mismatch	.714	.009
Technological Mismatch	-.202	.320
Educational Mismatch	.078	.003

The multiple regression analysis provides significant insights into the various impacts of skill mismatch dimensions on turnover intention among Generation Z employees (see table 3). Most importantly, generational mismatch was the strongest predictor (β=.714, $p<.05$), showing a large effect size that has to be considered about thoroughly in theory. This research indicates that values incongruence between Generation Z employees and organizational cultures is a significant factor influencing retention outcomes, outweighing the influence of technical skill mismatches (Gorenaka et al. 2020).

The prevalence of generational mismatch corresponds with current organizational behavior studies highlighting the significance of values alignment for younger employees (Lee et al., 2025; Novel & Tresna, 2024). Generation Z employees, influenced by the growth of technology, economic uncertainty, and increased social awareness, possess unique expectations for workplace culture, leadership approach, and organizational goal. When these expectations clash with traditional organizational structures that prioritize hierarchy, long-term employment relationships, and conventional job arrangements, this results in misalignment induces psychological distress, resulting in increased turnover intention.

Educational mismatch exhibited notable predictive value (β=.078, $p<.05$), which is understandable given the significant investment Gen Z employees have made in their education. This relationship shows that Generation Z is more sensitive to not using their qualifications than other generations, which is sense given how much they have invested in their education and how much they expect to go up in their careers (Barhate & Dirani, 2021). The research indicates that Malaysian firms must meticulously align job tasks with employee qualifications to enhance retention outcomes.

The non-significance of horizontal mismatch (β=.008, $p>.05$), vertical mismatch (β=-.365, $p>.05$), skill obsolescence (β=-.177, $p>.05$), soft skill mismatch (β=.080, $p>.05$), and technological mismatch (β=-.202, $p>.05$) has theoretically fascinating implications. These findings indicate that Generation Z employees may exhibit enhanced adaptation to discrepancies in technical skills while maintaining a heightened sensitivity to discrepancies in values. This pattern suggests that this generation may be willing to learn new skills and improving their skills, but they are not prepared to give up on basic workplace principles and expectations.

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4.1. What is the relationship between skill mismatch and turnover intention among Generation Z workforce in Malaysia?

The result reveals a significant positive relationship between skill mismatch and turnover intention. This indicates that employees experiencing higher levels of skill mismatch are more likely to exhibit an intention to leave their organizations. However, the strength of this correlation is weak, as the correlation coefficient (r) suggests only a small association between the two variables. It further suggests that while skill mismatch may contribute to turnover intention, its impact is limited, and additional factors are likely to play a more prominent role in influencing employees' decisions to leave. The weak correlation implies that skill mismatch is just one of many factors that can influence turnover intention among the Gen Z workforce in Malaysia. Previous studies have highlighted those generational differences significantly affect turnover intention, with younger employees often prioritizing job satisfaction, career development opportunities, and alignment with personal values over traditional employment factors (Yu et al., 2022). This aligns with the current findings, suggesting that while skill mismatch is relevant, it may not be the primary driver of turnover intention for the Gen Z workforce.

4.2. Which dimension of skill mismatch is the most critical in influencing turnover intention among the Gen Z workforce of Malaysia?

Generational mismatch is the most contributing factor in turnover intentions among younger employees. It refers to the values, expectations, and work styles of different generations in the workforce. Studies indicate that younger employees care more seriously about job satisfaction, work-life balance, and organizational culture than any other generation. Therefore, when the job does not meet their demands in such areas, it can lead to a growing turnover intention (Alshehhi, 2024; Muguna et al., 2021). Most young employees desire to work in an organization that pursues meaningful work and, therefore, want to satisfy this with a supportive environment. Kenku et al. (2021) added that when organizations do not provide these elements, young employees will be more disillusioned and push towards looking for opportunities elsewhere. Strongly associated with turnover intentions, these could be related to the requirement of having the job aligned with employees' expectations. Presently, such a research area has so much relevance as young employees tend to leave sooner than older employees in cases where their jobs do not meet their personal and professional needs. Furthermore, ineffective leadership styles may increase dissatisfaction among younger employees and contribute to turnover intention Besides, it will likely be disappointed by its passing and cannot treat leadership styles that affect employee satisfaction. Good leaders, therefore, become helpful in putting the right environment in place that would preserve young employees' expectations. This transformational leadership, which uses motivating and engaging strategies in the workplace, has been shown to improve job satisfaction and minimize turnover intention (Njuguna, 2023). It even brings about disconnection and possibly dissatisfaction and turnover intention if the younger employees are affected by the lack of effective leadership (Alshehhi, 2024).

