

Quality Culture Mediates Intrinsic Motivation's Impact on Higher Education Performance

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ABSTRACT: This research explores how intrinsic motivation and quality culture influence the performance of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Riau Province, Indonesia. Utilizing a quantitative methodology, data were gathered from 398 lecturers through a structured survey instrument. The analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach with the aid of SmartPLS software. The findings demonstrate that intrinsic motivation plays a critical role in enhancing both quality culture and institutional effectiveness. Moreover, quality culture was found to positively impact institutional performance and serves as an intermediary factor linking motivation and outcomes. These results are in accordance with the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which underscores the strategic importance of internal resources in building competitive advantage. This study underscores the need to strengthen internal motivation and foster a robust culture of quality as essential approaches to advancing teaching, research, and service in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia stands as one of the nations with the largest number of higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide. A 2024 report by Statista reveals that there are approximately 4,075 universities in Indonesia, placing the country second only to India in terms of quantity. Carey (2017), as cited in Murdowo (2018), argues that a country with such a vast number of universities should logically have at least one among the top 100 or 200 global institutions. Yet, Indonesia continues to face challenges in securing such global rankings. The concept of “performance” is widely recognized in management literature, but remains inconsistently defined across different academic disciplines (Cotelnic, 2022). Similarly, the notion of organizational performance in higher education is marked by fragmented interpretations and measurements.

Most scholars have focused on analyzing HEI performance through specialized lenses financial efficiency (Feranecova & Krigovska, 2016), innovation capabilities (Asiedu et al., 2020), research productivity (Alshaikhmubarak et al., 2020), and operational effectiveness (Martin & Thawabieh, 2018). Others have highlighted service delivery quality (Rodriguez-Gonzalez & Segarra, 2016; Kinanti et al., 2020), internationalization metrics (Gao, 2018), or institutional governance (Lokuwaduge & Armstrong, 2015). Despite these diverse angles, there are still calls for more holistic frameworks that consider multiple performance dimensions simultaneously (Abubakar et al., 2018; Hernandez-Diaz et al., 2020).

A growing body of literature emphasizes three core missions of universities globally: teaching, research, and service (Iqbal et al., 2022). These are not only widely accepted by scholars (Martin, 2012; Sanchez-Barrioluengo, 2014; Agasisti & Bertoletti, 2019; Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020), but are also foundational to institutional identity. However, “service” within HEIs is broader than the traditional community engagement role of faculty. It also involves contributions to both internal (students, staff) and external stakeholders. Recognizing this, the current study evaluates HEI performance from a multidimensional perspective encompassing teaching, research, and service and advocates for coping strategies that enhance competitiveness and institutional quality. One such strategy is strengthening employee motivation.

Motivation, originating from the word “motive” is described in various ways ranging from desires and aspirations to internal drives (Badura et al., 2020). It is often cited as a key psychological driver enabling individuals to perform optimally at work (Abbas & Kumari, 2023). Dewi and Wibowo (2020) add that motivation not only guides but also sustains employee efforts toward goal achievement. There is broad consensus that employee motivation significantly influences organizational outcomes (Ochola, 2018; Geelmaale, 2019), and this extends to individual job performance as well (Makki & Abid, 2017; Engidaw, 2021).

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Within higher education, faculty motivation is crucial as it dictates how lecturers engage in teaching, research, and service. Daumiller et al. (2020) define this as a set of processes that drive faculty to pursue institutional goals. This study particularly concentrates on intrinsic motivation—the internal satisfaction individuals derive from their tasks—as a primary catalyst for improving academic performance (Mazllami, 2020). In HEI contexts, intrinsic motivation refers to the commitment among educators and staff to enhance their professional roles without external rewards (Senanayake & Gamage, 2017). Hence, gaining insight into how intrinsic motivation shapes institutional performance is critical to reform strategies in Indonesian higher education.

In parallel, cultivating a strong quality culture has been proposed as another vital response to the pressures HEIs face. Amid declining government support and mounting competition, higher education institutions must embrace structural transformation (Bendermacher et al., 2017). Without embedding a culture of quality, various formal quality assurance mechanisms often fall short. In fact, research indicates that accreditation alone may not yield improvements in teaching or learning quality and, in some cases, may even lead to stagnation (Dattey et al., 2017; Jalal et al., 2017, 2020).

