

The Strategic Enabler: Human Resource Management's Role in Facilitating the Independent Campus Policy (MBKM) in Indonesian Higher Education

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper examines the critical, yet underexplored, strategic role of Human Resource Management (HRM) in enabling the successful implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) or "Independent Learning, Independent Campus" policy. It argues that without a strategic HRM overhaul, the policy risks remaining a top-down mandate with limited institutionalization.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research draws on data from semi-structured interviews with HR directors, faculty deans, and academic staff at three Indonesian universities, alongside analysis of institutional HR policy documents. Thematic analysis is used to identify key HRM challenges and adaptations.

Findings: The study identifies four pivotal HRM roles: 1) Strategic Change Architect, aligning university human capital with MBKM goals; 2) Faculty Capability Builder, through targeted development programs; 3) Performance System Innovator, redesigning appraisal and reward structures; and 4) Cultural Transformation Agent. Key challenges include resistance from tenured faculty, misaligned incentive systems, and resource constraints.

Practical Implications: University leaders and policymakers must reconceptualize HRM as a core strategic partner, not merely an administrative function. Concrete recommendations include developing dual-track career pathways, creating MBKM-focused key performance indicators (KPIs), and establishing industry liaison recognition schemes.

Article History

Submitted: 6 January 2026

Accepted: 16 January 2026

Published: 17 January 2026

Key Words

Higher education reform, human resource management, educational policy, faculty development, Indonesia, MBKM.

Originality/Value: This paper contributes to the literature on educational reform by explicitly linking macro-level policy (MBKM) to the micro-level HRM processes that determine its success.

1. Introduction

The global higher education landscape is undergoing profound transformation, driven by demands for graduate employability, interdisciplinary learning, and societal impact (Marginson, 2016). In Indonesia, the government's response is the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy, launched in 2020. MBKM grants students flexibility to earn credits through off-campus experiences—internships, community projects, entrepreneurship, and research—aiming to produce agile, competent graduates (Kemdikbud, 2020).

While existing discourse focuses on curricular logistics, student mobility, and industry partnerships (Fadli et al., 2021), the **human resource dimension** remains critically under-examined. Implementing MBKM fundamentally disrupts traditional academic roles, workloads, and competencies. Faculty are expected to become mentors, industry negotiators, and interdisciplinary collaborators, often without systemic support.

This paper posits that **strategic Human Resource Management (HRM)** is the key **enabler** for MBKM's institutionalization. Drawing on strategic HRM theory (Wright & McMahan, 1992) and organizational change literature (Kotter, 2012), we investigate the research question: How must university HRM systems evolve to strategically support the effective implementation of the MBKM policy?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Higher Education Reform and HRM: Successful educational reforms hinge on "human factors"—the readiness, capacity, and motivation of implementers (Fullan, 2007). In universities, HRM traditionally handles administrative functions (recruitment, payroll). However, contemporary reforms necessitate a shift to **strategic HRM**, aligning people management with institutional strategy (Boselie & Van Harten, 2019).

2.2. The MBKM Policy: MBKM is a radical departure from Indonesia's historically rigid, input-oriented system. It requires structural flexibility, quality assurance for diverse learning forms, and deep external engagement (Purwanto et al., 2020). These changes directly implicate faculty and staff roles.

2.3. Gap in the Literature: Current studies on MBKM address policy design, student perspectives, and partnership models. There is a paucity of research examining the **organizational and human resource challenges** faced by universities. This paper fills that gap.

3. Methodology

A multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018) was employed at three Indonesian universities: a large public university, a private religious university, and a technology-focused institute. Purposive sampling selected 25 participants: HR directors, faculty deans, department heads, and lecturers engaged in MBKM.

Data collection (June-December 2023) included:

Semi-structured interviews (60-90 minutes each, recorded and transcribed).

Document analysis of HR manuals, performance appraisal forms, and MBKM implementation reports.

Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software, following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step process, to identify patterns related to HRM practices, challenges, and adaptations.

4. Findings & Discussion

Four central themes emerged, conceptualized as the **Strategic HRM Framework for MBKM Implementation**.

4.1. HRM as Strategic Change Architect

Participants unanimously noted that HR must lead, not just follow, the MBKM transition. One HR Director stated, "We moved from processing letters to designing career paths for

industry adjuncts." This involves workforce planning to identify future skill gaps and restructuring units to support interdisciplinary programs.

4.2. HRM as Faculty Capability Builder

Traditional pedagogical training is insufficient. Demand is high for competencies in:

Partnership Management: Sourcing and managing industry/community projects.

Mentorship: Guiding reflective, non-classroom learning.

Digital Pedagogy: Supervising remote internships and projects.

Successful institutions established "MBKM Faculty Fellows" programs, offering certification and micro-credentials in these new competencies.

4.3. HRM as Performance System Innovator

The most significant barrier identified was the **misalignment of incentive systems**. Promotion and reward still prioritize publications in indexed journals. As a Dean noted, "A professor who guides 30 students in a village project gets less 'credit' than one publishing a single paper."

Forward-looking universities are piloting **portfolio-based appraisal** systems, where mentoring MBKM activities, securing partnerships, and creating innovative learning modules carry quantifiable weight toward promotion.

4.4. HRM as Cultural Transformation Agent

MBKM requires a cultural shift from individualistic, disciplinary scholarship to collaborative, application-oriented engagement. HR initiatives like cross-faculty "MBKM incubators," internal grant schemes for industry collaboration, and recognition ceremonies for outstanding mentors were cited as effective in fostering this new culture.

5. Discussion: A Proposed Strategic HRM Model for MBKM

Based on findings, we propose an integrated model:

MBKM POLICY GOALS

(Agile Graduates, External Engagement)

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STRATEGIC HRM ALIGNMENT

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- | 1. Talent Strategy |-> Recruit for "boundary-spanning" skills.
- | 2. Development Strategy|-> Continuous, just-in-time capability building.
- | 3. Performance Strategy|-> Redesigned KPIs valuing MBKM activities.
- | 4. Engagement Strategy |-> Foster collaborative, innovative culture.

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INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR MBKM

(Effective Implementation & Sustainability)

This model positions HRM as the central engine that translates policy into human capability and organizational practice.

6. Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations

6.1. Conclusion: The MBKM policy represents a paradigmatic shift in Indonesian higher education. Its success is inextricably linked to the modernization of university HRM from an administrative bureau to a strategic partner. This study delineates the four critical roles HRM must play to bridge the policy-practice gap.

6.2. Implications:

For University Leaders: Invest in HR department capacity building. Empower HR to redesign performance management systems.

For Policymakers (DIKTI): Develop national guidelines for HRM reform supporting MBKM, including funding for faculty re-tooling.

For Practitioners (HR Managers): Proactively engage with academic leaders to co-create MBKM-supportive HR processes.

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6.3. Limitations and Future Research: This study is limited to three Indonesian cases. Future research could employ quantitative surveys to measure the correlation between strategic HRM adoption and MBKM outcome metrics (e.g., student participation rates, employer satisfaction).

Comparative studies with similar policies in other countries (e.g., Thailand's "Cooperative Education") would also be valuable.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank the participating universities for their openness and collaboration.