

The Effect of Job Placement on the Performance of Educational Staff at Universitas Mulawarman: The Mediating Role of Career Development

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of job placement on the performance of educational staff at Universitas Mulawarman, Indonesia, with career development as a mediating variable. This study is driven by the ongoing challenge of optimizing administrative efficiency and utilizing human capital within higher education institutions. Utilizing Person–Job Fit Theory and Human Capital Theory, this study posits that appropriate job placement enhances employee performance both directly and indirectly through career development opportunities. A quantitative explanatory approach was employed, and data were collected from 135 administrative employees across various faculties and units using structured questionnaires. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4. The results revealed that job placement had a significant positive effect on both career development ($\beta = 0.748$, $p < 0.001$) and employee performance ($\beta = 0.644$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, career development positively influenced performance ($\beta = 0.268$, $p < 0.001$) and mediated the relationship between job placement and performance ($\beta = 0.201$, $p < 0.001$). These findings empirically validate an integrated framework combining person-job fit and human capital theory. This study contributes to the human resource management literature by demonstrating that employee performance in higher education is contingent not only on correct job placement but also on continuous career growth. Practically, the results underscore the necessity of competency-based placement systems and structured development programs to enhance organizational effectiveness and sustainability within the public education sector.

Keywords: job placement; career development; employee performance; human capital; higher education

INTRODUCTION

Human resources are integral to the success of organizations, particularly within educational institutions, where the performance of administrative staff has a direct impact on academic quality and institutional productivity. In the context of higher education, the efficacy of administrative systems relies not only on strategic leadership but also on the appropriate alignment of employees' competencies, experiences, and interests with suitable roles and responsibilities. In Indonesian universities, especially public institutions such as Universitas Mulawarman, the effectiveness of the educational staff is often a determinant of the efficiency of both academic and managerial operations. Nevertheless, despite the implementation of various human resource development programs, challenges persist, including mismatched placements, limited promotion systems, and ambiguous career trajectories, all of which detract from employee motivation and overall performance.

The significance of job placement has been extensively acknowledged in the human resource management literature as a pivotal factor that influences employee performance. According to the person–Job Fit Theory, the alignment of individual capabilities with job requirements enhances both satisfaction and productivity (KristofBrown et al., 2023). However, the degree to which effective placement impacts performance may depend on the availability of continuous career development opportunities that foster learning, advancement, and psychological engagement (Becker, 2022). Numerous organizations, particularly in the public sector, encounter challenges in sustaining high levels of staff commitment due to restricted career advancement pathways and inadequate training programs, which diminish the motivational effects of appropriate job placement.

Empirical research on job placement and performance has been inconsistent. Some scholars contend that placement directly enhances performance (Wong & Liu, 2023), whereas others highlight the mediating role of career development as the mechanism through which placement exerts its influence (Tang & Wang, 2024). In higher education, research remains limited, particularly in Indonesia, where administrative staff operate within rigid bureaucratic frameworks. Previous studies have predominantly concentrated on academic staff, leaving a gap in understanding the human resource dynamics among non-academic employees who support academic operations (Hidayat and Natsir, 2022). Furthermore, cultural, structural, and policy factors within Indonesian universities complicate the generalization of findings from corporate or Western contexts to the local public education system.

To address this research gap, the present study examines the impact of job placement on the performance of educational staff at Universitas Mulawarman, with career development serving as a mediating variable. This focus is essential because, while placement determines role suitability, the sustainability of employee performance often hinges on perceived career development. Consequently, this study extends the theoretical model by integrating Person–Job Fit and Human Capital Theory, positing that appropriate placement enhances performance both directly and indirectly through improved career development. By empirically validating this relationship using structural equation modeling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS), this study contributes to the advancement of Human Resource Management (HRM) theory within the context of higher education management and provides evidence pertinent to the development of more effective HR policies in Indonesian universities.

This study offers significant managerial insights for university administrators and policymakers aiming to optimize human capital utilization. The implementation of effective placement policies can mitigate skill mismatches and enhance organizational agility, while structured career development programs can sustain motivation and long-term commitment among educational staff members. For institutions facing challenges such as staff turnover, low morale, or uneven performance, integrating these two human resource dimensions can improve both employee engagement and institutional competitiveness.

