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Influence of Employee Learning on Career Growth: The Mediating Role of Employee Performance among Working Students at Universitas Terbuka

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ABSTRACT

Rapid technological advancement and changing labor market demands have increased the importance of continuous learning to maintain career growth, particularly among employees pursuing higher education while working. This study investigates the direct effect of employee learning on career growth and examines the mediating role of employee performance in this relationship among working students at Universitas Terbuka. A quantitative approach with a causal research design was employed. The population consisted of active working students at Universitas Terbuka, and a sample of 160 respondents was selected using incidental sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The research instrument was adapted from Yoopetch et al. (2021), comprising six indicators of employee learning, six indicators of employee performance, and four indicators of career growth. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4. The results indicate that employee learning has a positive and significant effect on career growth ($\beta = 0.523$, $p < 0.001$) and employee performance ($\beta = 0.692$, $p < 0.001$). Employee performance also has a positive and significant effect on career growth ($\beta = 0.192$, $p = 0.016$) and partially mediates the relationship between employee learning and career growth (indirect effect $\beta = 0.133$, $p = 0.017$; VAF = 20.27%). The findings extend Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that employee performance serves as an important mechanism through which investment in employee learning is translated into career growth. Practically, the study suggests that organizations should strengthen continuous learning initiatives and support employees pursuing higher education, while Universitas Terbuka should continue providing flexible learning systems that enhance students' workplace performance and long-term career development.

Keywords: Employee Learning, Employee Performance, Career Growth, Human Capital Theory, Universitas Terbuka.

JEL Code: M53, M12, J24, I23, O15

I. Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology, automation, and digitalization has fundamentally transformed the global labor market, requiring employees to continuously develop their competencies to



remain competitive. The Future of Jobs Report 2025 estimates that 170 million new jobs will emerge by 2030, while 92 million existing jobs will be displaced due to structural changes in the labor market (WEF, 2025). Moreover, 63% of organizations identify skill gaps as a major barrier to business transformation, and 85% plan to prioritize workforce development over the next five years (WEF, 2025). Consistent with these findings, the LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report (2025) reports that employees who actively participate in learning and development programs are more likely to receive promotions than those who do not. These trends indicate that continuous learning has become a strategic necessity for sustaining career growth rather than merely an individual choice.

The increasing participation of working adults in higher education reflects the growing importance of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning enables individuals to enhance competencies, strengthen professional identity, and improve career opportunities (Thwe et al., 2023). In Indonesia, this phenomenon is evident at Universitas Terbuka (UT), the only public university specifically designed to provide flexible distance education for working adults. In 2024, approximately 557,990 (74.32%) of UT's 760,379 active students were employed, demonstrating that UT represents one of the largest populations of working students in Indonesia (Universitas Terbuka, 2024). The number of Universitas Terbuka students has also increased substantially, from 378,754 students in 2020 to 760,379 students in 2024, indicating a growing awareness among working adults of the importance of formal education as an investment in professional development and career advancement (Universitas Terbuka, 2024). Previous studies suggest that one of the primary motivations for working adults to pursue higher education is to obtain better promotion opportunities, improve compensation, strengthen professional competencies, and remain competitive in the labor market (Cai et al., 2018). These developments raise an important question regarding whether investment in formal education and continuous learning truly translates into career growth among working students.

Career growth refers to the continuous development of an individual's professional career through competence development, promotion opportunities, remuneration growth, and career goal achievement (Weng et al., 2010). Previous studies have shown that career growth contributes to higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee well-being, whereas career stagnation increases turnover intention and psychological distress (Daud et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Career growth is therefore not limited to promotion or salary increases but also encompasses continuous professional development, greater responsibilities, and enhanced employability. Conversely, limited career growth opportunities may result in career plateau, reduced organizational commitment, lower job satisfaction, and higher turnover intention, ultimately affecting both employees and organizations (Arzani et al., 2025; Crisp et al., 2021). Human Capital Theory argues that investments in education and learning improve individuals' productivity and economic value, ultimately leading to better career outcomes (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). Nevertheless, learning does not always translate directly into career advancement. Employee learning is considered one of the primary drivers of career growth.