Quality culture is broadly defined as an institutional value system that supports ongoing improvement and long-term quality enhancement (Herminingsih & Sadikin, 2021). Multiple empirical studies have shown positive links between such a culture and organizational performance (Yusof & Ali, 2000; Ali & Musah, 2012; Katwalo & Asienga, 2015; Wu, 2015; Ullah et al., 2016; Hilman et al., 2017). However, limited research has investigated whether quality culture plays a mediating role between motivation and institutional outcomes—highlighting theoretical and empirical gaps that this study seeks to address.

Over the past two decades, Indonesia has experienced explosive growth in its number of universities. Although this surge suggests a flourishing academic sector, it has not necessarily translated into performance improvements. Instead, many Indonesian HEIs are now embroiled in fierce competition for survival and profit, often at the expense of quality. As a result, some institutions resort to misleading marketing tactics to attract student enrollment, including exaggerated claims about graduate employability or inflated rankings (Bradley, 2013, 2018; Ramsey & Wesley, 2015; Chiang et al., 2020).

These practices have prompted warnings from scholars about the erosion of academic standards in pursuit of institutional viability (Iqbal et al., 2023). Substandard academic quality continues to plague Indonesian HEIs, especially across the domains of teaching, research, and service (Hoodbhoy, 2009; Banuri, 2021; Murtaza & Hui, 2021). These three elements remain central to the mission of any university (Edgar & Geare, 2013; Agasisti & Bertolotti, 2019).

According to ISO 21001 (2018), teaching is defined as a collaborative engagement with learners to facilitate learning. In higher education, teaching performance reflects the attainment of pedagogical goals (Agasisti & Bertolotti, 2019). Yet, this is one of the most problematic areas in Indonesian HEIs. Scholars have highlighted numerous challenges: outdated instructional content, ineffective teaching strategies (Banuri, 2021), weak student learning skills, inadequate assessment systems (Hoodbhoy, 2009), politically influenced hiring processes, poor student discipline, academic dishonesty, reduced working hours, and a shortage of PhD qualified faculty (Murtaza & Hui, 2021).

In terms of research, performance is often measured through the output of scholarly work by academic staff (Agasisti & Bertolotti, 2019), or the dissemination of knowledge generated through research (Bazeley, 2010). Unfortunately, research capacity in Indonesian HEIs remains underwhelming. Factors include a culture of corruption, proliferation of predatory journals, flawed evaluation standards (Hoodbhoy, 2009), and limited research competencies (Nisar, 2019). Most assessments rely on bibliometric data, literature reviews, or institutional rankings (Abramo et al., 2013; Aldieri et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2020), which may not accurately reflect genuine research quality.

The third performance dimension, service also called the “third mission” refers to a university’s contributions to broader society, beyond academia (Agasisti & Bertolotti, 2019). It includes activities that benefit communities, industries, and public institutions. Defined by Zeithaml et al. (2018) as both process and outcome, educational services aim to develop learner competencies through formal education or research (ISO 21001, 2018). However, service delivery is another weak link in many HEIs. Poor service quality can often be traced to fragmented stakeholder involvement (Hwarng & Teo, 2001) and insufficient institutional accountability (Iqbal et al., 2023). Moreover, faculty contributions to service are frequently undervalued, even though many academics devote substantial time to these responsibilities (Brazeau, 2003; Neumann & Terosky, 2007; Throm, 2018).

Taken together, these challenges highlight the urgent need for HEIs to elevate their institutional performance across all three dimensions. This research seeks to contribute to that agenda by investigating how intrinsic motivation and quality culture can serve as key levers for meaningful improvement.

Motivation and HEI Performance

The concept of motivation stems from the term “motive” and is typically associated with a person’s internal drives, needs, aspirations, and desires (Badura et al., 2020). It functions as an internal energy or activating force that directs and organizes

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individual behavior (Inceoglu et al., 2012). Similarly, motivation can be viewed as the provision of stimuli or incentives that prompt individuals to act in line with their objectives or interests (Certo, 2019).

Motivation is commonly categorized into two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic, based on the origin and nature of the behavioral triggers (Deci et al., 1975). Intrinsic motivation refers to actions performed for the inherent pleasure or satisfaction derived from the activity itself, rather than for any external outcome (Zeng et al., 2022). In simpler terms, it is the internal desire that compels individuals to exert greater effort and strive for higher performance (Mazllami, 2020). Individuals are said to be intrinsically motivated when they engage in an activity due to the enjoyment or personal meaning it brings (Rita et al., 2018).