Most impacts on turnover intention stem from generational mismatch, but we should not underestimate the impact of education mismatch. Research shows that employees whose education does not correspond to their job roles exhibit dissatisfaction, low motivation, and an increased probability of

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resignation (Alshehhi, 2024; Muguna et al., 2021; Silva, 2024). This will create a feeling of underutilization of skills and qualifications and develop employees' frustration and detachment. Moreover, the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions is well documented. Mismatched educational qualifications and job requirements negatively impact employee satisfaction (Silva, 2024; Muguna et al., 2021). According to Alshehhi (2024), job satisfaction is directly proportional to employee retention, and it is difficult for an organization to address an educational mismatch before the turnover starts increasing as employees leave the organization for other positions better suited to their qualifications. Likewise, job satisfaction is not single-handedly interpreted; besides this, another critical parameter is continuous learning and development opportunities. Investments in training and development can also lessen the adverse effects of educational mismatch by improving engagement and productivity (Ibrahim, 2024; Alzahmi, 2024). Employees feel valued and satisfied when their organizations provide opportunities to further their education or training program and move toward their job roles. This ensures a culture of continuous improvement and loyalty among employees while eliminating the mismatch.

5. Conclusion

This study contributes significantly to the increasing body of research on Generation Z workforce dynamics by demonstrating that traditional skill mismatch conceptualizations may inadequately capture the complexity of contemporary employment relationships. The finding that generational mismatch (β=.714, $p<.05$) significantly exceeds technical skill mismatches in forecasting turnover intention questions traditional human resource management methodologies that emphasize technical competency alignment over values congruence (Lee et al., 2025).

Theoretically, these findings enhance Person-Environment Fit Theory by emphasizing the significance of values alignment for Generation Z employees. Previous generations were more prepared to accept differences in beliefs in exchange for job security or chances to move up in their careers. However, Generation Z employees seem to be unwilling to compromise on basic workplace expectations (Zahra et al., 2025; Reddy, 2024). This change means that there is a need to rethink what it means for an employee to fit in with an organization and put more emphasis on cultural alignment, purpose-driven work, and accommodating the values of different generations.

The practical implications for Malaysian organizations are significant and immediate. To effectively attract and retain Generation Z talent, organizations must significantly reinvent their employee value offerings, moving beyond standard benefit packages toward developing psychologically meaningful work environments. Specific recommendations include implementing flexible work arrangements that accommodate Generation Z preferences for work-life integration, developing leadership training programs focused on managing multigenerational teams, creating clear career progression pathways aligned with Generation Z expectations for rapid advancement, and establishing organizational cultures that emphasize purpose, social responsibility, and authentic communication (Rafaqat et al., 2022).

The fact that educational mismatch has a lesser but still substantial effect implies that technical skill alignment is still important, but it should be looked at in a broader context that values and meaningful work experiences. According to Chillakuri (2020), organizations should make investments in comprehensive job analysis and role design procedures. These processes should not only maximize the usage of employee

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qualifications, but they should also ensure alignment with the expectations of Generation Z for challenging and growth-oriented employment.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has some shortcomings that have been documented and serve as gate posts for future research. The size of the sample obtained (n=60) is too small to have adequate statistical power and this may have implications for the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to more accurately capture external validity and statistical power to draw findings from larger, probabilistic samples drawn from different areas of Malaysia. The cross-sectional design of the study, as such, has implications for the establishment of causation; longitudinal research designs are more likely to yield quality evidence of the time-ordering between the various skill mismatch measures and turnover. The sampling procedure also has its shortcomings as convenience sampling is associated with selection bias, so the findings may not be representative. Future research needs to incorporate stratified sampling across different sectors, sizes of organizations, and demographic characteristics to improve generalizability. In addition, more research is needed to clarify the factors through which generational differences affect turnover intention and involve certain key organizational practices and social arrangements that may exacerbate or cushion the effects of values incongruence. Also, the interplay of some other variables that may affect the relationship between skill mismatch and turnover intention needs to be analysed. Potential moderators include organizational support, quality of leadership, and avenues for career progression on the other hand, possible mediators include job satisfaction, commitment to the organization; engagement at work. Such research would lead to an understanding of the factors that such consequences of skill mismatch.

Author Contributions

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No conflict of interest.

Ethical Statement

Our institution does not require ethics approval for reporting individual cases or case series.

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