
NEGOTIATING MOTIVATION AND STRESS IN ACADEMIC WORK: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LECTURER PERFORMANCE IN AN INDONESIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

Slamet Riyadi

Institut Bisnis dan Teknologi Al-Washliyah Sibolga

Email: slamet.riyadi@um-tapsel.ac.id

Abstract

Lecturer performance is central to higher education quality, yet performance cannot be adequately understood through productivity indicators alone. This study explored how lecturers experience work motivation and work stress and how these experiences shape teaching, research, community engagement, and student mentorship. An interpretive phenomenological design was used with 15 full-time lecturers at a medium-sized private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. Participants were purposively selected using maximum variation criteria and completed semi-structured interviews lasting 45–75 minutes. Data were analyzed through Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis, supported by reflexive attention to participants' meaning-making and contextual accounts. Four motivational resources emerged: intrinsic passion, extrinsic rewards, collegial support, and institutional recognition. Five recurring demands shaped experiences of stress: excessive workload, role ambiguity, resource insufficiency, work–life imbalance, and bureaucratic pressure. Across accounts, motivation and stress were experienced as dynamically interconnected rather than as independent predictors of performance. Intrinsic motivation enabled lecturers to sustain teaching and research effort under demanding conditions, while collegial support functioned as an important social resource. However, persistent workload, ambiguity, and inadequate resources progressively weakened these protective capacities and were associated with exhaustion and reduced performance. Participants also identified student mentorship as a meaningful but comparatively under-recognized dimension of academic work. The findings extend motivation and job-demands perspectives by showing how individual motivational resources depend on relational and institutional conditions. The study suggests that sustainable lecturer performance requires workload redesign, clearer institutional priorities, protected autonomy, stronger collegial structures, and recognition of mentoring and other forms of academic labor.

Keywords: academic work, lecturer performance, work motivation, work stress, intrinsic motivation, collegial support, phenomenology

Abstrak

Kinerja dosen memegang peranan sentral dalam kualitas pendidikan tinggi, namun kinerja tersebut tidak dapat dipahami secara memadai hanya melalui indikator produktivitas saja. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana dosen mengalami motivasi kerja dan stres kerja, serta bagaimana pengalaman-pengalaman tersebut memengaruhi kegiatan pengajaran, penelitian, keterlibatan masyarakat, dan pembimbingan mahasiswa. Desain fenomenologis interpretatif digunakan dengan 15 dosen tetap di

sebuah universitas swasta berukuran menengah di Jakarta, Indonesia. Peserta dipilih secara purposif menggunakan kriteria variasi maksimum dan menjalani wawancara semi-terstruktur yang berlangsung selama 45–75 menit. Data dianalisis melalui analisis tematik enam fase menurut Braun dan Clarke, didukung oleh perhatian reflektif terhadap pembentukan makna dan narasi kontekstual para peserta. Terdapat empat sumber motivasi yang muncul: gairah intrinsik, imbalan ekstrinsik, dukungan rekan sejawat, dan pengakuan institusional. Lima tuntutan yang berulang membentuk pengalaman stres: beban kerja yang berlebihan, ambiguitas peran, keterbatasan sumber daya, ketidakseimbangan antara pekerjaan dan kehidupan pribadi, serta tekanan birokrasi. Secara keseluruhan, motivasi dan stres dialami sebagai hal yang saling terkait secara dinamis, bukan sebagai prediktor kinerja yang independen. Motivasi intrinsik memungkinkan dosen mempertahankan upaya pengajaran dan penelitian di bawah kondisi yang menuntut, sementara dukungan rekan sejawat berfungsi sebagai sumber daya sosial yang penting. Namun, beban kerja yang terus-menerus, ambiguitas, dan sumber daya yang tidak memadai secara bertahap melemahkan kapasitas pelindung ini dan dikaitkan dengan kelelahan serta penurunan kinerja. Peserta juga mengidentifikasi bimbingan mahasiswa sebagai dimensi pekerjaan akademik yang bermakna namun relatif kurang diakui. Temuan ini memperluas perspektif motivasi dan tuntutan pekerjaan dengan menunjukkan bagaimana sumber daya motivasi individu bergantung pada kondisi relasional dan kelembagaan. Studi ini menyarankan bahwa kinerja dosen yang berkelanjutan memerlukan perancangan ulang beban kerja, prioritas kelembagaan yang lebih jelas, otonomi yang dilindungi, struktur rekan sejawat yang lebih kuat, serta pengakuan terhadap pembimbingan dan bentuk-bentuk kerja akademik lainnya.