In the human resource management literature, employee learning has been conceptualized from two complementary perspectives: organizational-facilitated learning through formal training provided by employers and self-directed learning initiated independently by individuals (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Peno et al., 2024). In this study, employee learning refers to self-directed learning, whereby individuals actively identify their learning needs, acquire new knowledge, and apply new competencies to improve work performance (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Peno et al., 2024). This perspective is particularly relevant to working students at Universitas Terbuka because they voluntarily pursue higher education while simultaneously maintaining professional responsibilities across diverse occupational sectors, many of which do not provide structured organizational learning programs. Consequently, formal higher education at Universitas Terbuka represents a practical manifestation of self-directed learning as an individual investment in human capital. Previous studies have demonstrated that employee learning positively influences career growth (Yoopetch et al., 2021; Hafidz et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2019). More recent studies have also shown that continuous learning enhances employees' adaptability, professional competencies, and long-term employability in rapidly changing work environments (Bhaskar et al., 2021; Sarwar et al., 2025). However, career advancement generally depends not

only on learning itself but also on employees' ability to translate acquired knowledge into superior job performance.

Employee performance represents employees' behaviors and actions that contribute to organizational goals, including task performance, contextual performance, and the avoidance of counterproductive work behavior (Koopmans et al., 2014). Organizations generally reward employees based on demonstrated performance rather than learning activities alone. Consequently, employee performance may explain how learning is converted into career growth. Yoopetch et al. (2021), Syah et al. (2024), Hafidz et al. (2024), and Wijaya et al. (2025) suggest that employee performance plays a significant role in linking employee learning with career growth. Despite growing interest in these relationships, several research gaps remain. First, previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the effect of employee learning on employee performance. Second, most studies have focused on homogeneous organizational settings, such as the hospitality, construction, or information technology industries, limiting the generalizability of their findings. Third, empirical evidence examining employee performance as a mediating mechanism between employee learning and career growth remains limited.

Fourth, although Universitas Terbuka represents the largest higher education institution serving working adults in Indonesia, empirical evidence investigating how employee learning contributes to career growth among its working students remains absent. This population represents a unique context because participants simultaneously perform professional responsibilities while intentionally investing in formal higher education through self-directed learning. Based on these gaps, the present study addresses the following research problem: whether employee learning contributes directly to career growth or whether this relationship operates through improvements in employee performance among working students at Universitas Terbuka. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to examine the direct effect of employee learning on career growth, the effect of employee learning on employee performance, the effect of employee performance on career growth, and the mediating role of employee performance in the relationship between employee learning and career growth. The scope of this study is limited to active working students enrolled at Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia. Drawing upon Human Capital Theory, this study proposes that investment in learning enhances employee performance, which subsequently promotes career growth.

The study contributes to the Human Resource Management literature in three ways. First, it extends Human Capital Theory by examining employee performance as the underlying mechanism linking employee learning to career growth. Second, it provides empirical evidence from the underexplored context of working students pursuing higher education while employed across diverse occupational sectors. Third, it offers practical implications for organizations in designing learning strategies and for Universitas Terbuka in supporting the career development of its working students.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, introduced by Becker (1964), posits that education, training, and learning are forms of investment in human resources that enhance individuals' knowledge, skills, productivity, and career opportunities. From an organizational perspective, investment in employee learning is considered a strategic approach to improving employees' competencies, leading to superior job performance and long-term career advancement. Therefore, Human Capital Theory provides the theoretical foundation for explaining the relationships among employee learning, employee performance, and career growth (Becker, 1964; Becker, 1993; Yoopetch et al., 2021). In the context of working students, human capital development becomes increasingly important because individuals are required to simultaneously manage academic demands and professional responsibilities. Participation in higher education represents an additional investment in human capital that may strengthen employees' knowledge, skills, and competencies, thereby improving their work performance and increasing opportunities for career development. Therefore, examining employee learning

among working students provides a relevant perspective for understanding how continuous learning contributes to career outcomes.

