

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of The Problem

Human Resource Management (HRM) has undergone a significant transformation from being viewed primarily as an administrative function responsible for personnel administration to becoming a strategic management function that creates organizational value and sustainable competitive advantage. Contemporary Human Resource Management emphasizes the strategic alignment of human resource policies and practices with institutional vision, mission, and long-term objectives to improve organizational effectiveness and performance. This transformation is particularly important in higher education institutions, where lecturers and administrative staff represent the institution's most valuable intellectual assets. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, employees are regarded as strategic investments whose knowledge, competencies, skills, and professional capabilities contribute directly to institutional productivity, innovation, and long-term sustainability. Consequently, investments in recruitment, professional development, performance management, compensation, and career advancement should not be viewed merely as operational expenditures but as strategic initiatives that enhance institutional capacity and educational quality. Within this context, Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) extends traditional HRM by emphasizing the systematic integration of human resource practices with organizational strategy, thereby enabling institutions to develop a competent, motivated, and high-performing workforce capable of responding to increasingly complex educational and technological challenges. Recent studies demonstrate that educational institutions implementing strategically aligned HRM practices experience improvements in employee competence, organizational commitment, innovation capability, and overall institutional performance because human resources become a sustainable source of competitive advantage that is difficult for competing institutions to imitate (Jiang & Messersmith, 2022; Li & Wu, 2024). Therefore, Strategic Human

Resource Management provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding how effective HRM practices contribute to enhancing lecturer and staff competence while simultaneously strengthening organizational performance and institutional competitiveness in vocational higher education.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) provides a strong theoretical foundation for explaining why Human Resource Management (HRM) practices are fundamental to improving lecturer and staff competence in higher education institutions. According to RBV, an organization's long-term competitiveness depends on its ability to acquire, develop, and effectively utilize resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and organized to create sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 2021). In the context of vocational higher education, lecturers and administrative staff constitute the institution's most strategic resources because they possess specialized knowledge, pedagogical expertise, professional skills, industry experience, and innovative capabilities that directly influence teaching quality, research productivity, community engagement, and institutional performance. Unlike physical assets or technological infrastructure, human resources have the capacity to continuously generate new knowledge, adapt to technological advancements, and create organizational value through learning and innovation. Therefore, the competence of lecturers and staff is not merely an individual attribute but a strategic organizational asset that determines the institution's ability to respond to changing educational policies, labor market demands, and digital transformation.

From the RBV perspective, lecturer and staff competence cannot develop optimally without systematic and strategically aligned Human Resource Management practices. Effective recruitment and selection ensure that institutions attract highly qualified personnel whose competencies match organizational needs and long-term strategic objectives. Continuous professional development and training enable lecturers and staff to update their pedagogical, technical, digital, and professional competencies in response to emerging technologies and evolving industry requirements. Likewise, performance appraisal systems provide constructive feedback, identify competency gaps, and encourage continuous improvement, while equitable compensation, recognition, and career development

opportunities enhance employee motivation, organizational commitment, and retention of talented personnel. Collectively, these HRM practices strengthen institutional capability by developing a competent, innovative, and highly engaged workforce that is difficult for competing institutions to replicate. Recent empirical studies have confirmed that strategically integrated HRM practices significantly enhance employee competence, organizational capability, and institutional competitiveness, thereby reinforcing the Resource-Based View that human capital represents the most sustainable source of competitive advantage in higher education institutions (Wang et al., 2023; Li & Wu, 2024).

Competence serves as the primary dependent variable in this study because it reflects the extent to which lecturers and administrative staff possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional attributes necessary to perform their roles effectively and contribute to institutional excellence. Competency Theory posits that individual performance is determined not only by technical knowledge but also by a combination of behavioral characteristics, professional values, cognitive abilities, and continuous learning capacity that enable employees to achieve superior performance in dynamic organizational environments. Within vocational higher education, competence is a multidimensional construct encompassing pedagogical knowledge, professional and technical expertise, digital literacy, communication skills, problem-solving ability, innovation, collaboration, leadership, ethical responsibility, and the capacity to adapt to technological and organizational change. As higher education institutions increasingly respond to the demands of Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, and digital transformation, lecturers and staff are expected to continuously enhance these competencies to ensure high-quality teaching, effective institutional management, meaningful industry engagement, and improved graduate employability (Mulder, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