Kata kunci: pekerjaan akademik, kinerja dosen, motivasi kerja, stres kerja, motivasi intrinsik, dukungan rekan sejawat, fenomenologi

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to demonstrate measurable academic productivity while simultaneously maintaining teaching quality, research capacity, community engagement, and student support. These expectations place lecturers at the intersection of multiple institutional demands. In Indonesia, the tri dharma of higher education provides the normative framework for academic work, while accreditation, performance reporting, promotion requirements, and research publication targets increasingly translate that framework into measurable outputs. For lecturers in private universities, these demands may be experienced alongside resource constraints and substantial administrative responsibilities. Understanding how lecturers themselves interpret these conditions is therefore important for both higher education scholarship and institutional management. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Research on employee and academic performance has established the relevance of work motivation and work stress. Motivation concerns the forces that energize, direct, and sustain work behavior, whereas work stress reflects the experience of demanding work conditions that exceed or threaten available coping resources. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) distinguishes autonomous forms of motivation, which arise from interest, values, and meaningful engagement, from more controlled forms driven by external contingencies. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) perspective similarly proposes that

demanding work conditions can impair well-being and performance when they are not balanced by adequate job resources. Together, these perspectives provide a useful starting point, but they do not by themselves explain how lecturers interpret, negotiate, and respond to these conditions in their everyday professional lives. (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

A further limitation concerns the dominance of quantitative approaches in research on motivation, stress, and performance. Survey studies are valuable for estimating associations among variables, but they can obscure how academic workers make sense of competing demands, how motivation changes under sustained pressure, and why apparently similar working conditions produce different responses. A qualitative approach can illuminate these processes by attending to meaning, context, relationships, and participants' own descriptions of what enables or constrains their work. (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The Indonesian context is particularly relevant because academic work is embedded in institutional and social relationships. Collegiality, mutual assistance, respect for organizational hierarchy, and culturally meaningful understandings of work may shape how motivation and stress are experienced. These contextual dimensions cannot be assumed to operate in the same way as constructs developed primarily in Western organizational settings. A phenomenological inquiry can therefore contribute not simply by adding another national setting, but by examining how established theoretical concepts are lived and negotiated within a particular academic environment. (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

This study addresses this gap through an interpretive phenomenological inquiry into lecturers' experiences of motivation, stress, and performance at an Indonesian private university. The study asks three questions: (1) How do lecturers experience and interpret sources of work motivation? (2) How do they experience and make sense of work stress in their everyday academic lives? and (3) How do motivation and stress interact, in lecturers' accounts, to shape their academic performance?

The study makes three contributions. First, it conceptualizes motivation and stress as dynamically interconnected experiences rather than isolated predictors of performance. Second, it identifies collegial support as a relational resource that can help lecturers sustain performance under demanding conditions, while also showing that intrinsic motivation has limits when demands become chronic and resources remain inadequate. Third, it highlights student mentorship as an important form of academic labor that may be insufficiently represented in formal performance systems. These contributions offer a more contextualized account of sustainable lecturer performance in private higher education.

