

Enhancing Employee Engagement through Strategic Human Resource Management in Economics and Management Education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: <i>employee engagement, higher education, institutional performance, leadership, management, organizational culture, strategic human resource</i></p> <p>DOI: https://doi.org/10.22437/jssh.v9i2.50495</p> <p>Received: November 30, 2025</p> <p>Reviewed: December 1, 2025</p> <p>Accepted: December 8, 2025</p>	<p><i>This study explores how SHRM enhances employee engagement in higher education, particularly within economics and management education. Using a qualitative library research design and thematic content analysis, the study reviewed scholarly sources published between 2014 and 2024. Literature selection followed explicit inclusion–exclusion criteria, incorporating academic works addressing SHRM, employee engagement, leadership, organizational culture, or HRM in higher education, while excluding non-scholarly publications and studies lacking methodological clarity. The findings show that SHRM strengthens engagement when aligned with institutional strategy, supported by transformational leadership, and embedded within a participatory organizational culture. Four clusters of HR practices competency-based planning, continuous professional development, performance-based rewards, and participatory performance management emerge as key drivers of engagement through their effects on motivation and organizational commitment. Based on these insights, the study proposes a conceptual model explaining how SHRM enhances cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement, ultimately improving teaching performance, research productivity, and institutional competitiveness. The results contribute to the limited academic literature on SHRM in higher education and offer practical guidance for universities seeking to build integrated HR strategies. Future empirical research is recommended to validate the proposed model across diverse academic contexts.</i></p>

1. Introduction

The rapid development of globalization and digital transformation has reshaped how modern organizations manage resources, compete, and sustain performance. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, human resources (HR) are no longer positioned merely as operational implementers but as strategic value creators capable of driving organizational competitiveness (Albrecht et al., 2015; Delery & Roupni, 2017; Saleh & Rahim, 2025). Employee engagement, which reflects emotional and behavioral attachment to work, has emerged as a critical determinant of performance, retention, and organizational innovation. High engagement is associated with increased productivity, stronger organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Mehralian et al., 2021). Conversely, disengaged employees tend to exhibit reduced motivation and diminished performance effectiveness (Alolayyan et al., 2021; Para-González et al., 2019).

Within this strategic shift, organizations, including public institutions and educational organizations are challenged to adopt HR systems that align individual competencies with long-term institutional goals. Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) provides an integrative framework that connects HR practices with organizational strategies to generate sustainable competitive advantage (Wright & McMahan, 2011). Core SHRM components, competency-based HR planning, continuous professional development, performance-based rewards, and participatory work culture play a crucial role in strengthening employee motivation and engagement (Asmadi et al., 2024; Pandita & Ray, 2018). However, many organizations remain trapped in administrative, compliance-based HR models that are not sufficiently responsive to engagement needs, especially in dynamic and knowledge-intensive environments (Kossyva et al., 2023; Pandita & Ray, 2018).

In higher education institutions, the relevance of SHRM becomes even more pronounced. Universities rely heavily on the engagement and performance of lecturers and educational staff to achieve their core missions of teaching, research, and community service (Dehtjare & Užule, 2023; Hamadamin & Atan, 2019; Saleh & Rahim, 2025). Yet higher education institutions face distinct HR challenges, including academic autonomy, workload complexity, publication pressures, and rapidly evolving educational policies (Asmadi et al., 2022; Hamadamin & Atan, 2019). Although employee engagement has been widely studied in corporate settings, its linkage with SHRM within academic contexts, particularly in economics and management education, remains insufficiently explored (Elrayah & Mabkhot, 2023; Ghani et al., 2022). Prior studies have tended to focus separately on HR development or employee motivation, without examining how integrated SHRM practices function as a holistic mechanism to foster engagement among academic personnel (Sahito et al., 2025; Yanuarsari et al., 2021).

However, existing studies have not systematically examined how integrated SHRM practices enhance employee engagement specifically within the context of higher education institutions. No prior research has offered a comprehensive conceptual model that explains the mechanism through which SHRM strengthens engagement among lecturers and educational staff in economics and management education. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of strategic human resource management in enhancing employee engagement from the perspective of economics and management education. Through a structured literature review, this article synthesizes theoretical and empirical findings to formulate a conceptual model explaining how SHRM practices foster engagement and contribute to organizational performance in higher education institutions.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in library research to examine the role of SHRM in enhancing employee engagement within higher education, particularly in economics and management education. Given the conceptual nature of the inquiry and the study's objective to synthesize existing theoretical and empirical knowledge, a structured literature-based methodology was employed. This approach enables a comprehensive examination of patterns, relationships, and conceptual linkages across prior studies, while ensuring analytical rigor through transparent selection procedures and systematic thematic analysis. The methodology is organized into four sub-sections: research design, participants (sources of data), instruments, and data analysis procedures.