Recent empirical studies further demonstrate that lecturer and staff competence is strongly influenced by institutional Human Resource Management practices that promote continuous professional learning and organizational development. Strategic investments in training, mentoring, performance evaluation, career advancement, and competency-based talent management have

been shown to strengthen employees' professional capabilities, increase instructional innovation, improve digital readiness, and foster organizational commitment. Moreover, competency development has become an essential indicator of institutional quality assurance because highly competent lecturers and staff contribute directly to teaching effectiveness, research productivity, student satisfaction, and organizational competitiveness. Contemporary higher education research also emphasizes that competencies such as digital capability, innovation, communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving are indispensable for responding to rapidly changing educational environments and labor market expectations. Consequently, lecturer and staff competence represents not only an individual outcome but also a strategic institutional asset that mediates the relationship between Human Resource Management practices and overall organizational performance in vocational higher education (OECD, 2023; Zhang, Li, & Chen, 2025; Wang & Liu, 2024).

The rapid advancement of Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence (AI), and digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of vocational higher education, creating unprecedented challenges and opportunities for Human Resource Management (HRM). Vocational institutions are increasingly expected to prepare graduates who possess advanced technical, digital, and interdisciplinary competencies that meet the evolving demands of smart manufacturing, automation, big data, robotics, and intelligent production systems. Consequently, lecturers and administrative staff must continuously enhance their professional, pedagogical, and digital competencies to remain relevant in technology-driven learning environments. Human Resource Management has therefore become a strategic mechanism for equipping academic personnel with the capabilities required to integrate emerging technologies into teaching, research, and institutional management. Recent studies indicate that institutions capable of strategically developing their human resources through continuous professional learning, digital skills training, and competency-based performance management demonstrate higher levels of innovation, educational quality, and organizational adaptability than institutions relying on conventional personnel management approaches (Bond et al., 2024; Zawacki-Richter & Qayyum, 2023).

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into higher education has further accelerated the transformation of academic work by changing how lecturers design learning experiences, assess student performance, conduct research, and manage academic administration. AI-supported technologies—including intelligent tutoring systems, learning analytics, adaptive learning platforms, generative AI applications, and predictive analytics—have become increasingly important in enhancing educational effectiveness and institutional decision-making. However, these technological developments also require lecturers and educational staff to acquire new competencies related to AI literacy, digital ethics, data-informed decision-making, critical thinking, and responsible technology use. Recent evidence suggests that successful AI adoption in higher education depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on the readiness, competence, and continuous professional development of academic personnel, emphasizing the strategic role of HRM in facilitating institutional digital transformation (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2023; Tlili et al., 2025).

These global transformations have significantly influenced the reform of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems worldwide. Governments and educational policymakers increasingly recognize that vocational education must respond rapidly to technological innovation, industrial restructuring, and labor market transformation by producing graduates equipped with future-oriented competencies. Consequently, TVET reforms emphasize competency-based education, closer collaboration with industry, digital learning ecosystems, lifelong learning, and the development of "dual-qualified" educators who possess both strong academic qualifications and current industrial expertise. Human Resource Management is therefore expected to support these reforms by implementing strategic recruitment, competency development, performance evaluation, career progression, and talent retention policies that strengthen institutional capacity and educational quality. International organizations, particularly UNESCO, have consistently highlighted that teacher competence, continuous professional development, digital capability, and institutional leadership are among the most critical determinants of successful TVET reform

and sustainable workforce development in the digital era (UNESCO, 2022, 2024; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023). These developments underscore the urgency of examining how Human Resource Management practices can effectively enhance lecturer and staff competence to ensure that vocational higher education institutions remain responsive, competitive, and capable of supporting national economic and technological development.