2.2. Employee Learning and Career Growth

Employee learning refers to a continuous learning process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies that improve work effectiveness and support career development (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Noe, 2010). According to Human Capital Theory, learning activities represent investments that increase employees' productivity and organizational value, thereby creating greater opportunities for career advancement. Employee learning is not limited to formal training provided by organizations but also includes self-directed learning activities initiated by individuals to improve their capabilities. This perspective is particularly relevant for working students, as they often engage in independent learning through higher education to enhance their professional competencies and prepare for future career opportunities.

Career growth reflects employees' perceptions of their opportunities for professional development, including competence improvement, career goal achievement, promotion opportunities, and rewards within the organization (Weng et al., 2010; Hall, 2002). Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that employee learning positively influences career growth because continuous learning enhances employees' capabilities and competitiveness in the workplace (Yoopetch et al., 2021; Hafidz et al., 2024; Wijaya et al., 2025). Furthermore, recent evidence indicates that employees who actively engage in learning activities tend to have greater opportunities to improve their professional competence, access career development opportunities, and achieve career advancement. Learning becomes an important mechanism that enables individuals to adapt to changing workplace demands and strengthen their career prospects (Wijaya et al., 2025). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Employee learning has a positive effect on career growth.

2.3. Employee Learning and Employee Performance

Human Capital Theory suggests that investments in learning improve employees' competencies, enabling them to perform their jobs more effectively and efficiently (Becker, 1964). Through continuous learning, employees acquire new knowledge and skills that enhance their ability to solve problems, adapt to organizational changes, and improve work quality. Empirical evidence supports this argument. Dewani and Abadi (2024), Siagian (2025), and Yoopetch et al. (2021) found that employee learning significantly improves employee performance. However, Syah et al. (2024) reported an insignificant relationship between employee learning and employee performance, indicating inconsistent empirical findings. These inconsistencies highlight the need for further investigation, particularly among working students pursuing higher education. The inconsistency of previous findings suggests that the relationship between learning and performance may depend on the characteristics of individuals and organizational contexts. In particular, working students represent a unique group because they must integrate academic learning with workplace responsibilities. The knowledge and skills acquired through continuous learning may contribute to improved work effectiveness, problem-solving ability, and productivity. Therefore, further examination of employee learning and employee performance among working students is necessary to provide a broader understanding of how human capital investment translates into workplace outcomes. Building on the existing literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Employee learning has a positive effect on employee performance.

2.4. Employee Performance and Career Growth

Employee performance refers to the extent to which employees effectively accomplish their work responsibilities and contribute to organizational goals (Yoopetch et al., 2021). Organizations generally recognize and reward high-performing employees through promotion opportunities, increased responsibilities, and career advancement. Several empirical studies have demonstrated that employee performance positively influences career growth (Yoopetch et al., 2021; Hafidz et al., 2024; Wijaya et al., 2025; Syah et al., 2024). Employees who consistently demonstrate superior performance are more likely to experience professional development and achieve career success. Performance evaluation often becomes an important consideration for organizations when determining employee promotion, career opportunities, and professional recognition. Therefore, employees who demonstrate higher levels of effectiveness, productivity, and work quality are more likely to obtain greater career development opportunities. This relationship is particularly relevant for working students because their ability to maintain good performance while pursuing higher education may become an indicator of adaptability, competence, and readiness for future career advancement. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Employee performance has a positive effect on career growth.