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using a library research strategy. This design was selected to allow for an in-depth synthesis of scholarly literature related to SHRM, employee engagement, leadership, and organizational culture within higher education contexts. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the research focused on integrating and interpreting existing academic works to construct a conceptual model explaining the mechanisms through which SHRM influences employee engagement. A qualitative descriptive design is appropriate for this purpose, as it emphasizes conceptual clarity, theoretical integration, and contextual interpretation, particularly in studies aimed at model development and theory building.

2.2 Participants

In the context of this library-based study, the “participants” consist of scholarly sources rather than human subjects. The data corpus included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and institutional research reports that address SHRM, employee engagement, leadership, organizational culture, or human resource management in higher education. Literature was sourced from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Harzing Publish or Perish, and institutional e-book repositories. The selection was guided by clearly defined inclusion criteria: publications written in English or Indonesian, published between 2014 and 2024, and presenting either empirical findings or conceptual discussions relevant to SHRM and engagement in higher education. Foundational theoretical works of high scholarly significance were also included where relevant. Non-academic sources, publications lacking methodological clarity, and studies unrelated to employee engagement were excluded to ensure the credibility and relevance of the reviewed literature.

2.3 Instruments

The primary research instrument in this study was a structured literature review protocol developed to guide the identification, screening, and classification of relevant sources. This protocol included predefined keywords related to strategic human resource management, employee engagement, higher education HRM, leadership, and organizational strategy. In addition, an analytical matrix was used to record key information from each selected source, including research focus, theoretical framework, methodological approach, key findings, and relevance to SHRM–engagement relationships. These instruments facilitated systematic data extraction and ensured consistency during the thematic coding and synthesis processes.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns, conceptual relationships, and explanatory mechanisms across the selected literature. The analysis followed several iterative stages. First, open coding was applied to extract key concepts and constructs related to SHRM practices, determinants of employee engagement, and organizational outcomes. Second, the codes were grouped into broader themes based on conceptual similarities, resulting in three main analytical clusters: strategic HR practices, engagement determinants, and SHRM outcomes in higher education. Third, these themes were integrated to develop a conceptual model explaining the pathways through which SHRM enhances cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. To strengthen analytical rigor, source triangulation and theoretical cross-checking were employed by comparing insights across multiple studies and grounding interpretations in well-established theoretical frameworks. This systematic procedure ensured that the findings and the proposed model were firmly supported by credible and consistently analyzed academic sources.

3. Results and Discussion

The thematic content analysis produced four major themes that explain how SHRM influences employee engagement, particularly within higher education institutions. These themes reflect recurring patterns identified across conceptual and empirical studies, demonstrating both theoretical coherence and contextual relevance to economics and management education.

3.1 Alignment of SHRM with Institutional Strategy

The findings of this study show that the effectiveness of SHRM depends fundamentally on its alignment with the long-term strategic direction of an institution. Organizations that integrate HR policies with institutional strategy are consistently found to foster stronger employee engagement because human resources are positioned as strategic partners rather than merely administrative units (Albrecht et al., 2015). In the context of higher education, this alignment becomes especially critical, as lecturers and educational staff directly contribute to the core missions of teaching, research, and community service (Mehralian et al., 2021; Mukminin et al., 2019). When HR practices, such as competency-based recruitment, workload planning, or academic career development are intentionally designed to support institutional priorities, academic personnel experience clearer role expectations, a stronger sense of purpose, and greater psychological ownership of institutional outcomes (Alolayyan et al., 2021). This observation reinforces Wright and McMahan's (2011) conceptualization of SHRM as an alignment mechanism that connects human capital capabilities with institutional goals (Jala & Bation, 2023). Accordingly, universities, particularly those in economics and management education, must move beyond traditional administrative HR models and embed strategic HR planning into broader organizational decision-making processes. Engagement thus emerges not solely from individual motivation but from employees' belief that their work meaningfully contributes to the institution's strategic trajectory, strengthening their commitment and enhancing their overall performance (Harrison & Bazy, 2017; Mehralian et al., 2021).