China has positioned vocational education as a central pillar of its national development strategy to support industrial modernization, technological innovation, and the cultivation of a highly skilled workforce capable of sustaining high-quality economic growth. This commitment has been reinforced through the revision of the Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China, which elevates vocational education to a status equal to general education and emphasizes its strategic role in national modernization. The revised legislation promotes closer integration between education and industry, competency-based talent development, lifelong learning, and institutional quality improvement while encouraging vocational colleges to strengthen human resource capacity through systematic recruitment, professional development, and performance management. In parallel, the Ministry of Education of China has introduced a series of reforms aimed at improving educational quality, institutional governance, and workforce readiness by establishing competency standards for vocational educators, strengthening school-enterprise collaboration, and promoting innovation in teaching and learning. These policy initiatives highlight that effective Human Resource Management is no longer limited to personnel administration but has become a strategic instrument for enhancing institutional competitiveness and educational excellence within China's vocational higher education system (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2022; State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

A key component of these reforms is the development of "double-qualified" (shuangshi xing) teachers, who possess both strong academic qualifications and substantial industry experience. This concept has become one of the defining characteristics of vocational education reform in China because it enables lecturers to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical workplace

applications, thereby improving curriculum relevance, teaching effectiveness, and graduate employability. To achieve this objective, vocational institutions are expected to implement comprehensive Human Resource Management practices that support competency-based recruitment, continuous professional development, industry attachment programs, performance evaluation, and career advancement. Recent Chinese studies indicate that institutions with well-designed HRM systems are more successful in developing double-qualified teachers, enhancing lecturer competence, strengthening industry collaboration, and improving institutional performance. Conversely, vocational colleges that continue to rely on traditional personnel management characterized by seniority-based promotion, limited professional development opportunities, and weak performance incentives often experience slower competency development and reduced organizational innovation (Li & Zhang, 2023; Wang, Liu, & Chen, 2024; Zhao & Xu, 2025).

Despite substantial policy support and continuous investment, the implementation of vocational education reforms remains uneven across different regions of China, particularly in western provinces where disparities in educational resources, faculty development opportunities, digital infrastructure, and institutional capacity continue to present significant challenges. Vocational colleges are increasingly required to respond to the demands of digital transformation, artificial intelligence, green technologies, and advanced manufacturing while simultaneously complying with national quality assurance standards and industry expectations. These conditions place considerable pressure on institutional Human Resource Management systems to recruit competent lecturers, retain talented professionals, foster continuous competency development, and establish performance-based organizational cultures that encourage innovation and lifelong learning. Consequently, examining the relationship between Human Resource Management practices and lecturer and staff competence within Chinese vocational higher education has become both a theoretical necessity and a practical priority. Such investigation will provide empirical evidence to support ongoing vocational education reforms and contribute to the achievement of China's strategic objective of developing a highly

competent workforce capable of driving sustainable economic and technological development (MOE, 2024; Wu & Li, 2024; Chen, Zhang, & Liu, 2025).

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices constitute the independent variable in this study because they represent the strategic mechanisms through which higher education institutions acquire, develop, motivate, evaluate, and retain competent human resources. Strategic Human Resource Management theory suggests that organizational effectiveness is achieved when HRM practices are integrated and aligned with institutional objectives rather than implemented as isolated administrative activities. In vocational higher education, effective recruitment and selection ensure that institutions attract lecturers and administrative staff who possess the academic qualifications, industrial expertise, and professional competencies required to support teaching excellence and institutional development. Training and professional development provide continuous opportunities for enhancing pedagogical knowledge, technical expertise, digital literacy, and leadership capability, enabling employees to adapt to rapid technological and educational changes. Likewise, performance appraisal serves as a systematic process for evaluating employee performance, identifying competency gaps, and providing constructive feedback that supports continuous improvement. Compensation and reward systems, including both financial and non-financial incentives, contribute to employee motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention of talented personnel. Furthermore, career development initiatives create structured pathways for professional advancement, competency enhancement, and leadership preparation, thereby encouraging continuous learning and long-term institutional engagement. Recent empirical studies consistently demonstrate that these integrated HRM practices positively influence employee competence, organizational performance, innovation capability, and institutional competitiveness, particularly within higher education environments undergoing digital transformation and educational reform (Jiang & Messersmith, 2022; Wang et al., 2023; Li & Wu, 2024; Zhang & Chen, 2025).