In summary, this study investigated the causal relationships between job placement, career development, and employee performance among educational staff in an Indonesian university context. The findings are anticipated to provide both theoretical and practical implications for strategic human resource management in higher education. The subsequent section presents the theoretical framework and hypothesis development, followed by the research methods, empirical findings, and discussion.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Foundations

Two principal theories form the foundation of the present study: the Person–Job Fit Theory and the Human Capital Theory. The Person–Job Fit Theory posits that an optimal alignment between an individual's abilities and job requirements enhances job satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). When employees perceive congruence between their skills and assigned tasks, they are likely to exhibit increased engagement, commitment, and productivity. Conversely, misalignment can lead to stress, frustration, and diminished performance outcomes. In higher education administration, where employees navigate complex academic and bureaucratic processes, aligning qualifications, interests, and job responsibilities is crucial for ensuring efficiency and service quality.

In alignment with this, Human Capital Theory suggests that the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees constitute forms of capital that enhance organizational value (Becker, 2022). Investment in career development through training, mentoring, and promotion opportunities augments employees' competencies and their contribution to organizational performance. This theoretical integration indicates that appropriate job placement (as an entry condition) and structured career development (as a growth condition) collectively influence employee performance. Consequently, career development can serve as a mediating mechanism that fortifies the connection between placement and performance by offering opportunities for continuous learning and advancement.

Job Placement and Career Development

Job placement refers to the process of assigning individuals to roles that align with their qualifications, experience, and interests (Wong & Liu, 2023). Effective placement ensures that employees can execute tasks efficiently while promoting psychological comfort and motivation in the workplace. Within higher education institutions, the quality of placement often reflects the precision of human-resource planning and the equity of internal staffing policies. Previous research suggests that when job placement corresponds to employee competencies, individuals are more inclined to pursue professional development and demonstrate stronger organizational commitment (Albrecht & Dineen, 2023).

Research indicates that career development opportunities are frequently enhanced through appropriate job placement. When employees perceive that their current positions effectively utilize their potential and align with their long-term career objectives, they are more likely to actively pursue skill enhancement and improved performance. Conversely, inadequate placement decisions can result in stagnation and diminished motivation to engage in developmental activities. Therefore, effective job placement not only enhances immediate performance outcomes but also fosters sustained career growth in the long term.

H1: Job placement has a positive effect on career development.

Career Development and Performance

Career development refers to the systematic initiatives undertaken by organizations to facilitate employees' career advancement through training, mentoring, evaluation, and promotion (Tang & Wang, 2024). From a human capital perspective, these initiatives enhance employee value and enable organizations to adapt to the evolving demands. Within educational institutions, career development programs, such as skill upgrading, leadership training, and competency certification, are crucial for improving administrative effectiveness and fostering service innovation.

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that career development enhances both individual and organizational performance. Employees who perceive well-defined career pathways tend to exhibit elevated levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior (Becker, 2022). Furthermore, structured career development bolsters employees' confidence in their ability to perform tasks effectively, thereby improving performance indicators such as service quality, punctuality, and innovation.

H2: Career development positively affects employee performance.

Job Placement and Performance

The direct correlation between job placement and performance has been extensively examined in the management literature. Effective placement enables employees to leverage their competencies efficiently, diminishes role ambiguity, and enhances motivation (Hidayat and Natsir, 2022). In higher education contexts, appropriate placement facilitates smoother administrative operations, improves coordination with academic units, and increases service satisfaction among faculty and students.

In certain organizations, particularly in the public sector, placement decisions may not adequately consider the alignment of competence and interest, resulting in inefficiencies. Consequently, job placement can serve as a strategic human resource practice to optimize human potential and ensure accountability in task execution. Empirical research substantiates that precise placement directly enhances work quality and organizational productivity (Wong and Liu, 2023).

H3: Job placement has a positive effect on employee performance.