Numerous empirical studies have highlighted that intrinsic motivation has a more substantial impact on organizational performance compared to extrinsic factors (Senanayake & Gamage, 2017; Olugu et al., 2018). A deficiency in intrinsic motivation is often linked to underperformance, which can ultimately reduce overall organizational effectiveness (Kusumah et al., 2021). These findings are reinforced by more recent evidence indicating a strong correlation between intrinsic motivation and job performance (Kuvaas et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2021; Jnaneswar & Ranjit, 2022).

In the context of higher education institutions (HEIs), empirical research on the direct relationship between intrinsic motivation and performance is still limited. For instance, a qualitative study conducted in a private HEI in Dhaka, Bangladesh, revealed that most faculty members perceived intrinsic motivation as essential for fostering enthusiasm in both teaching and research, as well as for maintaining satisfaction and academic quality (Rahnuma, 2020).

H1: Intrinsic motivation affects HEI performance

Intrinsic Motivation dan Quality Culture

Numerous prior studies have explored intrinsic motivation as a predictor variable; however, few have specifically investigated its association with quality culture. Although some research has addressed employee motivation in relation to organizational culture, the scope remains limited. Organizational culture is a broad concept encompassing the collective values, norms, behaviors, beliefs, and routines that influence how individuals operate and make decisions within an organization. Despite its wide application, scholars have yet to reach a unified definition (Gautam & Basnet, 2021). According to the Chartered Management Institute (2015), organizational culture reflects the informal practices and unwritten norms that shape how people behave and interact in an organizational context. In contrast, quality culture is a more focused subset of organizational culture, emphasizing shared values and collective commitment to continuous quality enhancement (Dellana & Hauser, 1999; Bendermacher et al., 2017).

Some studies have examined motivation as an outcome variable in the context of organizational culture and reported that a strong organizational culture positively correlates with higher employee motivation (Yusof et al., 2016). Meanwhile, other researchers have tested motivation as a mediating variable, but the results have been inconsistent. For instance, in a study conducted at a coal company in Indonesia, organizational culture showed no significant or even negative influence on intrinsic motivation (Hariadi et al., 2022). Similarly, a separate investigation involving employees at the Employment Social Security Provider Agency in Tangerang found no meaningful effect of organizational culture on staff motivation (Riyanto et al., 2021). Nonetheless, these studies were conducted under unique contextual conditions and used limited, non-representative samples, which may have influenced the results.

Conversely, only a few studies have approached employee motivation as an independent variable in relation to either quality culture or organizational culture. One such example is a study conducted in higher education institutions in Bangalore, India, where researchers discovered that teacher motivation had a positive impact on organizational culture (George & Sabhapathy, 2014). However, considering the divergent findings and roles attributed to motivation in these studies, it becomes evident that the literature remains fragmented and lacks a coherent theoretical stance on how motivation relates to organizational or quality culture. Therefore, this research seeks to address these inconsistencies by proposing the following hypothesis:

H2: Intrinsic motivation affects quality culture

Quality Culture and HEI Performance

Quality culture can be defined as a collection of shared group values that shape how ongoing improvements are implemented in daily operations and the outcomes they produce (Harvey, 2004). It represents an organization-wide commitment to continuous improvement, where all members are responsible for creating a productive and supportive work environment that contributes to institutional excellence (Trewin, 2002). Within the context of higher education institutions (HEIs), quality culture refers to the institution's overall disposition and commitment to embedding the principles of quality across every facet of its operations (Ali & Musah, 2012).

Several studies have explored quality culture as an antecedent variable in relation to organizational performance and have consistently reported a positive correlation (Yusof & Ali, 2000; Ali & Musah, 2012; Wu, 2015). For instance, a more recent

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investigation assessed the impact of quality culture on service quality across public and private HEIs. Findings indicated that while quality culture significantly influenced service delivery in both sectors, the effect was more pronounced in private institutions (Iqbal et al., 2023). Similarly, Katwalo and Asienga (2015) examined the relationship between quality culture and institutional performance in research-oriented HEIs in Kenya and found a strong positive association.

