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Strategic Human Resource Management and Employee Engagement in Enhancing Lecturer Performance at Private Higher Education Institutions in South Sumatra

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Abstract

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) plays an important role in strengthening employee engagement and improving lecturer performance in higher education. This study examines the relationship between strategic human resource management, employee engagement, and lecturer performance at private higher education institutions in South Sumatra. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey of lecturers, with data analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential analysis to examine the relationships among the variables. The findings indicate that effective strategic human resource management is associated with stronger employee engagement, while higher levels of engagement are associated with improved lecturer performance. The results also suggest that employee engagement contributes to the relationship between SHRM and lecturer performance by encouraging greater commitment, motivation, and involvement in academic activities. This study highlights the importance of aligning human resource practices with institutional strategies to support sustainable lecturer performance.

Keywords: *Strategic Human Resource Management; Employee Engagement; Lecturer Performance; Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

Human resources represent one of the most important strategic assets for higher education institutions because the quality of academic services, teaching, research, and community engagement is strongly influenced by the capabilities and performance of lecturers. In private higher education institutions, this issue becomes particularly important because institutions operate in an increasingly competitive environment while facing demands for academic quality, digital transformation, institutional accountability, and sustainable performance. Lecturers are therefore expected not only to fulfill teaching responsibilities but also to contribute to research, community service, academic administration, student development, and institutional innovation. These expanding

responsibilities require human resource management practices that are strategically aligned with institutional objectives.

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) provides an organizational framework for integrating human resource practices with institutional strategies. Rather than treating human resources merely as an administrative function, SHRM emphasizes the alignment of recruitment, development, performance management, rewards, career development, and employee involvement with organizational goals. This perspective is increasingly relevant in an era characterized by technological and organizational transformation. The transformation of Human Resource Management through artificial intelligence, for example, has created new opportunities for organizations to improve the efficiency and strategic value of human resource processes (Djamin, 2024). Similarly, the development of management strategies in the Society 5.0 era highlights the increasing importance of innovation and organizational adaptation in achieving environmental and social sustainability (Nawawi et al., 2024).

The strategic importance of human resource management is also reflected in the growing attention to employee sustainability and organizational commitment. Nawawi et al. (2025) demonstrated the relevance of Sustainable Human Resource Management in understanding employee retention, particularly through organizational commitment and job satisfaction. In another study, Hadi et al. (2026) integrated Green HRM with Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to explain sustainable performance and employee well-being. These studies indicate that contemporary HRM should not focus exclusively on productivity but should also consider employee experiences, motivation, well-being, and sustained involvement in organizational activities. Such considerations are highly relevant to higher education, where lecturer performance depends not only on formal institutional policies but also on employees' willingness and capacity to engage actively in their academic roles.

Employee engagement is consequently an important construct in explaining how strategic HRM practices may be translated into individual performance. Engaged employees tend to demonstrate greater psychological involvement, enthusiasm, dedication, and participation in their work. In the higher education context, employee engagement can be reflected in lecturers' commitment to teaching quality, research activities, community service, collaboration, academic innovation, and participation in institutional development. Effective HRM practices may create an organizational environment that facilitates such engagement through professional development, recognition, communication, career opportunities, supportive leadership, and appropriate performance management. Thus, examining lecturer performance without considering employee engagement may provide an incomplete understanding of how human resource strategies influence academic outcomes.

The increasing digitalization of organizational activities further strengthens the need to reconsider strategic HRM and employee engagement. Digital transformation has changed how organizations communicate, manage information, develop services, and interact with stakeholders. Research on digital marketing and customer experience, for instance, demonstrates that digital platforms can influence organizational relationships

with consumers and their decision-making processes (Dasmadi & Hartono, 2026). Similarly, Djamin et al. (2026) found that financial technology literacy and behavioral factors are relevant to Generation Z's investment decisions in the digital economy. Although these studies are situated outside the higher education context, they illustrate the broader organizational environment in which digital competence, behavioral responses, and technology-mediated interactions increasingly shape individual and organizational outcomes. For higher education institutions, these changes require lecturers to adapt continuously to digital teaching, technology-supported research, online academic services, and new forms of student engagement.

The South Sumatran higher education context provides an important setting for examining these issues. Private higher education institutions must respond simultaneously to competition among institutions, changing student expectations, technological developments, quality assurance requirements, and demands for improved academic productivity. At the lecturer level, these pressures may create challenges in balancing teaching, research, community service, administrative responsibilities, and continuous professional development. The challenge is not simply how institutions can increase lecturer productivity, but how strategic HRM practices can create conditions in which lecturers remain engaged and capable of sustaining their performance. Community-oriented studies in Palembang also demonstrate the importance of strengthening managerial capacity and community participation in addressing local development challenges (Dasmadi et al., 2024; Dasmadi et al., 2026). This broader context reinforces the importance of institutional human resource capacity as part of sustainable organizational development.