Lecturer and staff competence constitutes the dependent variable of this study because it reflects the extent to which academic and administrative

personnel possess the capabilities required to perform effectively within vocational higher education institutions. Competence is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct encompassing knowledge, practical skills, attitudes, values, and professional behaviors that collectively determine employee performance and institutional effectiveness. In the context of vocational higher education, lecturer competence extends beyond traditional teaching expertise to include pedagogical competence, which refers to the ability to design, implement, and evaluate effective learning experiences; professional competence, involving mastery of disciplinary knowledge and technical expertise; research competence, encompassing the ability to conduct scholarly inquiry, generate innovation, and contribute to knowledge development; digital competence, referring to the effective integration of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and learning management systems into teaching and institutional administration; and industrial competence, which reflects practical industry experience and the ability to integrate workplace practices into vocational education. These competency dimensions have become increasingly important as vocational institutions respond to Industry 4.0, digital transformation, and competency-based education reforms. Recent studies indicate that higher levels of lecturer and staff competence contribute significantly to teaching quality, student learning outcomes, research productivity, institutional innovation, graduate employability, and organizational sustainability. Consequently, strengthening these competencies has become a strategic priority for vocational higher education institutions worldwide (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2023; Mulder, 2023; Wang & Liu, 2024; Zhang, Li, & Chen, 2025).

Recent studies conducted between 2021 and 2026 consistently demonstrate that Human Resource Management practices play a significant role in enhancing employee competence and institutional performance within higher education. Contemporary research has shown that strategic recruitment and competency-based selection improve the quality of academic personnel by ensuring alignment between institutional needs and employee capabilities. Professional development and continuous training programs have been found to strengthen pedagogical expertise, digital literacy, research productivity, and innovation capacity among

lecturers, thereby improving teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Similarly, performance appraisal systems that emphasize developmental feedback and competency improvement rather than administrative evaluation contribute to higher employee motivation, professional growth, and organizational commitment. Studies also indicate that equitable compensation systems and transparent career development opportunities enhance job satisfaction, talent retention, and long-term institutional sustainability. Furthermore, recent investigations into digital Human Resource Management reveal that technology-supported HR systems improve workforce planning, performance monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making while facilitating institutional adaptation to digital transformation. Although these studies collectively confirm the importance of strategic HRM for organizational effectiveness, they primarily focus on organizational commitment, employee satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, digital transformation, or institutional performance rather than comprehensively examining how integrated HRM practices simultaneously influence lecturer and administrative staff competence within vocational higher education. Consequently, further empirical investigation is needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship, particularly within the rapidly evolving context of Chinese vocational education (Jiang & Messersmith, 2022; Bond et al., 2024; Li & Wu, 2024; Wang et al., 2023; Zhang & Chen, 2025; Chen et al., 2025; Zhao & Xu, 2025; Wu & Li, 2024; OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

Despite the expanding body of literature on Human Resource Management in higher education, several important research gaps remain. Existing studies generally investigate the influence of HRM on organizational performance, employee engagement, organizational commitment, leadership effectiveness, or job satisfaction, while relatively few studies examine lecturer and staff competence as the principal outcome of integrated Human Resource Management practices. Furthermore, previous research frequently analyzes individual HRM functions—such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, or compensation—in isolation, without considering how these practices collectively operate as an integrated strategic system for competency development. Within the context of Chinese vocational higher education, empirical evidence remains

particularly limited regarding the combined influence of recruitment, professional development, performance appraisal, compensation, and career development on the competence of lecturers and administrative staff. In addition, most previous studies have been conducted in comprehensive universities or economically advanced eastern regions of China, whereas vocational colleges located in western provinces continue to receive relatively little scholarly attention despite facing distinctive institutional conditions, resource constraints, and regional development challenges. These gaps indicate the need for a comprehensive investigation that examines the integrated effects of Human Resource Management practices on lecturer and staff competence within Chinese vocational higher education institutions, thereby contributing to both Human Resource Management theory and vocational education management literature (Li & Wu, 2024; Wang et al., 2023; Zhao & The urgency of this research is closely associated with the accelerating transformation of vocational higher education driven by digitalization, artificial intelligence, Industry 4.0, and China's ongoing educational reforms. Vocational colleges are increasingly expected to produce graduates equipped with advanced technical competencies while simultaneously strengthening institutional quality, innovation capacity, and industry collaboration. Achieving these objectives depends fundamentally on the competence of lecturers and administrative staff, which in turn is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of institutional Human Resource Management practices. However, many vocational institutions continue to encounter challenges related to talent recruitment, competency development, performance management, employee retention, and career advancement, potentially limiting their capacity to respond effectively to contemporary educational and labor market demands. Given these challenges and the limited empirical evidence available within the context of Chinese vocational higher education, particularly in western China, further investigation is essential to generate evidence-based strategies for strengthening Human Resource Management systems and enhancing institutional competitiveness. Therefore, this study entitled *The Effect of Human Resource Management Practices on Lecturer and Staff Competence in Vocational Higher Education* is expected to provide significant theoretical and practical contributions by explaining how strategic