The Mediating Role of Career Development

While job placement directly affects performance, its long-term impact may depend on the extent to which employees experience meaningful career development. Effective placement establishes a foundation for career

progression by offering individuals suitable exposure, opportunities for skill application, and the confidence required for growth. Consequently, ongoing development enhances performance by promoting adaptability, motivation and innovation (Tang & Wang, 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, this mediating process aligns with Human Capital Theory, which asserts that the accumulation of skills and investment in one's career enhance the returns from initial job suitability (Becker, 2022). When employees perceive that their organization values their development, they are more likely to maintain high performance even in dynamic institutional environments. Consequently, career development serves as both a psychological and professional conduit that links job placement with performance.

Empirical evidence supports this concept. Albrecht and Dineen (2023) found that career development mediates the relationship between placement satisfaction and performance among employees in the service sector. Similarly, Wong and Liu (2023) demonstrated that training opportunities and career mobility enhance the positive effects of job role fit on performance outcomes. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4: Career development mediates the relationship between job placement and employee performance.

Conceptual Framework

Building on the theoretical and empirical foundations previously discussed, this study introduces a conceptual model in which job placement functions as the independent variable, career development as the mediating variable, and performance as the dependent variable. The model posits both direct and indirect effects between job placement and performance, illustrating a dual-path mechanism that encompasses both immediate role effectiveness and long-term developmental outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative explanatory research design to investigate the causal relationships among job placement, career development, and employee performance. The methodology is rooted in the positivist paradigm, which posits that organizational behavior can be measured objectively through statistical analysis. Given the study's objective of testing mediation effects and assessing latent constructs, structural equation modeling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS) was chosen as the primary analytical technique. This method is particularly suitable for predictive modeling and theory development, especially when addressing complex relationships and relatively small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2024).

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey methodology, collecting data at a single point in time from educational personnel at Universitas Mulawarman. This design enables the identification of associative patterns among constructs while minimizing the influence of external variables. Furthermore, SEM-PLS is particularly advantageous for research focused on model validation and mediation testing because it effectively accommodates non-normal data and reflective measurement models.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of educational administrative staff employed across various faculties and units at Universitas Mulawarman, Indonesia. These individuals constitute a crucial segment of non-academic human resources tasked with responsibilities in academic administration, finance, logistics, and institutional services. The selection of this population is consistent with the study's aim to explore human resource management dynamics within higher education settings, where administrative efficiency has a direct impact on institutional performance.

A census sampling method was used to ensure comprehensive representation. From an approximate total of 200 staff members, 135 valid responses were collected and analyzed. This sample size meets the recommended minimum threshold for SEM-PLS analysis, which suggests a ratio of at least 10 respondents per indicator (Hair

et al., 2024). All respondents were permanent staff with a minimum tenure of two years, thereby ensuring sufficient experience and familiarity with their job placement and career progression.

In terms of demographics, the respondents were predominantly female (62%), aged between 31 and 45 years (58%), and possessed undergraduate degrees (74%). The average tenure was 8.4 years, suggesting a moderate level of experience in administrative positions. These characteristics indicate a stable, mid-career workforce capable of providing valuable insights into institutional human resource practices.

Measurement of Variables

In this study, each construct was operationalized as a reflective latent variable measured using multiple indicators adapted from established instruments. All indicators were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Job Placement (JP) This construct assesses the degree to which an employee's qualifications, competencies, and preferences align with their assigned position. It was adapted from Albrecht and Dineen (2023) and included indicators such as alignment between education and job tasks, suitability of skills to job requirements, compatibility between interests and assigned duties, clarity of placement procedures, and fairness in assignment decisions. Higher scores indicate greater perceived appropriateness of placement.

Career Development (CD) This variable captures employees' perceptions of organizational support for career growth based on Becker (2022) and Tang & Wang (2024). Indicators include access to training and skill enhancement programs, clarity of career pathways and promotion criteria, perceived opportunities for advancement, and managerial support for development. This construct reflects both the structural and psychological dimensions of career progression.

Employee Performance (EP) was measured using indicators derived from Wong and Liu (2023), encompassing both task and contextual dimensions: work quality and accuracy, timeliness and reliability, initiative and problem-solving capacity, and contribution to service innovation and stakeholder satisfaction. These indicators reflect the holistic performance of higher education administrative settings.

Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire underwent a content validity assessment by three experts in HR and academic management to ensure its conceptual relevance and clarity. A pilot test with 20 respondents was also conducted, confirming item reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70 for all constructs.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were gathered via self-administered questionnaires, which were distributed electronically and in printed form over a four-week duration. Participation was voluntary and confidential, with respondents being informed of the study's academic purpose. Ethical approval was obtained from the Universitas Mulawarman Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of data collection. To mitigate common method bias, procedural remedies were implemented, including randomization of question order and assurance of respondent anonymity. Furthermore, statistical analyses, such as Harman's single-factor test, revealed that no single factor accounted for more than 40% of the variance, indicating minimal common method variance.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis employed a two-stage approach in Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEMPLS) using SmartPLS 4.0 software.

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model) The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed based on the following criteria: indicator loadings ≥ 0.70 , composite reliability (CR) ≥ 0.70 , average variance extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50 , and discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (< 0.85). Multicollinearity was evaluated using the variance inflation factor (VIF) values (< 5.0). All indicators satisfied these standards, confirming both convergent and discriminant validity.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model) The relationships among constructs were analyzed using path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and significance levels obtained through bootstrapping (5000 subsamples). The predictive relevance of the model was assessed using R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 values. Specifically, the R^2 value for career development (0.56) indicated moderate explanatory power, whereas the R^2 for performance (0.67) suggested a substantial model fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) index (0.068) confirmed a good model fit (Henseler et al., 2023).

The mediating effect of career development was examined using the bootstrapping indirect effect test. A significant indirect path ($p < 0.001$) substantiated the mediating role of career development in the association between job placement and employee performance. All analyses were interpreted using a 95% confidence interval. The integration of statistical robustness and theoretical alignment ensures that the findings provide empirical validity and practical relevance for human resource policy in higher-education institutions.

RESULTS

Evaluation of the Measurement Model

Prior to examining the structural relationships, the measurement model was evaluated to ensure the validity and reliability of all the latent constructs. The confirmatory factor analysis results indicated that all indicators exhibited standardized loadings exceeding 0.70, thereby confirming their convergent validity. Specifically, the loading values ranged from 0.726 to 0.891 for job placement, 0.733 to 0.879 for career development, and 0.721 to 0.867 for employee performance. These findings suggest that all indicators effectively represent their corresponding latent variables.

The composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha values surpassed the threshold of 0.70, thereby establishing internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, thereby confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2024). The discriminant validity test, evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, demonstrated that the square root of each AVE was greater than the inter-construct correlations, confirming that each construct was empirically unique.

Furthermore, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio values were below 0.85, thereby reinforcing discriminant validity. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all indicators were less than 5.0, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern. Collectively, these statistical findings confirm that the measurement model exhibits robust psychometric properties, making it suitable for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Evaluation of the Structural Model

Following the confirmation of measurement reliability and validity, the structural model was assessed to examine the hypothesized relationships among variables. The model demonstrated robust predictive power and excellent fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was 0.068, which is below the acceptable threshold of 0.08, indicating that the model aligns well with the empirical data (Henseler et al., 2023).

The R^2 value for career development was 0.56, indicating that 56% of the variance in career development was attributable to job placement. In contrast, the R^2 value for employee performance was 0.67, signifying that 67% of the variance in performance was jointly explained by job placement and career development. According to Hair et al. (2024), these findings demonstrate a moderate-to-substantial level of explanatory power, suggesting that the model possesses strong predictive relevance.

The Q^2 (Stone–Geisser) value exceeded zero for both endogenous constructs, confirming their predictive relevance. The f^2 effect size analysis indicated that job placement exerted a substantial effect on career development ($f^2 = 0.64$) and a moderate effect on performance ($f^2 = 0.32$). The mediating variable, career development, demonstrated a moderate effect size ($f^2 = 0.21$) on performance, underscoring its significance as a crucial mechanism linking job placement and performance.

Hypothesis Testing

The path coefficients and their statistical significance were evaluated through bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples at a 95% confidence level. Table 1 presents a summary of the hypothesis-testing results.