Conceptual Background

Self-Determination and Academic Motivation

SDT provides a useful framework for understanding why lecturers invest effort in academic work. Autonomous motivation is associated with acting because an activity is interesting, personally valued, or consistent with one's sense of self, whereas controlled motivation depends more strongly on external pressure or contingent rewards. In academic settings, intrinsic interest in teaching, intellectual curiosity, professional purpose, and perceived autonomy can therefore support sustained engagement. However, SDT also emphasizes that motivation is shaped by the social environment; autonomy-supportive, competence-supportive, and relatedness-supportive conditions can facilitate high-quality motivation, whereas controlling or unsupportive environments can undermine it. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020).

Job Demands, Resources, and Academic Stress

The JD-R model distinguishes job demands from job resources. Workload, administrative requirements, role ambiguity, and emotional demands can consume energy, while autonomy, feedback, social support, and adequate resources can facilitate goal attainment and buffer strain. This perspective is particularly relevant to academic work because lecturers often occupy multiple roles simultaneously. The model also helps avoid interpreting stress as solely an individual weakness: strain can emerge from the configuration of work demands and available resources. (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Toward a Dynamic Account of Performance

The present study brings these perspectives into dialogue without treating them as competing causal models. The analytical interest is in how lecturers describe the relationship among motivational resources, work demands, social resources, and performance. The central sensitizing proposition is that motivation may help lecturers sustain performance under manageable demands, but chronic demands and insufficient resources may progressively erode that capacity. Conversely, relational resources such as collegial support may help preserve both motivation and performance. This framing guided interpretation while allowing themes to remain grounded in participants' accounts. (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

METHOD

Research Design

An interpretive phenomenological design was adopted to examine how lecturers experienced and made sense of motivation, stress, and performance in their everyday academic work. The study used thematic analysis to identify patterned meanings across participants' accounts. Phenomenological orientation shaped the research questions, interviewing, attention to lived experience, and interpretation; thematic analysis provided the analytic procedure for developing themes across the dataset. (van Manen, 2016).

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Universitas Cendekia Mandiri, a pseudonym for a medium-sized private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. The university has five faculties—Economics, Engineering, Social Sciences, Education, and Law—and approximately 120 full-time lecturers. Participants were eligible if they were full-time lecturers, had at least three years of service, and consented to an in-depth interview. Purposive maximum-variation sampling was used to obtain variation in gender, age, faculty, academic rank, and years of service. Fifteen lecturers participated. The source manuscript reports that no new themes emerged in the final three interviews and describes this as the point at which thematic saturation was reached.

<u>PARTICIPANT</u>	<u>GENDER</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>FACULTY</u>	<u>SERVICE (YEARS)</u>	<u>RANK</u>
P1	Male	42	Engineering	10	Lektor
P2	Female	35	Economics	7	Asisten Ahli
P3	Male	50	Law	18	Lektor Kepala
P4	Female	28	Education	3	Asisten Ahli
P5	Male	45	Social Sciences	12	Lektor
P6	Female	38	Engineering	9	Asisten Ahli
P7	Male	33	Economics	5	Asisten Ahli
P8	Female	55	Education	20	Lektor Kepala
P9	Male	40	Law	11	Lektor
P10	Female	31	Social Sciences	4	Asisten Ahli
P11	Male	47	Engineering	15	Lektor
P12	Female	36	Economics	8	Asisten Ahli
P13	Male	29	Law	3	Asisten Ahli
P14	Female	44	Education	13	Lektor
P15	Male	52	Social Sciences	17	Lektor Kepala