2.5. The Mediating Role of Employee Performance

Human Capital Theory explains that investments in learning first improve employees' competencies, which are subsequently reflected in higher job performance. Improved performance then becomes the basis for career advancement, promotion, and professional recognition (Becker, 1964). Therefore, employee performance serves as a mechanism through which employee learning contributes to career growth. Previous studies by Yoopetch et al. (2021), Hafidz et al. (2024), and Wijaya et al. (2025) confirmed that employee performance mediates the relationship between employee learning and career growth. Nevertheless, empirical evidence regarding this mediating mechanism remains limited, particularly among working students who simultaneously pursue higher education. Most previous studies examining employee learning, performance, and career growth have focused on conventional organizational employees, while limited attention has been given to individuals who combine employment and higher education. Working students represent an important research context because their learning experiences occur both inside and outside the workplace. Therefore, this study extends previous research by investigating whether employee performance acts as an explanatory mechanism that converts employee learning into career growth among working students at Universitas Terbuka. Based on this theoretical and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Employee performance mediates the relationship between employee learning and career growth.

2.6. Conceptual Framework

Drawing upon Human Capital Theory and prior empirical findings, this study proposes that employee learning directly influences career growth and employee performance. Furthermore, employee performance directly affects career growth and mediates the relationship between employee learning and career growth. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine employees within organizational training contexts, this study focuses on working students at Universitas Terbuka, where learning activities occur through both workplace experiences and higher education participation. This research therefore contributes to the literature by explaining how continuous learning among working students can enhance performance and subsequently support career growth. The conceptual framework of this study is presented in Figure 1. Hypotheses:

- H1: Employee learning has a positive effect on career growth.*
H2: Employee learning has a positive effect on employee performance.
H3: Employee performance has a positive effect on career growth.
H4: Employee performance mediates the relationship between employee learning and career growth.

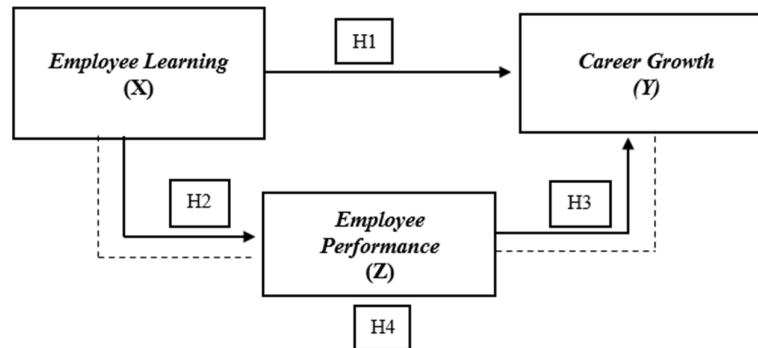


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

III. Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory causal research design to examine the effect of employee learning on career growth, with employee performance serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the empirical testing of relationships among variables using numerical data collected through structured questionnaires. The causal research design was applied because this study aims to examine the predictive relationships among employee learning, employee performance, and career growth, including the indirect effect of employee performance as a mediating mechanism based on the Human Capital Theory perspective. The study was conducted from January to June 2026 and involved working students enrolled at Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia. The target population consisted of all active Universitas Terbuka students who were simultaneously employed. Since the population size was unknown, the sample size was determined based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (2021), who suggested that the minimum sample size for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) should range from five to ten times the number of indicators. The research instrument consisted of 16 indicators, including six indicators of employee learning, six indicators of employee performance, and four indicators of career growth. Accordingly, a total of 160 respondents (10×16 indicators) were included in the study. Respondents were selected using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically incidental sampling, with the criterion that participants were active Universitas Terbuka students who were currently employed. This sampling technique was selected because the exact number of working students at Universitas Terbuka was unavailable, making probability sampling difficult to implement. To reduce potential selection bias, screening criteria were applied to ensure that only respondents who met the research requirements were included in the final analysis.