However, it is important to note that the Kenyan study was limited to a single HEI, raising concerns regarding the generalizability of its results. Comparable research in the Nigerian higher education context also revealed a statistically significant effect of quality culture on HEI performance. Nevertheless, quality culture accounted for only 30.4% of the variance in performance outcomes, and the study's geographical scope remained narrow, focusing solely on Nigerian institutions (Hilman et al., 2017). Given these methodological limitations, scholars have recommended expanding future research by incorporating additional predictive variables and studying more diverse institutional settings. In light of the limitations observed in prior literature, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Quality Culture affects HEI performance

Mediating Effect of Quality Culture

Despite its frequent use in academic discourse, the term quality culture remains conceptually ambiguous due to a lack of universally accepted definitions (Nygren-Landgards et al., 2022). In prior literature, most investigations into quality culture have been conducted within qualitative frameworks (Adina-Petruța, 2014; Njiro, 2016; Bendermacher et al., 2017; Lycke & Tano, 2017; Tutko, 2019). In contrast, quantitative studies have largely positioned quality culture as an independent variable, commonly examining its relationship with organizational performance. These studies have consistently reported that quality culture positively influences institutional outcomes (Ali & Musah, 2012; Katwalo & Asienga, 2015; Wu, 2015; Ullah et al., 2016; Hilman et al., 2017).

Beyond this, a number of researchers have analyzed quality culture as a dependent variable. The findings from such studies indicate that quality culture is significantly shaped by various antecedents, including total quality management (TQM) practices (Al-Otaibi, 2015), internal quality assurance mechanisms (Do et al., 2020), and visionary leadership (Herminingsih et al., 2020). However, there remains a scarcity of studies that have examined the mediating role of quality culture in organizational contexts. A limited number of investigations suggest that quality culture functions as a mediator between talent management and institutional performance in HEIs (Abubakar & Hilman, 2017), as well as between TQM practices and competitive advantage in the Saudi construction industry (Alotaibi & Islam, 2013).

Given the existing ambiguity surrounding the precise function of quality culture, and based on suggestions made by previous scholars (Al-Otaibi, 2015), the present study seeks to explore the mediating role of quality culture in the relationship between intrinsic motivation and performance within higher education institutions. This approach aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which intrinsic motivation affects institutional outcomes and to provide a deeper explanation of the dynamics at play in this relationship. In light of the discussion above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Quality culture mediates the effect of intrinsic motivation on HEI performance

This study adopts the Resource-Based View (RBV) theoretical framework to explain how universities can achieve competitive advantage and improve long-term performance. RBV views that an organization's competitive advantage comes from its assets and capabilities (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). In this context, universities rely not only on physical and financial assets, but also on intangible resources such as intrinsic motivation of the workforce and a strong quality culture. Intrinsic motivation, as a unique internal drive that is difficult to replicate, enables individuals to perform better and innovate (Kuvaas et al., 2017). Meanwhile, quality culture creates a conducive environment for continuous improvement and commitment to quality (Dellana & Hauser, 1999).

Thus, this study proposes a conceptual framework based on RBV theory to understand how universities can utilize intrinsic motivation and quality culture as strategic resources to achieve competitive advantage and improve long-term performance, which is aligned with the basic principles of RBV theory (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). This framework consists of one independent variable (intrinsic motivation), a mediator (quality culture) and a dependent variable (HEI performance). The conceptual framework is shown in figure 1.

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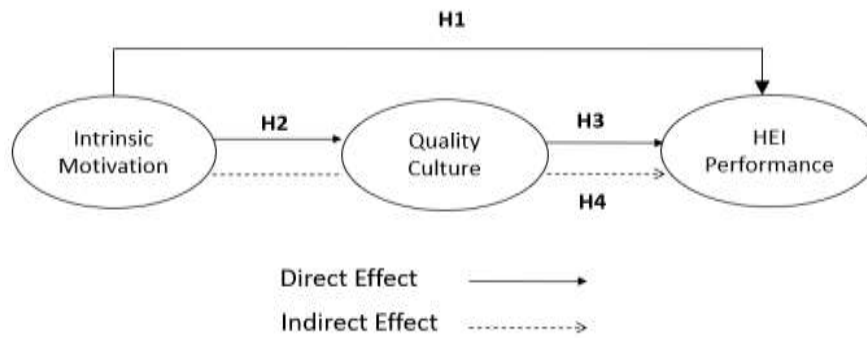


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHOD

This research employed a quantitative approach utilizing a cross-sectional survey design. Survey-based methods are considered highly effective due to several advantages, including their capacity to reach large and geographically dispersed populations, adherence to ethical standards, and efficiency in both cost and response time (Creswell, 2014; Fowler, 2014). Additionally, the cross-sectional design is particularly well-suited for capturing data at a single point in time, offering practical benefits in terms of reduced cost, time, and logistical effort (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The target population for this study consisted of university faculty members (lecturers) in the province of Riau. According to the Higher Education Database (PD-Dikti, 2025), the total number of lecturers in Riau-based universities in 2025 was 6,839. Using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was calculated to be 378 respondents.