Data Collection

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted between March and May 2024. The interview guide was developed from the research questions and pilot-tested with two lecturers who were not part of the main sample. Questions addressed sources of motivation, experiences of stress, and perceived effects on teaching, research, community service, and student support. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, lasted approximately 45–75 minutes, were audio-recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were used to document contextual observations and non-verbal cues.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis. The researchers first familiarized themselves with the transcripts, generated initial codes across the dataset, developed candidate themes, reviewed themes against coded extracts and the dataset as a whole, refined and named themes, and produced the final analytical narrative. Coding was conducted manually with NVivo 14 used for data management. The analysis focused on both explicit descriptions and underlying meanings concerning motivation, stress, coping, relational resources, and performance. Participant quotations were selected to illustrate the interpretive claims rather than to establish quantitative prevalence. (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Trustworthiness was supported through several procedures reported in the source study: three participants reviewed interview summaries; two qualitative research colleagues participated in peer debriefing; contextual and participant information was described in detail; and an audit trail documented analytical decisions. The interpretive orientation also required attention to the researchers’ assumptions during analysis. Rather than treating researcher bracketing as the complete removal of preconceptions, the analysis used reflexive attention to how prior understandings could shape coding and interpretation. (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university’s research ethics committee. Participants provided written informed consent and were assured that their identities would remain confidential. Pseudonyms are used for the university and participants. No identifying institutional information is disclosed in this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Motivation as Professional Meaning

Participants described motivation not simply as a desire to obtain rewards, but as an experience of meaning attached to teaching, intellectual work, and contribution. Four interrelated motivational resources were identified: intrinsic passion, extrinsic rewards, collegial support, and institutional recognition.

THEME	SUB-THEME	PARTICIPANTS MENTIONING (N)
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INTRINSIC PASSION	Love of teaching and student interaction	14
INTRINSIC PASSION	Intellectual curiosity and research joy	12
INTRINSIC PASSION	Autonomy and creativity	10
EXTRINSIC REWARDS	Certification allowance and salary	13
EXTRINSIC REWARDS	Promotion and career advancement	9
EXTRINSIC REWARDS	Institutional awards and recognition	8
COLLEGIAL SUPPORT	Peer collaboration and mentoring	11
COLLEGIAL SUPPORT	Supportive departmental climate	9
INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION	Appreciation from leaders	7
INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION	Fair performance evaluation	6

Intrinsic passion was the most consistently described motivational resource. Participants associated teaching with satisfaction derived from seeing students understand difficult material and described research as intellectually energizing. One participant explained that seeing students finally understand a difficult concept was “priceless” (P2). Another described research discovery as a calling rather than simply a job (P1). Autonomy was also valued, although participants noted that institutional curricula and procedures could constrain the freedom they ideally associated with academic work.

Extrinsic rewards were important but were usually described as conditional or instrumental. Certification allowances, salary, promotion, and formal awards encouraged effort, particularly when lecturers were seeking to meet performance requirements. Yet participants distinguished between working to meet a formal target and investing discretionary effort in high-quality teaching or research. This distinction suggests that external rewards could sustain compliance without necessarily producing deeper engagement.

Collegial support emerged as a distinctive social source of motivation. Participants described senior colleagues who assisted with proposals, departments that shared teaching responsibilities, and peer relationships that made demanding academic work

more manageable. Institutional recognition was comparatively less prominent but remained meaningful when it communicated that effort was noticed and evaluated fairly.

Academic Stress as Accumulated Demands

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants mentioning (n)
Excessive workload	High teaching hours	14
Excessive workload	Administrative burden (BKD/reports)	13
Excessive workload	Student supervision overload	10
Role ambiguity	Unclear performance expectations	9
Role ambiguity	Shifting institutional priorities	8
Resource insufficiency	Limited research funding/facilities	11
Resource insufficiency	Lack of administrative support	9
Work–life imbalance	Blurred online-work boundaries	12
Work–life imbalance	Neglected family time	10
Bureaucratic pressure	Rigid regulations	8
Bureaucratic pressure	Accreditation demands	7

Stress was experienced primarily as cumulative rather than as isolated incidents. Excessive workload was the most prominent theme. Participants described high teaching loads, extensive reporting requirements, and large numbers of supervisees as competing for the same limited time and energy. Administrative work was particularly frustrating when lecturers perceived it as displacing preparation for teaching or research.

Role ambiguity intensified this burden. Participants described uncertainty about which institutional priorities mattered most and how performance expectations could realistically be achieved when funding, training, or administrative support was limited. Resource insufficiency similarly transformed desired performance into a difficult negotiation. Limited research facilities, for example, required some lecturers to use personal resources or external collaborations.