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed through online and direct approaches. The online questionnaire was distributed through WhatsApp groups and communication networks of Universitas Terbuka students, while direct distribution was conducted to reach respondents who fulfilled the research criteria. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the research objectives and confidentiality of their responses. Screening questions were provided at the beginning of the questionnaire to confirm that participants were active Universitas Terbuka students and currently employed. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). All measurement items were adapted from the instrument developed by Yoopetch et al. (2021). The selection of this instrument was considered appropriate because Yoopetch et al. (2021) examined similar constructs involving employee learning, employee performance, and career growth. The indicators

represent the process of human capital development, where continuous learning contributes to improved employee capabilities, work performance, and career advancement opportunities. Employee learning was measured using six indicators reflecting continuous learning behaviors, including participation in organizational training, self-directed learning to support work, perceived benefits of learning for oneself and the organization, commitment to continuous learning, and continuous acquisition of new knowledge. Employee performance was measured using six indicators representing effective time management, work effectiveness, work efficiency, quality of work, supervisors' evaluation, and co-workers' evaluation. Career growth was measured using four indicators reflecting skill and knowledge development, availability of career development facilities, opportunities for training and education, and career path clarity within the organization.

Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4 software. The analysis consisted of two stages. First, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated by examining convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability using outer loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha. Convergent validity was assessed based on outer loading values above 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50, while construct reliability was considered acceptable when Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded 0.70. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Second, the structural model (inner model) was assessed by evaluating the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients, predictive relevance (Q^2), model fit indices, and bootstrapping procedures to test the significance of the proposed hypotheses. The mediating effect of employee performance was examined through indirect effect analysis using the bootstrapping procedure. The collected responses were coded numerically based on the Likert scale before statistical analysis, while demographic information was used to describe the characteristics of respondents.

Table 1. Sample Criteria (N = 160)

Measurement	N	%
Gender		
Man	49	31
Female	111	69
Age (years-old)		
< 25 Tahun	75	47
25-34 Tahun	64	40
335-44 Tahun	18	11
> 45	3	2
Current Semester		
1	3	2
2	4	3
3	9	6
4	22	14
5	31	19
6	37	23
7	25	16
8	26	16
9	2	1
10	1	1
Length of Work (years)		
< 1	16	10
2-3	52	33

Measurement	N	%
4-5	36	33
>5	56	35
Employment sector		
Civil Servant/State Apparatus (PNS/ASN)	33	21
Military/Police (TNI/POLRI)	7	4
State-Owned/Private Enterprise (BUMN/BUMS)	11	7
Private-sector employee	70	44
Self-employed	16	10
Other	23	14

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1. Analysis Result

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software. Prior to hypothesis testing, the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) were evaluated. PLS-SEM was selected because the proposed research model involves multiple latent variables and examines both direct and indirect relationships through a mediating variable. Compared with conventional multiple regression analysis, PLS-SEM enables the simultaneous evaluation of measurement validity and structural relationships while providing greater flexibility for prediction-oriented research involving relatively complex models and moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2021).

The results of the outer model evaluation indicated that all measurement indicators met the validity and reliability requirements after one indicator of the employee learning construct was removed. All remaining outer loading values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were 0.683 for career growth, 0.655 for employee learning, and 0.743 for employee performance. These values were all above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Furthermore, the results of the cross-loading, Fornell–Larcker criterion, and latent variable correlation analyses demonstrated satisfactory discriminant validity for all constructs. The Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.845 to 0.931, while the Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.896 to 0.946, indicating that all constructs were reliable.

The evaluation of the inner model showed that the proposed model had a satisfactory level of goodness-of-fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was 0.063 (<0.10), the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) value was 0.567, and the Q^2 values were 0.418 for career growth and 0.468 for employee performance, indicating that the model possessed adequate predictive relevance. The R^2 results showed that employee learning explained 47.9% of the variance in employee performance, whereas employee learning together with employee performance explained 45.0% of the variance in career growth. These findings indicate that the proposed research model possesses moderate explanatory power, suggesting that employee learning and employee performance are important determinants of career growth among working students, although other organizational and individual factors may also contribute to career development. The hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Employee Learning → Career Growth	0.523	5.863	0.000	Supported

H2	Employee Learning → Employee Performance	0.692	15.713	0.000	Supported
H3	Employee Performance → Career Growth	0.192	2.141	0.016	Supported
H4	Employee Learning → Employee Performance → Career Growth	0.133	2.114	0.017	Supported

The analysis also revealed that employee performance partially mediated the relationship between employee learning and career growth. The Variance Accounted For (VAF) value was 20.27%, indicating that part of the effect of employee learning on career growth was transmitted through improvements in employee performance.