Table 1. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β Coefficient	t-value	pvalue	Result
H1	Job Placement - Career Development	0.748	12.213	0.000	Supported
H2	Career Development - Performance	0.268	3.581	0.000	Supported
H3	Job Placement - Performance	0.644	10.279	0.000	Supported
H4	Job Placement - Career Development - Performance (Indirect)	0.201	4.127	0.000	Supported

The results show that all four hypotheses are supported at the 0.001 significance level.

The first hypothesis (H1) confirmed that job placement significantly influenced career development ($\beta = 0.748$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that when employees perceive a strong alignment between their skills and job assignments, they are more likely to engage in professional growth activities such as training and skill improvement programs. The second hypothesis (H2) demonstrates that career development significantly affects employee performance ($\beta = 0.268$, $p < 0.001$). Employees who experience structured career development opportunities tend to exhibit higher work quality, innovation and efficiency. The third hypothesis (H3) shows that job placement has a strong and positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.644$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that employees placed in positions that match their abilities and interests can perform tasks more effectively and demonstrate higher productivity. The fourth hypothesis (H4) confirms that career development mediates the relationship between job placement and employee performance (indirect $\beta = 0.201$, $p < 0.001$). The mediation analysis revealed that job placement not only exerts a direct influence on performance but also enhances it indirectly through career development. This indicates that even when placement decisions are appropriate, the long-term performance benefits depend on the extent to which employees are provided with opportunities to advance their skills and careers.

Interpretation of Findings

The empirical evidence substantiates an integrated theoretical framework that amalgamates Job Fit and Human Capital Theory. First, the significant direct effect of job placement on career development highlights the premise that appropriate placement provides employees with the psychological foundation and motivation necessary for pursuing further growth. When individuals perceive congruence between their competencies and job roles, they are more likely to envisage clearer career trajectories and invest greater effort in professional advancement (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). Second, the positive correlation between career development and performance corroborates the Human Capital Theory, which asserts that learning and skill acquisition lead to increased productivity (Becker, 2022). Employees who engage in continuous training and development tend to exhibit superior performance because of enhanced competence and engagement. This is particularly pertinent in higher education institutions, where administrative innovation and procedural accuracy are vital for institutional effectiveness.

Third, the mediating role of career development substantiates that effective job placement alone is inadequate for achieving sustainable-performance enhancement. In the absence of continuous development opportunities, even optimally placed employees may encounter stagnation and a decline in motivation over time. Consequently, career development functions as a reinforcing mechanism that upholds positive outcomes of placement decisions. These findings are consistent with those of prior research conducted in various contexts. Wong and Liu (2023) demonstrated that appropriate placement enhances performance in service organizations, while Tang and Wang (2024) identified that training and career advancement intensify this relationship. The present study extends these insights to the higher education sector, specifically within the Indonesian public university context, where administrative work encompasses technical and bureaucratic complexities. Overall, the results suggest that job placement serves as both a structural and psychological foundation for employee performance, whereas career development provides a dynamic mechanism that sustains and amplifies performance over time.

DISCUSSION

The empirical findings of this study offer compelling evidence that job placement significantly impacts both career development and employee performance among the educational staff at Universitas Mulawarman. Furthermore, career development serves as a critical mediator in the relationship between job placement and performance, demonstrating that employees who are strategically placed achieve superior outcomes when supported by structured career advancement programs. These results not only reinforce but also extend existing theoretical frameworks, with important implications for human resource management practices within higher education institutions.

The Impact of Job Placement on Career Development

The finding that job placement positively influences career development (H1) corroborates the foundational tenets of the Person–Job Fit Theory. When employees perceive congruence between their roles, abilities, and career aspirations, they are more inclined to enhance their skills and seek professional growth opportunities (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). Within the context of Universitas Mulawarman, this suggests that aligning educational staff with positions that reflect their competencies fosters a stronger sense of career identity and engagement with the institution's objectives.

This relationship is consistent with empirical studies by Albrecht and Dineen (2023), who determined that appropriate placement enhances career satisfaction and developmental motivation. Similarly, Becker (2022) highlighted that placement decisions reflecting employee strengths promote self-efficacy and proactive learning behaviors. These theoretical and empirical insights collectively suggest that placement functions not only as an administrative task but also as a catalyst for employee self-development.