The measurement instruments for each variable were adapted from validated scales used in prior studies and were further refined by the researchers to align with the specific context and objectives of this research. All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

HEI performance is measured using 3 indicators namely teaching performance (Goos et.al, 2017; Dicker et.al, 2019) research performance (Yaakub et.al, 2020) and service performance (Nedwek et.al, 1994; Hui et.al, 2003; Badri et.al, 2004; Asif et.al, 2014). Intrinsic motivation is measured using 6 indicators, namely achievement, recognition, responsibility, progress, work itself and the possibility of development (Herzberg, 2009). Quality culture is measured using 4 indicators, namely values, traditions, procedures and expectations (Wu, 2015). Research data analysis using SmartPLS software. Furthermore, the data will be analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis techniques. The hypothesis will be tested by looking at the t-statistic value which uses a statistical value of 5% through a process called bootstrapping with the complete bootstrapping method. To accept or reject a hypothesis using probability if the p value <0.05, then H_a is accepted (Ghozali & Latan, 2020).

RESULTS

Based on demographic data, the majority of respondents in this study came from private sector higher education as many as 255 people (64%), while from public sector higher education amounted to 143 people (36%), showing the dominance of PTS lecturers' participation. In terms of gender, the respondents were dominated by 251 women (63%) compared to 147 men (37%). In terms of education, most respondents were master graduates (S2) as many as 287 people (72%), while doctoral graduates (S3) amounted to 111 people (28%). In terms of age, the 35-50 age group dominates with 287 respondents (72%), followed by 25-34 years old as many as 68 people (17%), and over 50 years old as many as 44 people (11%). Based on tenure, the majority of respondents have more than 10 years of experience (259 people or 65%), followed by 6-10 years of service (96 people or 24%), and 3-5 years (44 people or 11%). Overall, the profile of the respondents reflects the dominance of female lecturers from private HEI with a master's educational background, productive age of 35-50 years, and work experience of more than a decade, which indicates a high level of professional maturity among the academics studied

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Sector		
Public Sector	143	36
Private Sector	255	64
Gender		
Male	147	37

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Female	251	63
Educational background		
Doctoral Degree	111	28
Master Degree	287	72
Age		
25-35 y.o	68	17
35-50 y.o	287	72
> 50 y.o	44	11
Work experience		
3-5 y	44	11
6-10 y	96	24
>10 y	259	65

Source: Created by Authors

The measurement model (see Figure 2) was assessed as the initial phase in the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) procedure, focusing on internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2022). Items with factor loadings below 0.600 were excluded from the model unless the construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) remained above the acceptable threshold of 0.500. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, and both reliability and validity indicators surpassed the commonly accepted benchmark of 0.700. Furthermore, all AVE values met or exceeded the minimum criterion of 0.500, in accordance with prior guidelines (Hair et al., 2014; 2019).

To assess discriminant validity an essential component of construct validity the Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied. This method compares the square root of each construct's AVE with the correlation coefficients between that construct and others in the model. Discriminant validity is confirmed when the AVE square root exceeds any of its corresponding inter-construct correlations (Hair et al., 2022). The detailed outcomes of factor loadings, reliability, and validity assessments are illustrated in Figure 2 and summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 Cross Loading, Reliability, and Convergent Validity Result

	HEP	IM	QC	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>HEI Performance (CR = 0.931; AVE = 0.818)</i>				
HEP1	0.863	0.550	0.512	0.888
HEP2	0.919	0.519	0.576	
HEP3	0.929	0.583	0.584	
<i>Intrinsic Motivation (CR = 0.955; AVE = 0.779)</i>				
IM1	0.492	0.885	0.706	0.943
IM2	0.541	0.868	0.638	
IM3	0.570	0.905	0.690	
IM4	0.501	0.902	0.707	
IM5	0.549	0.856	0.749	
<i>Quality Culture (CR = 0.910; AVE = 0.716)</i>				
QC1	0.576	0.754	0.867	0.868
QC2	0.518	0.737	0.851	
QC3	0.495	0.562	0.814	
QC4	0.493	0.626	0.851	