Human Resource Management practices enhance lecturer and staff competence, improve institutional effectiveness, and support the sustainable development of vocational higher education in China.Xu, 2025).

1.2. Limitation Research

This study has several limitations that define the scope and boundaries of the research. First, the study is limited to Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and their relationship with lecturer and staff competence at Lanzhou Vocational College of Engineering (LVCE), China. The HRM practices examined in this study focus primarily on recruitment and selection, performance management, professional development and training, compensation and rewards, and career development. Other organizational factors that may influence employee competence, such as individual personality, family circumstances, external labor-market conditions, and broader socioeconomic factors, are outside the primary scope of the study. This limitation is consistent with the research background, which identifies HRM as a strategic mechanism for acquiring, developing, motivating, evaluating, and retaining competent personnel within vocational higher education.

Second, the study is geographically and institutionally limited to Lanzhou Vocational College of Engineering in China. Although the findings may provide useful insights for other vocational higher education institutions, particularly institutions facing similar HRM and competency-development challenges, the results cannot automatically be generalized to all vocational colleges in China or to higher education institutions in other countries. Differences in institutional governance, regional economic conditions, organizational culture, educational policies, human-resource systems, and available resources may influence the implementation and effectiveness of HRM practices. The background of the study particularly recognizes that vocational education implementation differs across regions of China and that western regions may experience distinctive institutional and resource conditions.

Third, the dependent variable is restricted to lecturer and staff competence. The study examines competence through dimensions relevant to vocational higher

education, including pedagogical, professional and technical, research, digital, and industrial competence. Although these competencies are closely associated with teaching quality, institutional performance, innovation, and graduate employability, the study does not directly evaluate student achievement, graduate employment outcomes, research productivity, or overall institutional performance as independent outcome variables. These outcomes may be discussed as implications of competence development but are not treated as the principal dependent variables of the study.

Fourth, the study is limited to examining the influence of HRM practices rather than evaluating every factor that contributes to lecturer and staff competence. Leadership practices, governance structures, and institutional culture are considered as contextual factors in understanding the implementation of HRM, but the study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive evaluation of institutional leadership or organizational culture as separate research domains. Similarly, technological infrastructure, financial resources, curriculum policy, and industry partnerships may affect competency development, but these factors are considered only insofar as they interact with or provide context for HRM implementation.

Fifth, the study is conducted within the rapidly changing environment of vocational higher education characterized by digital transformation, artificial intelligence, Industry 4.0, and competency-based educational reform. Consequently, the findings represent the conditions and perceptions of HRM implementation during the period in which the research is conducted. Changes in national vocational education policies, AI technologies, digital learning systems, labor-market requirements, and institutional HRM policies may influence the relevance of particular findings in the future. The background indicates that these transformations are continuously increasing the need for lecturers and staff to develop digital, professional, technical, and adaptive competencies.

Sixth, the study relies substantially on information obtained from lecturers, administrative staff, and relevant institutional stakeholders concerning HRM practices and employee competence. Therefore, some findings may be influenced

by respondents' perceptions, experiences, and willingness to provide accurate information. Perceptual responses may not always fully correspond with formally documented HRM policies or actual institutional practices. To reduce this limitation, the research should apply appropriate procedures for instrument validation, reliability testing, and, where applicable, triangulation of information from different sources.

1.3. Research Question

Based on the background above, the core problem of this research lies in the misalignment between HRM practices and educational management goals at Lanzhou Vocational College of Engineering. This problem is formulated into the following research questions:

1. How do current HRM practices at LVCE influence teaching effectiveness, faculty performance, and student learning outcomes?
2. To what extent do recruitment, performance management, and professional development systems align with the college's educational objectives and national vocational education policies?
3. How do leadership practices, governance structures, and institutional culture shape the implementation of HRM at LVCE?
4. What strategic HRM interventions can enhance educational quality, faculty engagement, and institutional effectiveness in vocational colleges?