4.2. Discussion

The findings indicate that employee learning has a positive and significant effect on career growth. This result suggests that the greater an individual's involvement in learning activities, the greater the opportunity for career advancement. The finding supports Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which argues that investment in learning enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, and productivity, thereby increasing career advancement opportunities. This result is consistent with the findings of Yoopetch et al. (2021), Wijaya et al. (2025), and Hafidz et al. (2024), who also reported that employee learning is an important determinant of career growth. The standardized path coefficient ($\beta = 0.523$) indicates that employee learning contributes substantially to career growth. This finding implies that employees who continuously improve their competencies through formal training and self-directed learning are more likely to perceive greater career opportunities. In the context of Universitas Terbuka, this finding is particularly relevant because working students simultaneously acquire academic knowledge and practical workplace experience, allowing them to strengthen both their competencies and career prospects.

The study also demonstrates that employee learning has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This relationship exhibits the largest path coefficient in the structural model, indicating that learning is the primary factor contributing to improved employee performance. This finding further supports Human Capital Theory, which proposes that competency development through learning leads to higher productivity (Becker, 1964). The result is in line with the studies of Dewani and Abadi (2024), Yoopetch et al. (2021), and Siagian (2025), all of which concluded that continuous learning improves employees' work effectiveness and efficiency. The relatively high path coefficient ($\beta = 0.692$) suggests that employee learning is the strongest predictor in the proposed structural model. This finding demonstrates that continuous learning not only improves knowledge acquisition but also enhances employees' ability to perform their work efficiently and effectively. Compared with previous studies, the present research extends the existing evidence by confirming that this relationship also applies to adult learners who simultaneously manage academic and occupational responsibilities.

Furthermore, the results reveal that employee performance positively influences career growth. This indicates that employees with better job performance have greater opportunities for promotion, career development, and professional recognition. The finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by Yoopetch et al. (2021), Wijaya et al. (2025), Syah et al. (2024), and Hafidz et al. (2024), which identified employee performance as one of the primary determinants of career growth. Although the magnitude of this relationship ($\beta = 0.192$) is smaller than the direct effect of employee learning, the result indicates that work performance remains an important mechanism through which employees achieve career advancement. Organizations generally reward high-performing employees through promotion opportunities, greater responsibilities, and professional recognition, thereby supporting long-term career growth.

In addition to the direct effects, this study found that employee performance partially mediates the relationship between employee learning and career growth. This finding indicates that learning contributes to career growth not only directly but also indirectly through improved employee performance. In other words, the knowledge and skills acquired through learning should be translated into better job performance

to maximize career advancement. This finding is consistent with Human Capital Theory, which explains that investment in learning enhances human capital, which is subsequently transformed into higher employee performance and ultimately leads to career growth (Becker, 1964). The result also reinforces the findings of Yoopetch et al. (2021), Wijaya et al. (2025), and Hafidz et al. (2024). The VAF value of 20.27% indicates partial mediation, suggesting that employee performance explains only part of the relationship between employee learning and career growth. This implies that additional factors, such as organizational support, employee motivation, career commitment, and self-efficacy, may also contribute to translating learning into career advancement.