Note: HEP = Higher Education Performance; IM = Intrinsic Motivation; QC = Quality Culture

Table 3 Discriminant Validity Result

	HEI Performance	Intrinsic Motivation	Quality Culture
HEI Performance	0.904		
Intrinsic Motivation	0.608	0.882	
Quality Culture	0.618	0.799	0.846

Source: Created by Authors

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As presented in Table 3, all diagonal values (in bold) represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct and are higher than the off-diagonal correlation values in their respective rows and columns. This confirms the discriminant validity of the measurement model, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. Specifically, the square root of AVE for HEI Performance is 0.904, which is higher than its correlations with Intrinsic Motivation (0.608) and Quality Culture (0.618). Similarly, Intrinsic Motivation shows a square root of AVE value of 0.882, exceeding its correlation with HEI Performance (0.608) and Quality Culture (0.799). Lastly, Quality Culture has a square root of AVE of 0.846, which is greater than its correlation with HEI Performance (0.618) and Intrinsic Motivation (0.799). These results provide strong evidence that the constructs exhibit good discriminant validity, allowing for reliable interpretation of the structural model. Establishing discriminant validity strengthens the reliability of the model by confirming that the constructs measure conceptually different concepts, thus avoiding multicollinearity issues and enhancing the interpretability of the path coefficients (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, the discriminant validity results confirm that the measurement model is robust and suitable for further hypothesis testing

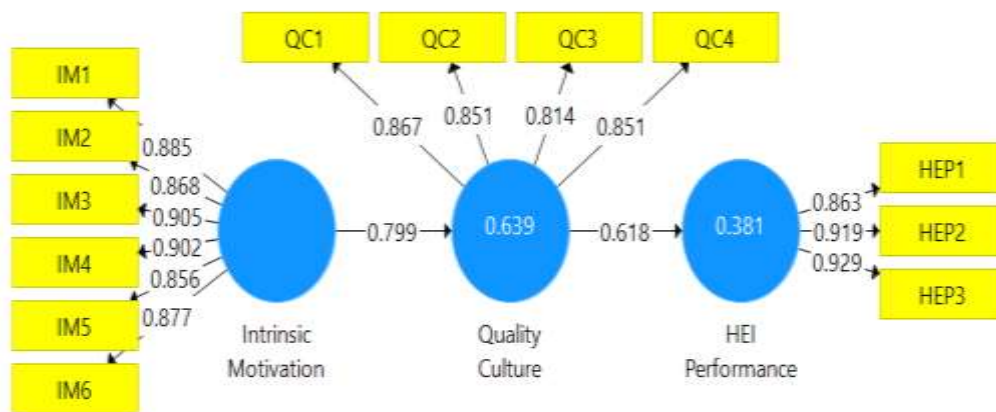


Figure 2. Measurement Model Assessment

The inner model represents the structural relationships among the latent constructs and other variables included in the study. Its evaluation was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure, which generated several key statistical indicators: the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), path coefficients, and intercorrelations among latent variables. The outcomes of the inner model assessment are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Coefficient of Determinance (R^2) Test Result

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
HEI Performance	0.381	0.380
Quality Culture	0.639	0.638

Source: Created by Authors

As shown in Table 4, the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the Quality Culture construct is 0.639. This indicates that 63.9% of the variance in quality culture can be explained by the independent variables included in the structural model such as intrinsic motivation or other examined predictors while the remaining 36.1% is attributable to factors outside the scope of this study.