3.2 Leadership and Organizational Culture as Engagement Catalysts

The findings also emphasize that leadership practices and organizational culture function as critical catalysts for employee engagement within higher education institutions. Transformational and inspirational leadership styles provide psychological stimulation that encourages employees to participate actively, articulate ideas, and collaborate, thereby reinforcing both emotional and cognitive dimensions of engagement (Putri et al., 2024; Tyagi, 2021). In academic environments, the roles of rectors, deans, and department heads extend beyond administrative responsibilities, as these leaders serve as intellectual exemplars whose behaviors shape institutional values and norms. This influence becomes particularly pronounced in hierarchical academic cultures such as those found in Indonesia, where leadership authority carries symbolic weight and consequently becomes a strong predictor of academic staff engagement (Asmadi et al., 2022; Slamet et al., 2024). Equally important is the institutional culture that surrounds these leadership structures. A participatory and supportive organizational climate, characterized by openness, trust, and fairness, contributes to fulfilling core psychological needs that sustain engagement (Mukminin et al., 2017; Trivedi & Prakasha, 2021). Academic settings that promote dialogue, innovation, and academic freedom have been shown to generate higher levels of commitment and involvement among lecturers and staff (AlMulhim, 2023; Shuck & Reio, 2020). These observations collectively illustrate that SHRM cannot operate effectively in isolation; leadership behavior and cultural conditions must reinforce HR strategies to create an environment conducive to engagement (Dehtjare & Užule, 2023; Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė, 2018). As such, leadership development and culture-building must be embedded within SHRM frameworks to ensure that engagement is nurtured through both structural alignment and day-to-day relational dynamics (Dehtjare & Užule, 2023; AlMulhim, 2023).

3.3 Strategic HR Practices that Directly Influence Engagement

The third theme highlights a set of SHRM practices that function as direct drivers of employee engagement, demonstrating how specific HR interventions shape both the psychological and behavioral dimensions of academic work. The analysis reveals four interrelated clusters of practices that consistently appear in the literature. First, competency-based HR planning ensures that employees are placed in roles that match their expertise and potential, thereby strengthening their sense of relevance, contribution, and professional identity. Second, continuous professional development in the form of training, academic workshops, certification programs, and research collaboration enhances competence and reinforces perceived organizational support, a factor shown to significantly affect motivation and engagement (Asmadi et al., 2024). Third, performance-based reward systems, including incentives for publication quality, teaching excellence, and innovation, strengthen both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation while reinforcing behaviors aligned with institutional goals. Fourth, participatory performance management provides opportunities for lecturers and staff to be involved in academic decision-making and evaluative processes, cultivating psychological ownership and a deeper sense of engagement. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that SHRM practices collectively enhance psychological engagement and organizational commitment by fulfilling employees' needs for competence, recognition, and participation (Yanuarsari et al., 2021). In higher education contexts, such practices translate into strategic academic HRM initiatives, such as structured research development programs, transparent and merit-based promotion systems, and public

recognition of academic achievements, that signal institutional appreciation and support. As a result, academic staff feel valued, empowered, and connected to institutional success, thereby strengthening their engagement and overall contribution to organizational performance.

3.4 Conceptual Model: SHRM–Engagement Mechanism

The synthesis of findings across the previous themes culminates in a comprehensive conceptual model that explicates the mechanism through which SHRM influences employee engagement within higher education institutions. Drawing upon human capital theory (Wright & McMahan, 2011), engagement theory (Albrecht et al., 2015), and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Saikrishna, 2025; Shuck & Reio, 2020), the model positions SHRM as a foundational organizational input that shapes engagement through both direct and indirect pathways. At the core of this mechanism are four strategic HR practices, competency-based planning, continuous professional development, performance-based reward systems, and participatory performance management which collectively serve as job resources that enhance employees’ sense of capability, recognition, and influence. These resources activate key motivational processes, fostering higher levels of intrinsic motivation and stronger affective and normative commitment to the institution (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Pham-Thai et al., 2018). Motivation and commitment then function as mediating variables that translate SHRM practices into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. This mediating pathway underscores that engagement does not arise merely from exposure to HR policies, but from psychological states shaped by employees’ perceptions of support, growth opportunities, fairness, and participation (Aboramadan, 2022; Saikrishna, 2025).