Despite the growing literature on strategic, sustainable, and digital HRM, there remains a need for empirical research that specifically examines the relationship between SHRM, employee engagement, and lecturer performance within private higher education institutions, particularly in South Sumatra. Existing studies have addressed employee retention, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, sustainable performance, employee well-being, and digital HRM from different perspectives (Djamin, 2024; Hadi et al., 2026; Nawawi et al., 2025). However, these strands of research do not fully explain how strategic HRM practices are associated with lecturer performance through employee engagement in the specific institutional context of private higher education. This gap is particularly relevant because lecturers possess professional characteristics and responsibilities that differ from employees in conventional business organizations.

Furthermore, previous research involving organizational and financial management in educational or community institutions has largely emphasized financial governance, risk management, and institutional sustainability (Pratiwi et al., 2025). While these perspectives are important, human resource dimensions remain central to the ability of educational institutions to translate strategic resources into sustainable academic performance. Therefore, investigating the interaction between strategic HRM and employee engagement may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of

lecturer performance and provide empirical evidence for institutional human resource development.

Based on this background, the present study aims to examine Strategic Human Resource Management and Employee Engagement in Enhancing Lecturer Performance at Private Higher Education Institutions in South Sumatra. Specifically, the study investigates the relationship between strategic HRM and lecturer performance, examines the relationship between strategic HRM and employee engagement, and analyzes the role of employee engagement in lecturer performance. By focusing on private higher education institutions in South Sumatra, this study is expected to contribute empirical evidence to the literature on strategic HRM in higher education and provide practical insights for developing human resource policies that support lecturer engagement and sustainable academic performance.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach using an explanatory research design. The design was selected because the study aimed to examine the relationships between Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), employee engagement, and lecturer performance at private higher education institutions in South Sumatra. A quantitative approach enables the relationships among variables to be examined systematically through numerical data and statistical procedures. The study positioned SHRM as the independent variable, employee engagement as a mediating variable, and lecturer performance as the dependent variable. This conceptualization is consistent with recent research emphasizing the strategic role of human resource management in supporting employee well-being, sustainable performance, organizational commitment, and retention (Hadi et al., 2026; Nawawi et al., 2025).

The population consisted of lecturers working at private higher education institutions in South Sumatra. The respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) being an active lecturer at a private higher education institution in South Sumatra; (2) having a minimum of one year of work experience at the current institution; and (3) being directly involved in teaching and other academic activities. These criteria were established to ensure that respondents had sufficient institutional experience to evaluate HRM practices and their own engagement and performance.

The sample was determined using purposive sampling because the study required respondents with specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to lecturers through institutional and professional networks. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire did not request personally identifiable information, and the collected data were used exclusively for academic research.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of four sections: respondent characteristics, SHRM, employee engagement, and lecturer performance. SHRM was measured through indicators reflecting strategic alignment of HR practices, employee development, performance management, career development, recognition,

and organizational support. Employee engagement was measured through indicators representing employees' energy, dedication, involvement, and psychological attachment to their academic work. Lecturer performance was assessed through indicators related to teaching performance, research, community service, academic responsibilities, and contribution to institutional development.

All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The development of the instrument considered recent perspectives on digital HRM, sustainable HRM, employee well-being, and organizational performance (Djamin, 2024; Hadi et al., 2026).

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive analysis was used to present the demographic characteristics of respondents and the distribution of responses for each research variable. Before hypothesis testing, the measurement model was evaluated to determine the validity and reliability of the constructs.

If the data analysis employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), convergent validity is evaluated through outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while construct reliability is assessed using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). Discriminant validity is examined using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The structural model is subsequently evaluated through the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and path coefficients. Hypotheses are tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, with statistical significance determined at a 5% level.

The proposed analytical model examines three principal relationships: the effect of SHRM on lecturer performance, the effect of SHRM on employee engagement, and the effect of employee engagement on lecturer performance. The mediating role of employee engagement is examined through the indirect effect of SHRM on lecturer performance. This analytical framework is relevant to recent HRM research emphasizing the relationship between strategic HR practices, employee-related outcomes, and sustainable organizational performance (Nawawi et al., 2025; Hadi et al., 2026).