For the College Performance variable, the R^2 value is 0.381, suggesting that 38.1% of its variance is accounted for by the independent variables in the model. Additionally, the Adjusted R^2 value of 0.380 supports the model's reliability and indicates acceptable stability. This R^2 value falls within the medium effect size category, implying that although the model demonstrates moderate explanatory strength for institutional performance, there is still potential for incorporating additional variables in future research to enhance model robustness.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Result

Hypothesis		Original Sample	Sample Mean	Std. Deviation	T-Statistics	P-Values
<i>Direct Effect Test</i>						
IM → HEP	H ₁	0.494	0.497	0.050	9.947	0.000
IM → QC	H ₂	0.799	0.802	0.029	27.789	0.000

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QC → HEP	H ₃	0.494	0.497	0.050	9.947	0.000
<i>Mediation Effect Test</i>						
IM → QC → HEP	H ₄	0.494	0.497	0.050	9.947	0.000

Note: HEP = Higher Education Performance; IM = Intrinsic Motivation; QC = Quality Culture

Table 5 demonstrates that all proposed hypotheses (H1–H4) are statistically supported based on PLS-SEM analysis. The direct effect of intrinsic motivation on higher education performance (H1) is significant and positive ($\beta = 0.494$; $T = 9.947$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher intrinsic motivation leads to better institutional performance. Likewise, intrinsic motivation strongly influences quality culture (H2) with the highest effect size ($\beta = 0.799$; $T = 27.789$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting its central role in shaping academic quality norms. The relationship between quality culture and performance (H3) is also significant ($\beta = 0.494$; $T = 9.947$; $p < 0.001$), affirming that a strong quality culture enhances performance. Furthermore, the mediation analysis (H4) confirms that quality culture significantly mediates the relationship between intrinsic motivation and performance ($\beta = 0.494$; $T = 9.947$; $p < 0.001$), highlighting that the indirect path is as strong as the direct one, thus underscoring the strategic importance of fostering both individual motivation and institutional culture to drive higher education outcomes.

DISCUSSION

In the context of higher education in Riau Province, the condition of limited resources, especially in private universities, makes the intrinsic motivation of lecturers a key factor in maintaining and improving the quality of performance in teaching, research, and community service. This is in line with the Resource-Based View (RBV) approach, which states that intangible resources such as individual motivation are unique strategic assets, difficult to imitate, and can provide a competitive advantage for organizations (Barney, 1991).

This study strengthens previous findings from Kuvaas et al. (2017), Jnaneswar and Ranjit (2022), and Senanayake and Gamage (2017), which show that intrinsic motivation has a positive and significant influence on workforce performance, including in the context of higher education. In a situation where institutions are pursuing quality improvement amidst limited facilities and policy support, strong motivation from individual lecturers becomes the foundation for the establishment of a sustainable quality culture.

Quality culture in this case is not only limited to the documentation system or formal accreditation, but also includes the values, beliefs, and commitment of lecturers in maintaining quality standards in the implementation of the tridarma of higher education. This finding also fills a void in the literature, as pointed out by George and Sabhapathy (2014), that the relationship between motivation and organizational culture has rarely been empirically studied. The RBV also recognizes that a strong organizational culture is part of the intangible assets that can sustainably strengthen institutional excellence.

In Riau Province, challenges such as accreditation, quality standardization, and increasing competitiveness are still crucial issues for many universities, especially private ones. This research shows that internalizing a culture of quality among lecturers can be a strategic solution in improving institutional quality without relying entirely on formal tools such as accreditation instruments. A strong quality culture encourages lecturers to make continuous improvement, as reinforced by the findings of Yusof and Ali (2000), Wu (2015), and Katwalo and Asienga (2015), who found a positive relationship between quality culture and organizational performance.

Furthermore, this study identified that quality culture mediates the relationship between intrinsic motivation and institutional performance. This suggests that strengthening quality culture should start from developing individual motivational aspects, rather than solely through structural or administrative approaches. This finding is in line with the study of Hilman et al. (2017) and Alotaibi et al. (2016), which concluded that quality culture is an effective mediator in bridging the relationship between human resources and organizational performance. Within the RBV framework, this confirms the importance of building internal excellence through synergy between human resources and organizational culture.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the influence of intrinsic motivation on the performance of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Riau Province, with quality culture as a mediating variable. The findings confirm that intrinsic motivation not only directly enhances institutional performance but also significantly fosters the development of a quality culture, which in turn strengthens overall organizational outcomes. These results align with the research hypotheses and reinforce the relevance of the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory in the context of higher education. The study contributes to existing literature by empirically demonstrating that intangible internal resources such as motivation and organizational culture are strategic drivers of sustained institutional excellence. A key implication of this research is that efforts to improve HEI performance should begin by nurturing

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the intrinsic motivation of academic staff, as this forms the foundation of a strong quality culture capable of generating long-term competitive advantage. This integrated mechanism provides a new theoretical insight into how human capital and internal culture interact to shape institutional success.

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