The findings provide several practical implications for organizations. Organizations should regard employee learning as a strategic investment in human resource development rather than merely an operational expense. By providing continuous training programs, supporting employees who pursue formal education, and fostering a learning-oriented organizational culture, organizations can improve employees' competencies and work performance, which ultimately contributes to sustainable career growth. For higher education institutions, particularly Universitas Terbuka, these findings demonstrate that flexible higher education programs provide tangible benefits for working students by enhancing both their workplace performance and long-term career development.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the respondents consisted exclusively of working students enrolled at Universitas Terbuka, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other employee populations. Second, employee performance was the only mediating variable examined in this study, whereas other individual and organizational factors may also influence the relationship between employee learning and career growth. In addition, although PLS-SEM provides advantages for prediction-oriented research and mediation analysis, the method primarily focuses on maximizing explained variance rather than strict theory confirmation. Therefore, future studies may employ covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) with larger samples to further validate the theoretical relationships proposed in this study.

Future research is encouraged to investigate additional mediating or moderating variables, such as employee motivation, organizational support, self-efficacy, and career commitment, to explain the remaining direct effect of employee learning on career growth that was not captured in the present model. Furthermore, to reduce potential bias arising from differences in career development systems and performance appraisal practices across industries, future studies are recommended to focus on more homogeneous occupational sectors, such as civil servants or private-sector employees. Researchers are also encouraged to increase the sample size and expand the geographical coverage by including respondents from other regional offices of Universitas Terbuka throughout Indonesia, including participants from the Overseas Learning Service Program for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), thereby improving the generalizability of the findings. Finally, future studies may consider employing a more comprehensive measure of career growth, such as the Organizational Career Growth Scale (OCGS) developed by Weng et al. (2010), which consists of 15 measurement items across four dimensions and provides a richer and more multidimensional assessment of career growth.

V. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effect of employee learning on career growth, with employee performance serving as the mediating variable among working students at Universitas Terbuka. The findings demonstrate that employee learning has a positive and significant effect on both career growth and employee performance. Furthermore, employee performance positively influences career growth and partially mediates the relationship between employee learning and career growth. These findings indicate that continuous learning not only enhances employees' competencies but also improves their work performance, which ultimately accelerates career growth. Overall, the findings provide empirical support for Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that investment in employee learning contributes directly and indirectly to

employees' career advancement through improved job performance. These findings also provide evidence that employee performance serves as an important mechanism linking learning activities to career advancement among working adult students, thereby extending the application of Human Capital Theory within the context of higher education.

This study contributes to the development of Human Capital Theory by providing empirical evidence that employee performance functions as an important mechanism through which employee learning is translated into career growth. The findings enrich the literature on the relationships among employee learning, employee performance, and career growth by extending previous studies to the context of working adult students pursuing higher education. Moreover, the study confirms that investment in continuous learning remains a significant driver of career advancement across employees from diverse occupational backgrounds. This study also broadens the empirical evidence regarding career growth among working students, a context that has received relatively limited attention in previous Human Resource Management research. The findings provide practical implications for organizations by emphasizing the importance of establishing a continuous learning culture through training programs, competency development initiatives, and organizational support for employees pursuing formal education. Organizations should ensure that knowledge acquired through learning activities is effectively translated into improved workplace performance to maximize career development opportunities. In addition, higher education institutions, particularly Universitas Terbuka, should continue to design flexible and workplace-oriented learning programs that support the professional development of working students and enhance their competitiveness in the labor market. These findings also suggest that organizations should integrate employee learning initiatives with performance management systems to maximize employees' long-term career development.

This study is subject to several limitations. The respondents were limited to working students at Universitas Terbuka, and the proposed research model examined only employee performance as the mediating variable. Consequently, future studies are encouraged to incorporate additional mediating or moderating variables, including employee motivation, organizational support, self-efficacy, and career commitment, to provide a more comprehensive explanation of career growth. Future researchers are also recommended to focus on homogeneous occupational sectors, expand the sample size and research coverage across regional offices of Universitas Terbuka and the Overseas Learning Service Program for Indonesian Migrant Workers, and employ more comprehensive measurement instruments, such as the Organizational Career Growth Scale developed by Weng et al. (2010), to enhance the robustness and generalizability of future findings. Future studies may also employ longitudinal research designs to examine how employee learning influences career growth over time and to provide stronger evidence regarding causal relationships among the variables.

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