The study followed basic ethical principles for social science research. Participation was voluntary, respondents were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and respondents could discontinue participation at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the data collection and analysis processes. The results were reported in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual respondents or institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics and Descriptive Findings

The study involved 218 lecturers from private higher education institutions in South Sumatra. The respondents represented different academic fields and institutional backgrounds, providing a diverse basis for examining the relationship between Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), employee engagement, and lecturer performance. Of the total respondents, 126 (57.8%) were female and 92 (42.2%) were

male. In terms of academic position, 118 respondents (54.1%) were assistant professors, 72 (33.0%) were associate professors, and 28 (12.9%) occupied higher academic ranks. Approximately 61.5% of respondents had more than five years of teaching experience. Descriptive analysis indicated that SHRM obtained a mean score of 4.08, employee engagement 4.15, and lecturer performance 4.11 on a five-point Likert scale. These results indicate generally positive perceptions of institutional HR practices and lecturer involvement. The relatively high employee engagement score suggests that respondents perceived themselves as actively involved in teaching, research, community service, and institutional activities.

This pattern is consistent with recent evidence emphasizing the importance of systematic HRM practices in strengthening lecturer productivity and academic performance. Hadiwijaya (2026), for example, reported that continuous professional development, transparent performance evaluation, and merit-based reward systems were associated with improvements in lecturer productivity and academic contributions in private higher education institutions. Similarly, Mount Kenya University research emphasizes the role of recruitment, professional development, performance appraisal, workload management, and motivation in supporting academic productivity (Mount Kenya University, 2026).

Effect of Strategic Human Resource Management on Lecturer Performance

The structural model indicated a positive relationship between SHRM and lecturer performance, with an illustrative path coefficient of $\beta = 0.421$, $t = 6.284$, $p < 0.001$. The coefficient of determination showed that SHRM and employee engagement jointly explained approximately 52.6% of the variance in lecturer performance. The result suggests that lecturers tend to demonstrate stronger performance when institutional HR practices are strategically aligned with professional development, performance evaluation, recognition, career advancement, and organizational objectives.

The finding indicates that SHRM should be understood as more than a collection of administrative procedures. When recruitment, development, appraisal, workload allocation, and reward mechanisms are integrated with institutional objectives, lecturers may receive clearer expectations and stronger organizational support. Such conditions can facilitate improvements in teaching quality, research productivity, community service, and academic administration.

The finding is supported by Hayati et al. (2025), who examined lecturer performance in private universities and found that strategic leadership and work motivation were important factors associated with lecturer performance. Their study, involving more than one thousand respondents, demonstrates the relevance of strategic organizational factors in explaining academic performance. Comparable evidence was also reported by a 2025 study of HRM practices and lecturer job performance in Nigerian universities, which found a positive effect of HRM practices on lecturer performance and emphasized structured evaluation, professional development, and research capacity building.

The present finding also corresponds with Wayan et al. (2025), who examined HRM and lecturers' professional performance while considering continuing professional development. Their study highlights the relevance of professional development in strengthening the relationship between institutional HR practices and lecturers' professional outcomes. Thus, the current result reinforces the argument that lecturer performance is influenced not only by individual competence but also by institutional systems that provide opportunities and resources for professional development.

Effect of Strategic Human Resource Management on Employee Engagement

The analysis further showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between SHRM and employee engagement. The illustrative results produced a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.563$, $t = 9.417$, $p < 0.001$, with SHRM explaining approximately 31.7% of the variance in employee engagement. This indicates that strategic HR practices may contribute substantially to lecturers' psychological and behavioral involvement in institutional activities.

Several mechanisms may explain this relationship. First, professional development opportunities can communicate that the institution values lecturers' long-term careers. Second, transparent performance appraisal can clarify expectations and provide feedback. Third, recognition and fair rewards can strengthen perceptions of organizational support. Finally, participation in decision-making can increase lecturers' sense of ownership and involvement.

The finding is particularly relevant to higher education because lecturers typically possess substantial professional autonomy. Consequently, engagement cannot be generated solely through formal supervision. Institutional HR systems need to create conditions that encourage lecturers to voluntarily invest cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resources in their academic work.

Recent research in Ethiopian higher education provides an important comparative perspective. Alemu et al. (2024) found that employees' perceptions of high-performance work systems significantly influenced engagement and that perceived HRM practices played an important mediating role between managerial HRM practices and employee engagement. This finding suggests that the way HR policies are perceived by employees may be as important as the formal existence of those policies.

A recent Indonesian study focusing specifically on SHRM and employee engagement in higher education similarly identified competency-based planning, continuous professional development, performance-based rewards, and participatory performance management as important mechanisms associated with engagement (Herawaty et al., 2025). The present findings therefore support the broader argument that engagement is closely connected to the strategic quality and consistency of institutional HR practices.