Within academic settings, this SHRM–engagement mechanism becomes particularly salient due to the centrality of human capital to institutional performance. Engaged lecturers and staff exhibit greater role clarity, initiative, and ownership over teaching, research, and service responsibilities elements that directly influence institutional outcomes (Albrecht et al., 2023; Shivamurthy et al., 2023). Accordingly, the model posits that enhanced engagement contributes to improvements in teaching quality, research productivity, academic innovation, and broader institutional competitiveness (Mehta & Jha, 2025). The integrated conceptual model therefore advances the understanding of how SHRM operates as a multidimensional system that aligns organizational strategy, leadership behaviors, cultural conditions, and human resource practices to produce engagement as a strategic organizational asset. By articulating a clear causal pathway, this model also fills a notable gap in existing literature, which has often examined SHRM and engagement separately or focused predominantly on corporate contexts rather than academic environments. The model thus provides a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant framework for universities particularly within economics and management education to design and implement strategic HR systems that strengthen employee engagement and enhance institutional performance. Overall, the findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Four major themes that explain SHRM influences employee engagement at higher education institutions

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence	Interpretation	Implications for Higher Education
1. Alignment of SHRM with Institutional Strategy	SHRM is effective when HR practices align with long-term institutional goals. Strategic alignment enhances employee clarity, purpose, and ownership.	Integration of HR policies with institutional strategy strengthens engagement (Albrecht et al., 2015). SHRM acts as a mechanism linking human capital with strategy (Wright & McMahan, 2011).	Alignment positions HR as a strategic partner rather than an administrative unit, enabling employees to see their contribution to institutional missions.	Universities must embed HR planning in strategic decision-making to enhance engagement, especially in academically intensive environments.
2. Leadership and Organizational Culture	Transformational leadership and a participatory culture foster high levels of emotional and cognitive engagement.	Leadership behaviors shape engagement in hierarchical academic settings (Asmadi et al., 2022). Supportive climates improve autonomy, trust, and motivation (Shuck & Reio, 2020).	Engagement is influenced not only by HR systems but by leaders who model values, encourage collaboration, and cultivate academic freedom.	Leadership development and culture-building must be incorporated into SHRM strategies to strengthen institutional engagement.
3. Strategic HR Practices	Four SHRM practices directly improve engagement: competency-based planning, continuous development, performance-based rewards, and participatory performance management.	Professional development boosts capability and job satisfaction (Asmadi et al., 2024). Reward systems reinforce academic commitment (Yanuarsari et al., 2021).	These practices provide essential “job resources” that activate motivation, strengthen commitment, and shape engagement behaviorally and emotionally.	HR policies should prioritize capacity development, fair recognition, and participatory evaluation to create engaged academic communities.
4. SHRM - Engagement Mechanism (Conceptual Model)	SHRM influences engagement through mediating variables motivation and organizational commitment which lead to improved institutional performance.	The JD-R framework supports that job resources fuel motivational processes (Shuck & Reio, 2020). Engagement improves performance outcomes such as research productivity and teaching quality.	Engagement emerges from interconnected organizational systems: HR practices, leadership, culture, and psychological mediators.	Implementing integrated SHRM systems can improve teaching, research, innovation, and overall institutional competitiveness.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that SHRM plays a central and multidimensional role in shaping employee engagement within higher education institutions. Engagement does not emerge as a spontaneous psychological state, but rather as an outcome of deliberate organizational mechanisms that integrate strategic alignment, leadership behavior, organizational culture, and targeted HR practices. The analysis shows that SHRM practices are most effective when tightly aligned with institutional strategy, enabling employees to perceive their contributions as meaningful and strategically relevant. Leadership and organizational culture further amplify this effect by creating supportive environments that foster trust, autonomy, and intellectual participation psychological conditions that are essential for sustained engagement.

The study also identifies four key SHRM practices competency-based planning, continuous professional development, performance-based rewards, and participatory performance management as direct drivers of engagement. These practices function as job resources that strengthen motivation and organizational commitment, which the conceptual model recognizes as pivotal mediators linking SHRM to engagement. In line with the Job Demands–Resources framework and contemporary engagement theory, the proposed conceptual model clarifies how SHRM enhances cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, ultimately contributing to institutional performance, including teaching quality, research productivity, and organizational competitiveness.

By synthesizing these elements, this study contributes to the literature by offering a higher-education–specific conceptual model of SHRM and engagement an area where existing research has been fragmented or overly corporate-focused. The model provides a theoretically grounded and practically relevant framework for universities, particularly in economics and management education, seeking to strengthen human capital and advance institutional excellence. Future empirical studies may refine and test this model across diverse academic contexts to further validate its applicability and deepen understanding of the mechanisms linking SHRM to engagement and performance.

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