Work–life imbalance was another important source of strain. Digital communication blurred boundaries between academic and personal time, with students contacting lecturers outside normal working hours. Participants described emotional consequences when academic work repeatedly displaced family time. Bureaucratic pressure, especially during accreditation periods, added episodic peaks of intense work to an already demanding environment.

Motivation and Stress as Interacting Experiences

The central finding was that participants did not experience motivation and stress as independent forces. Instead, they described three interconnected patterns: buffering, erosion, and amplification. (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

****Buffering.**** Strong intrinsic motivation enabled lecturers to continue investing effort despite demanding conditions. Passion for teaching encouraged participants to search for new examples, redesign activities, or seek alternative research arrangements. The motivational resource did not remove the stressor; rather, it helped lecturers mobilize additional effort or reinterpret constraints as manageable challenges.

****Erosion.**** The buffering capacity of motivation was not unlimited. When high workload, role ambiguity, or inadequate resources persisted, participants described exhaustion, reduced creativity, and a shift toward minimum compliance. One participant explained that under intense workload they had little energy for interactive activities and therefore relied on reading slides (P6). This account indicates a transition from motivated performance to energy-conserving performance.

****Amplification.**** Extrinsic motivation could become counterproductive when performance targets were perceived as unattainable. When rewards were strongly tied to indicators but institutional resources were inadequate, participants experienced frustration rather than sustained engagement. In these circumstances, the gap between expected performance and perceived feasibility weakened the motivational value of the reward.

Collegial Support as a Relational Resource

Collegial support was distinctive because participants described it as useful across different forms of stress. Peer collaboration supplied instrumental assistance, while supportive departmental climates provided emotional reassurance and a sense that demanding responsibilities were shared. Participants therefore did not experience coping as an exclusively individual process. Academic work was sustained through relationships that enabled lecturers to exchange knowledge, distribute tasks, and maintain professional standards. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Performance Beyond Formal Outputs: Student Mentorship

Participants described performance across teaching efficacy, research productivity, community engagement, and student mentorship. Mentorship was especially revealing because it involved substantial emotional and temporal investment but was perceived as

less visible in formal performance systems. Lecturers continued to support students outside scheduled teaching, even when this contributed to work–life strain. Some participants reported becoming less patient with students when competing deadlines accumulated, suggesting that stress could affect not only the amount of mentoring but also its relational quality.

An Integrative Interpretation

Across the themes, lecturer performance appeared to be sustained through a dynamic configuration of motivational and relational resources. Intrinsic motivation provided meaning and persistence; collegial support supplied social and instrumental resources; institutional recognition validated effort; and extrinsic rewards structured some forms of goal-directed behavior. Against these resources stood workload, ambiguity, resource scarcity, boundary erosion, and bureaucracy. When resources were sufficient relative to demands, lecturers could maintain or adapt performance. When demands became chronic and resources remained inadequate, motivational resources were progressively depleted and performance shifted toward minimum compliance.

MOTIVATION/RESOURCE	STRESS CONDITION	OBSERVED PERFORMANCE PATTERN IN PARTICIPANTS’ ACCOUNTS
HIGH INTRINSIC MOTIVATION	High workload	Often maintained teaching/research effort, but with signs of fatigue
HIGH INTRINSIC MOTIVATION	High role ambiguity	Less able to sustain performance when priorities were unclear
HIGH EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION	High workload	Frequently associated with reduced performance and compliance-oriented effort
HIGH EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION	Resource insufficiency	Research and mentoring were particularly difficult to sustain
HIGH COLLEGIAL SUPPORT	Multiple stressors	Often helped maintain teaching, research, community, and mentoring activity

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that lecturer performance is better understood as a negotiated outcome of motivational resources, job demands, and social resources than as a simple consequence of motivation or stress. This interpretation is consistent with SDT in emphasizing the importance of meaningful engagement and autonomy, while the JD-R perspective helps explain why motivation alone cannot compensate indefinitely for excessive demands and inadequate resources.