1.4. Research Objectives

The general purpose of this research is to analyze Human Resource Management practices at Lanzhou Vocational College of Engineering from an educational management perspective and to propose strategic improvements that support teaching quality, faculty development, and institutional sustainability. Specifically, the study aims:

1. To identify and analyze HRM challenges in educational management
This research seeks to examine recruitment, retention, performance appraisal, and professional development practices at LVCE and to analyze their impact on teaching effectiveness, faculty motivation, and governance processes.

2. To examine the relationship between HRM, leadership, and institutional culture

The study aims to explore how leadership styles, governance mechanisms, and organizational culture influence HRM implementation and educational outcomes within the vocational college context.

3. To propose strategic HRM interventions for vocational education
- Based on empirical findings, the research proposes practical and policy-relevant recommendations for strengthening HRM systems, integrating digital HR tools, and enhancing leadership capacity to improve educational quality and institutional performance.

Through these objectives, the study is expected to contribute to the field of Educational Management by providing insights that are relevant to vocational college leaders, policymakers, and researchers in China and other countries facing similar challenges in vocational education reform.

1.5. States the Art

Recent empirical and conceptual studies consistently demonstrate that human resource management (HRM) plays a decisive role in strengthening institutional performance and competitiveness within vocational higher education institutions, including contexts comparable to Lanzhou Vocational Technical College.

Research by Yang et al. (2023) emphasizes the strategic contribution of comprehensive HRM practices to institutional performance in Chinese vocational colleges. Using a quantitative survey approach across multiple institutions, the study found a significant positive correlation between structured HRM systems—covering recruitment, appraisal, training, and compensation—and improvements in teacher performance and overall institutional outcomes. These findings highlight the necessity of adopting a strategic HRM framework at LVCE to systematically enhance faculty productivity, accountability, and educational quality.

Similarly, Chen et al. (2025) examined the relationship between industry–education integration and graduate employment quality through a large-scale quantitative analysis involving 689 vocational institutions. The study revealed that teacher qualifications significantly moderate the effect of industry integration on employment outcomes. In other words, industry partnerships alone are insufficient unless supported by well-qualified and professionally developed faculty members. This reinforces the importance of HRM policies at LVCE that prioritize recruitment standards, continuous professional development, and competency-based training aligned with labor market demands.

From a broader theoretical perspective, Desmiarni, Maksum, and Purwanto (2024) conducted a meta-analysis demonstrating that HRM systems strongly influence teacher motivation, professional development engagement, and ultimately student learning outcomes. Their findings suggest that performance-linked HRM systems—such as transparent appraisal mechanisms, incentive-based compensation, and structured career pathways—can significantly enhance instructional effectiveness. For LVCE, this underlines the importance of integrating performance management systems with institutional academic goals.

However, structural and cultural dimensions also shape HRM effectiveness. Lin and Wang (2025), through qualitative case studies, found that hierarchical decision-making structures and limited faculty empowerment reduce the success of HRM implementation in vocational colleges. Even well-designed HR systems may fail if organizational culture restricts participation and innovation. This suggests that LVCE must not only reform HR policies but also cultivate a participatory and empowering institutional culture to maximize HRM outcomes.

In the context of digital transformation, Zhang (2025) highlights the growing importance of digital HR systems in vocational institutions. Through conceptual analysis, the study argues that Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) and technology-enabled HR practices enhance administrative efficiency, data-driven decision-making, and faculty competency development. For LVCE,

adopting digital HR infrastructure can support transparent performance evaluation, competency mapping, and strategic workforce planning.

Furthermore, Chen (2023), in a comparative case study of private vocational colleges, demonstrates that innovative recruitment strategies, competitive compensation models, and dynamic performance management systems significantly improve institutional competitiveness. These findings offer practical guidance for LVCE to modernize its HRM approach in response to increasing competition and evolving educational demands.