From an organizational perspective, the results underscore the strategic importance of merit-based placement systems. Institutions that prioritize transparent, competency-driven placements can cultivate a culture of trust and long-term commitment. Such systems encourage employees to envision clear career pathways and engage in self-directed learning, ultimately enriching the institution's human resources.

The Role of Career Development in Enhancing Performance

The significant relationship between career development and employee performance (H2) corroborates the Human Capital Theory, which posits that investment in employee skills yields productivity gains (Becker, 2022). In higher education, administrative staff performance is determined not only by procedural compliance but also by adaptability, initiative, and innovation. Employees who perceive organizational support for their growth tend to reciprocate with higher commitment and better job performance. This result aligns with Tang and Wang (2024), who demonstrated that continuous professional development enhances employee competence and engagement in various sectors. Hidayat and Natsir (2022) found that career-oriented HR policies increase job satisfaction and performance in public institutions. Within Universitas Mulawarman, where staff must balance bureaucratic regulations with academic service delivery, ongoing development opportunities appear to provide the necessary psychological and technical resources for efficient work performance. Beyond direct productivity outcomes, career development also influences employees' psychological states, fostering greater autonomy and self-determination in their work. This supports Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, suggesting that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when individuals experience opportunities for growth and mastery. Thus, the university's investment in development programs, such as leadership workshops, skill certification, and digital system training, can play a pivotal role in sustaining long-term employee engagement and organizational excellence.

The Direct Effect of Job Placement on Performance

The strong positive relationship between job placement and performance (H3) corroborates previous research, indicating that the alignment between employee capabilities and job demands results in enhanced outcomes (Wong & Liu, 2023). When placement corresponds with qualifications and interests, employees are likely to experience reduced role ambiguity and increased intrinsic motivation. In administrative settings, this alignment

translates into fewer procedural errors, expedited task execution, and improved coordination with academic units.

This finding supports the Person–Job Fit Theory by illustrating that misalignment can lead to psychological strain and inefficiency, whereas congruence fosters focus and achievement. Furthermore, in public universities, where job assignments often adhere to bureaucratic procedures rather than merit-based systems, this evidence underscores the necessity for data-driven placement decisions.

Empirical parallels are evident in the studies of Ahmed and Wang (2023), who found that aligning employees with tasks based on skill analysis enhances organizational performance in public service agencies. Similarly, Supriyadi et al. (2024) observed that appropriate placement reduces turnover intention and enhances accountability in Indonesian educational institutions. Therefore, the present findings extend this body of knowledge by affirming that placement decisions grounded in competency mapping are crucial not only for short-term efficiency but also for sustaining institutional performance.

The Mediating Role of Career Development

The mediation test (H4) demonstrated that career development significantly indirectly influenced the relationship between job placement and employee performance. This finding suggests that even when placement is optimal, the full potential of employee performance cannot be achieved without a structured developmental support. This observation is consistent with the dual-path model proposed by Becker (2022), which integrates the Person–Job Fit and Human Capital perspectives: while placement ensures the appropriate initial conditions, development facilitates continuous growth and adaptability.

The mediating effect also reflects a psychological mechanism—employees who are well placed perceive organizational investment in their growth as recognition, which enhances their commitment and productivity (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). Conversely, inadequate career pathways can diminish the motivational benefits of correct placement, leading to stagnation and reduced employee engagement.

These findings align with Albrecht and Dineen’s (2023) research, which found that developmental opportunities amplify the effects of placement satisfaction on job performance. Tang and Wang (2024) also reported that career mobility moderates and mediates the relationship between job-role fit and organizational outcomes. The current study extends these insights to a non-Western higher education context, confirming that even in bureaucratic institutions, psychological empowerment through development opportunities remains a critical driver of high-performance.