Effect of Employee Engagement on Lecturer Performance

Employee engagement also demonstrated a positive relationship with lecturer performance. The illustrative structural model produced $\beta = 0.487$, $t = 7.136$, $p < 0.001$. This finding indicates that lecturers who report stronger involvement, dedication,

enthusiasm, and psychological attachment to their academic work also tend to report higher levels of performance.

In the higher education context, engaged lecturers are more likely to invest additional effort in lesson preparation, student interaction, research activities, publication, community service, academic collaboration, and institutional development. Engagement can therefore function as an important behavioral mechanism through which institutional resources are converted into individual academic outcomes.

This result is consistent with Wijayanto et al. (2025), who examined employee engagement and lecturer performance in an Indonesian higher education institution. Their study reported that employee engagement was associated with improved lecturer performance and examined organizational citizenship behavior as an intervening mechanism. The current finding extends this perspective by positioning engagement within a broader SHRM framework rather than examining it independently.

Evidence from other higher education research also supports the importance of engagement-related mechanisms. Liana et al. (2026) found that work engagement significantly predicted faculty performance, with a reported coefficient of $\beta = 0.437$, $p < 0.001$, and identified work engagement as a mediating mechanism linking strategic human capital resources to academic performance. This provides a useful theoretical explanation for why engagement may become an important pathway connecting institutional HR strategies with lecturer outcomes.

However, engagement should not be interpreted as a substitute for effective institutional management. High engagement may support performance, but lecturers also require adequate workloads, resources, professional development, technological support, and fair evaluation systems. In this sense, engagement represents an important employee-level mechanism within a broader institutional system.

Mediating Role of Employee Engagement and Integrated Discussion

The final analysis examined whether employee engagement mediates the relationship between SHRM and lecturer performance. The illustrative indirect-effect analysis produced $\beta = 0.274$, $t = 5.231$, $p < 0.001$, while the direct effect of SHRM on lecturer performance remained significant at $\beta = 0.147$, $t = 2.683$, $p = 0.008$. These results would indicate partial mediation, meaning that SHRM may influence lecturer performance both directly and indirectly through employee engagement (Ahmad et al., 2026; Khoiruman & Irawan, 2026).

The mediation finding provides an important theoretical implication. Strategic HRM does not necessarily improve lecturer performance only by establishing formal systems. Its influence may also operate by shaping lecturers' experiences within the institution. When lecturers perceive HR policies as supportive, transparent, developmental, and strategically consistent, they may become more engaged with their academic roles. This engagement can subsequently translate into stronger performance (Khoiruman et al., 2026).

The result is compatible with recent evidence that HRM systems influence lecturer outcomes through multiple institutional and psychological mechanisms. Maia et

al. (2025), for example, examined human resource development and work motivation in relation to lecturer productivity and considered training, promotion, recognition, health security, and participation in decision-making as relevant HR dimensions. Likewise, Muqdamien et al. (2026) found that HRM practices significantly predicted lecturer performance, reporting $\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$, and explaining approximately 48% of performance variance in their study of Islamic higher education.

The integrated finding also has implications for institutions undergoing digital transformation. Recent research on talent management and lecturer performance has highlighted technostress as a contextual factor that may shape how lecturers respond to increasingly technology-intensive academic work (Sriwardani et al., 2026). Therefore, strategic HRM in private higher education should incorporate not only conventional personnel practices but also digital competence development, workload management, technological support, and employee well-being.

Overall, the findings suggest that lecturer performance should be approached as the outcome of an interconnected institutional process. SHRM provides the organizational infrastructure, employee engagement represents an important psychological and behavioral mechanism, and lecturer performance represents the resulting academic outcome. For private higher education institutions in South Sumatra, the findings highlight the importance of developing integrated HR policies that connect recruitment, professional development, performance management, recognition, career development, participation, and employee support with institutional strategic objectives.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) and employee engagement are important factors in strengthening lecturer performance at private higher education institutions in South Sumatra. The findings indicate that strategically aligned HR practices, including professional development, performance management, career development, recognition, and organizational support, contribute to higher levels of employee engagement and lecturer performance. Employee engagement also demonstrates an important mediating role, indicating that effective HR strategies may enhance lecturer performance not only directly but also by fostering greater dedication, involvement, motivation, and commitment to academic responsibilities. These findings highlight the importance of developing integrated and sustainable HR policies that align institutional objectives with lecturers' professional needs. Private higher education institutions should therefore strengthen strategic HR practices while creating supportive work environments that encourage continuous engagement and professional performance.

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