Intrinsic Motivation Supports Persistence, but Does Not Eliminate Structural Strain

Participants' accounts of teaching passion, intellectual curiosity, and autonomy are consistent with the SDT distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation. Intrinsically meaningful work generated discretionary effort: lecturers searched for new teaching materials, pursued research despite constraints, and found alternative routes when facilities were limited. However, the findings also complicate any assumption that strong intrinsic motivation is a durable shield against stress. Persistent demands eventually reduced energy and creativity. The implication is important for higher education management: institutions should not treat lecturer commitment as an unlimited organizational resource. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020).

Collegiality as a Social Job Resource

Collegial support emerged as more than a pleasant workplace characteristic. Participants described concrete ways in which peers helped them cope with academic demands, including proposal development, task sharing, and collaborative outreach. From a JD-R perspective, such relationships function as job resources because they facilitate goal attainment and reduce the costs of demanding work. The finding also highlights the importance of interpreting social support in context: in a relational academic environment, performance may be sustained partly through collective rather than individual coping.

From Demands to Erosion: A Sustainable Performance Problem

The erosion pattern is arguably the study's most consequential finding. Lecturers initially responded to demands by drawing on intrinsic motivation and professional commitment. With persistent exposure, however, they described exhaustion and a movement toward minimum compliance. This pattern suggests that performance management systems can become self-defeating when they add measurable demands without increasing the resources required to meet them. Sustainable performance therefore depends not simply on increasing motivation but on redesigning the demand–resource configuration. (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Reconsidering Lecturer Performance

The prominence of student mentorship raises a broader conceptual question about what counts as lecturer performance. Formal higher education systems often privilege observable outputs such as teaching hours, publications, and community-service

documentation. Participants, however, treated mentoring as an important form of academic contribution involving emotional availability, guidance, and relational work. If such work remains invisible in appraisal systems, institutions may unintentionally discourage an activity that students experience as central to academic support. Recognizing mentorship does not require abandoning measurable indicators; rather, it calls for a broader conception of academic labor.

Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes a contextualized dynamic interpretation of motivation and stress. First, autonomous motivation operates as a conditional resource: it can sustain effort under demanding conditions when lecturers retain sufficient autonomy and supporting resources, but its protective capacity declines under chronic structural strain. Second, collegial support operates as a relational resource that can preserve performance by enabling instrumental and emotional coping. Third, performance is not a single outcome. Different forms of academic work may respond differently to the same demand: mentoring, for example, appeared particularly vulnerable to work–life boundary erosion, while research was strongly affected by resource insufficiency.

Practical Implications

University leaders should prioritize five actions. First, workload should be redesigned by reviewing teaching loads, supervision ratios, and administrative reporting. Second, institutional priorities should be communicated clearly and translated into achievable expectations supported by funding and training. Third, lecturers' autonomy in teaching and research should be protected where educational standards permit. Fourth, peer mentoring, collaborative research groups, and team-based community engagement should be institutionalized rather than left to informal goodwill. Fifth, performance systems should recognize mentoring, teaching innovation, and other relational forms of academic labor. Stress-management programs may be useful, but they should complement—not substitute for—organizational changes to excessive demands and inadequate resources.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single private university in Jakarta, which limits transferability to public universities, other regions, and different institutional cultures. The cross-sectional interview design captures participants' retrospective accounts at one period rather than changes across an academic career. Performance was also examined through self-reported experience rather than independent indicators such as student evaluations, publication records, workload records, or observations. Future research should use longitudinal qualitative designs and multiple data sources to examine how motivational resources change over time. Comparative studies across public, private, secular, and faith-based universities could also clarify which findings are context-specific and which reflect broader patterns in academic work. A subsequent mixed-methods study could test the conceptual relationships identified here without treating the present qualitative findings as causal estimates.

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