Fang (2025) contributes a comparative review showing that differences in HR education and professional HR capacity across institutions influence the quality of HRM implementation. Institutions with stronger HR training and expertise tend to implement more systematic and effective HR practices. This indicates that LVCE should invest in HR capacity-building programs to strengthen the professional competence of its HR personnel and management teams.

Finally, a systematic review of studies published between 2020 and 2025 consistently concludes that strategic HRM must align with national vocational education reforms and industry collaboration policies. HRM systems that integrate government modernization goals, industry partnerships, and institutional missions demonstrate stronger sustainability and policy coherence. For LVCE, aligning HRM strategies with national modernization objectives and industry-driven transformation is essential for long-term institutional development.

Collectively, these studies provide strong theoretical and empirical support for strengthening strategic, performance-based, digitally enabled, and policy-aligned HRM systems at LVCE. They demonstrate that effective HRM is not merely administrative, but a core driver of teacher competence, student outcomes, industry relevance, and institutional excellence.

1.6. Road Map Research

The first stage is identification of the research problem. The study begins by identifying the potential misalignment between HRM practices and the educational management objectives of LVCE. Particular attention is given to how recruitment, performance management, professional development, compensation, and career development are implemented and experienced by institutional personnel. The background indicates that HRM has increasingly become a strategic mechanism for developing institutional human capital and improving educational quality rather than functioning only as an administrative activity.

The second stage is theoretical and literature exploration. Relevant theories, including Strategic Human Resource Management, Human Capital Theory, Resource-Based View, and Competency Theory, are reviewed to establish an analytical foundation for understanding HRM and lecturer and staff competence. The literature review also examines vocational higher education, professional development, digital transformation, Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, and the development of competent vocational educators. These theoretical perspectives are used as sensitizing concepts rather than as rigid categories that restrict the emergence of findings from participants.

The third stage is formulation of research questions and qualitative research focus. The research questions guide the exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions. The study investigates how HRM practices influence teaching effectiveness, faculty performance, and educational outcomes; how HRM systems align with institutional and national vocational education objectives; how leadership, governance, and institutional culture shape HRM implementation; and what HRM strategies may strengthen competence and institutional effectiveness.

The fourth stage is qualitative research design. The study employs a qualitative approach because the purpose is to obtain an in-depth understanding of HRM implementation and its influence on lecturer and staff competence within the specific institutional context of LVCE. Rather than reducing HRM and competence to numerical indicators, the qualitative approach allows the

researcher to explore how participants understand, experience, and interpret HRM policies and practices in their everyday institutional environment.

The fifth stage is participant selection. Participants are selected purposively based on their relevance to the research questions and their direct experience with HRM practices at LVCE. Potential participants include institutional leaders, HR managers or administrative personnel, lecturers, department or program heads, and other staff members involved in HRM implementation or affected by HRM policies. Participant selection continues until sufficient information and thematic saturation are achieved.

The sixth stage is qualitative data collection. Data are primarily collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their experiences, perceptions, challenges, and expectations concerning HRM practices and competence development. Where appropriate, the interviews are complemented by document analysis of institutional HRM policies, recruitment procedures, professional development programs, performance evaluation documents, career development policies, and relevant vocational education regulations. Observation may also be used to understand the institutional context and actual implementation of HRM practices.

The seventh stage is data organization and qualitative analysis. Interview recordings are transcribed and the collected documents are systematically organized. The researcher conducts familiarization with the data, initial coding, categorization, identification of patterns, development of themes, and interpretation of relationships among emerging themes. Particular attention is given to themes concerning HRM implementation, competency development, leadership, governance, organizational culture, institutional challenges, and strategic opportunities.

The eighth stage is data triangulation and trustworthiness. Findings from interviews are compared with relevant institutional documents and, where available, observations or information from different participant groups. Credibility is strengthened through techniques such as member checking, prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer discussion, and an audit trail. These

procedures help ensure that the findings accurately represent participants' experiences and the institutional context.

The ninth stage is interpretation of findings. Emerging themes are interpreted in relation to the research questions and theoretical perspectives. The analysis seeks to explain not only what HRM practices exist, but also how they are implemented, how participants experience them, why certain practices support or constrain competence development, and how institutional leadership and culture influence implementation. The findings are also compared with previous research and the broader context of vocational education reform in China.