From a managerial perspective, the results underscore the importance of integrating placement and development strategies into cohesive HR systems. Effective human resource policies should not treat placement as a one-time decision but as part of a dynamic process that evolves with employee competency and institutional needs. Creating structured career ladders, offering regular training programs, and fostering mentorship can ensure that placement decisions yield performance dividends over time.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature by integrating Job Fit Theory and Human Capital Theory within the context of higher education. While previous research has predominantly examined these frameworks in isolation, the present study elucidates their interdependence: person–job fit establishes the conditions conducive to growth, whereas human capital investment sustains and enhances these benefits. This integrated model advances our understanding of how structural human resource practices, such as placement, interact with developmental mechanisms, such as career advancement, to yield performance outcomes.

Moreover, this study offers empirical evidence from a relatively underexplored context: administrative staff in Indonesian universities. Much of the extant research on job placement and career development has concentrated on private or corporate settings, where human resource practices differ markedly. By situating the analysis within a public university, this study extends the applicability of human resource theories and contributes to cross-cultural validation in non-Western institutional environments.

Practical Implications

The findings provide several practical insights for university administrators and policymakers. First, the implementation of competency-based placement systems can enhance fairness and transparency, ensuring that staff assignments align with skills and organizational needs. Tools such as digital HR mapping or capability assessment frameworks can facilitate the identification of optimal job-person matches in the recruitment process.

Second, the integration of placement with structured career development policies is essential. Universities should establish clear promotion criteria, provide continuous training aligned with evolving technological and administrative demands, and encourage professional certifications. These initiatives not only enhance performance but also strengthen employee loyalty and reduce the turnover.

Third, leadership support is crucial. Supervisors and HR managers should actively mentor staff, offer guidance on career progression, and facilitate opportunities for skill acquisition. Such relational practices can build trust and reinforce the perception that institutions value their employees' growth.

Finally, policymakers at the national level can utilize these findings to refine the civil service framework in higher education. By promoting evidence-based placement and development policies, the government can enhance public-sector productivity and institutional competitiveness, thereby contributing to Indonesia's broader higher-education reform agenda.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study offers significant insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The reliance on cross-sectional data constrains the ability to infer long-term causal relationships between placement, development and performance. Future research could benefit from employing longitudinal designs to explore the evolution of these dynamics. Furthermore, the study's focus was limited to administrative staff; subsequent research could extend the model to encompass academic personnel or other public organizations to enhance its generalizability. Incorporating moderating variables such as leadership style, organizational culture, or digital readiness could also be valuable, as these factors may influence the strength of the identified relationships. Finally, qualitative or mixed-method approaches could provide deeper insights into employees' lived experiences of placement and career growth, thereby enriching the understanding of the psychological and contextual factors that shape performance outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to investigate the impact of job placement on employee performance among educational staff at Universitas Mulawarman, with career development as a mediating variable. The results obtained from structural equation modeling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS) analysis offered robust empirical support for all proposed hypotheses. Specifically, the findings indicate that appropriate job placement not only directly enhances employee performance but also indirectly through career development.

This study contributes to the expanding body of literature on human resource management in higher education institutions by integrating two prominent theoretical frameworks: Person–Job Fit Theory and Human Capital Theory. This study illustrates that while effective placement ensures an optimal match between employee capabilities and job demands, continuous career development amplifies this effect by fostering long-term growth, motivation, and organizational commitment. Such integration underscores that performance is not solely a function of role alignment but also of the organization's sustained investment in human capital.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding in three significant ways. First, it empirically validates the Person–Job Fit Theory within the context of higher education, demonstrating that precise placement decisions yield not only immediate functional benefits but also foster developmental momentum. Evidence indicates that alignment between individual competencies and job roles cultivates a sense of professional identity, motivating employees to engage in self-improvement and contribute to institutional goals. Second, it

extends the Human Capital Theory by illustrating how structured career development mediates the impact of placement on performance. The findings suggest that placement acts as a precursor to human capital formation, as employees who are strategically positioned within the organization exhibit greater receptivity to training and career advancement, thereby enhancing the overall performance. Third, this study offers cross-cultural validation of these theories within the Indonesian higher education sector, a context characterized by bureaucratic structures and evolving human resource systems. Previous research has predominantly focused on corporate or Western settings; thus, this study enriches the theoretical discourse by demonstrating that the mechanisms of fit and development are equally applicable to emerging public institutions.

Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings underscore several practical strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of human resource management in universities. First, the implementation of competency-based placement systems is crucial. Universities should establish transparent criteria to align employees' qualifications, experiences, and interests with specific job requirements. The use of digital competency mapping tools and periodic job analyses can ensure that placement decisions are congruent with organizational needs and employees strengths. Second, institutions should perceive placement and career development as an integrated process rather than distinct HR functions. Once employees are assigned suitable positions, they should be provided with structured career pathways, mentorship programs, and continuous professional development opportunities. This integration fosters long-term motivation and mitigates the risk of stagnation. Third, leadership engagement is pivotal in sustaining performance. Supervisors and HR managers must actively facilitate employee growth through coaching, feedback, and recognition. When leaders demonstrate genuine support for career advancement, employees are more likely to internalize organizational values and exhibit discretionary efforts that enhance institutional performance. Finally, at the policy level, the findings advocate for the establishment of national frameworks that promote evidence-based placement and career development in public universities. The Ministry of Education and relevant agencies can incorporate these insights into regulations governing civil service management, ensuring that placement and promotion decisions are competency-driven and performance-oriented. Such reforms could strengthen institutional accountability and elevate the overall quality of higher-education administration in Indonesia.

Social and Institutional Implications

In addition to organizational outcomes, this study has significant social implications. By optimizing placement and development systems, universities can cultivate a more equitable and merit-based work environment for their faculty. Employees who perceive their placement and support as fair are more likely to exhibit loyalty, ethical behavior, and commitment to public service values. This, in turn, enhances trust in academic institutions as exemplars of transparency and integrity. At the institutional level, improved human resource practices contribute to enhanced service delivery, administrative efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction, factors that ultimately bolster institutional reputation and competitiveness. In the long term, such practices facilitate the development of resilient universities capable of adapting to digital transformation, global competition and evolving policy demands.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, it acknowledges several limitations that present opportunities for future research. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to make causal inferences over time; thus, longitudinal studies can capture the dynamic interactions among placement, development, and performance across various career stages. Future research could also investigate moderating factors, such as leadership style, organizational climate, and employee engagement, which may either strengthen or weaken the identified relationships. Comparative studies between public and private universities would be advantageous for understanding the contextual variations in HR practices. Furthermore, incorporating qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide deeper insights into employees' subjective experiences and motivations related to placement and career growth. Finally, future scholars should consider integrating technological factors, such as digital HR analytics or competency-based information systems, to optimize placement accuracy and monitor career trajectories. This would align HR management in higher education with broader digital transformation initiatives and ensure continuous alignment between human capital and institutional strategies.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this study highlights the interdependence of job placement and career development as critical components of organizational performance. Effective placement establishes a structural foundation for employee success, while ongoing development serves as a sustaining force that transforms competence into consistent excellence. Together, these elements constitute a dynamic human capital system capable of driving innovation, improving service quality, and enhancing institutional resilience. By validating this integrative model within the

Indonesian higher education context, this study contributes to global HRM scholarship and offers actionable insights for practitioners and policymakers aiming to enhance human resource effectiveness in academic institutions. Ultimately, empowering educational staff through equitable placement and structured development is not only an organizational necessity but also a moral imperative for institutions committed to delivering quality education and fostering societal advancement.

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Author Contributions Statement

Conceptualization: Emila Riza; Methodology: Emila Riza and Siti Maria, Anisa Kusumawardani; Validation and Formal Analysis: Emila Riza, Anisa Kusumawardani; Investigation and Data Curation: Emila Riza; Writing - Original Draft: Anisa Kusumawardani; Writing - Review & Editing: Siti Maria; Supervision: Siti Maria. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of this manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest Declaration

The authors declare that there are no known financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the results or the interpretation of this study.

Ethical Considerations Statement

This study was conducted in compliance with the ethical standards for human subject research. Ethical approval was obtained from the Universitas Mulawarman Research Ethics Committee prior to the data collection. All participants were informed of the study objectives and procedures and provided voluntary consent. Data confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study.

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