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Unlocking public service potential: The impact of competency and career development on local government performance in emerging economies

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Abstract

This study investigates key determinants of civil servant performance in local governments of emerging economies, with a particular focus on Papua Province, Indonesia. It specifically evaluates how competence, job placement, and career development contribute to performance outcomes and explores the moderating roles of education level and job tenure. A quantitative research design was employed, using a structured questionnaire to gather data from 325 local public officers. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and Multi-Group Analysis (PLS-MGA) to test direct and moderating effects. The results reveal that both competence and career development significantly enhance employee performance, while job placement does not exhibit a notable impact. Furthermore, education level positively moderates the relationship between competence and performance, and job tenure strengthens the effect of career development on performance. Competency-building and strategic career development initiatives are critical for optimizing civil servant performance. These interventions are most effective when aligned with individual educational backgrounds and job tenure levels. The findings underscore the need for context-specific HRM strategies in remote or underperforming regions. Policymakers and administrators should prioritize structured training programs and tailored career development frameworks to bolster public sector performance in emerging regions.

Keywords: Career Development, Competency, Education, Job Tenure, Employee Performance, Job Placement.

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Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This research has received ethical approval from the Universitas Terbuka, Unit Program Belajar Jarak Jauh (UPBJJ) Jayapura, as evidenced by the official clearance document (Approval No: B/498/UN31.UT38/PT.01.05/202). The study adheres to the ethical standards based on the three principles of B-A-H (Beneficence, Autonomy, and Justice), and complies with the 7 standards and 25 CIOMS-WHO ethical guidelines. Data collection involved adult civil servants as respondents, with informed consent obtained via digital questionnaires distributed through secure online platforms. All responses were anonymous, and the confidentiality and voluntary nature of participation were ensured. No vulnerable populations were involved in this study.

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1. Introduction

Emerging countries often face significant public-sector challenges, predominantly related to human resources [1]. These include the mismanagement or misuse of public funds, unmotivated or undertrained officials, and low-quality public services. Additional issues stem from uncoordinated service delivery, corruption, collusion, nepotism, and complex bureaucratic procedures. Such human resource factors hinder consistent performance, vibrancy, and the continuous renewal of local public governance [2].

These challenges are exacerbated by increasing demands on local governments, driven by urbanization, decentralization, and a growing emphasis on government-public relations. Rapid urbanization leads to brain drain in rural areas, severely affecting human resource quality, especially in remote regions [3]. Decentralization is often seen as a remedy for national-level inefficiencies, while local governments are urged to be more self-sufficient and responsive to public demands [4]. Effective service delivery hinges on qualified local human resources.

In Indonesia, Law No. 43 of 1999 mandates that local public officers perform tasks efficiently and effectively [5]. This law underscores the importance of professionalism, responsibility, honesty, and fairness [6] achieved through rigorous recruitment and selection processes. Competency is crucial for operating government facilities and infrastructures, directly impacting public officers' performance. The regulation also requires supervised work, akin to an apprenticeship, benefiting public officers by helping them set career goals, gain practical experience, enhance skills, and build networks. Through training and education provided by government agencies, systematic career development is essential for professional growth and aligning officers with organizational opportunities. These development activities include both off-the-job and on-the-job training.

Presidential Decree No. 29 of 2014 (LAKIP) was enacted to measure public service performance. This regulation specifies performance indicators and requires state-funded organizations to submit accountability reports. These reports integrate planning, budgeting, and work reporting systems, reflecting organizational performance against set targets [7]. Such reports can also serve as proxies for public officers' performance.

The Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform highlights poor performance in remote regions like Papua and northern Kalimantan due to unqualified human resources and limited budgets. For instance, Papua's provincial government received unsatisfactory performance ratings for four consecutive years [8, 9]. This fact is ironic, given these regions' wealth in natural resources. Hence, understanding the antecedents of public officers' performance is vital for improving governance in distant regions of Indonesia and other emerging countries.

This study investigates the determinants of public officer performance, focusing on nine human factors: competency, career development, employee placement, work environment, motivation, facilities and infrastructure, leadership styles, organizational commitment, and culture. A preliminary survey revealed that competency, career development, and employee placement are perceived as the main factors contributing to poor performance, with response rates of 24%, 24%, and 19%, respectively.

Existing research on competency, employee placement, and career development's impact on performance is inconclusive, varying by context and study generalization. Some studies affirm the positive role of these factors [10-18]. While others find no significant impact [19-24]. This dynamic nature of human resources performance underscores the importance of context-specific studies, especially in emerging local governments [25, 26].

Furthermore, the moderating effects of job characteristics, such as education and job tenure, are under-researched [27, 28]. Education level significantly influences competency and performance, which is often overlooked in research [29]. Higher education enhances employee skills, thus improving performance [30]. Job tenure, another critical moderator, affects career development's impact on performance, with longer tenure correlating with higher performance due to increased experience [31-34].

This study addresses five research questions: 1) Does competency affect performance? 2) Does career development influence performance? 3) Does employee placement modify performance? 4) Does education moderate the relationship between competency and performance? 5) Does job tenure moderate career development's effect on performance? It contributes new insights into local public officers' performance determinants, supports theory expansion on competence and education levels, and informs human resources practices for career development strategies.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Employee Competencies

According to Boyatzis [35] competence refers to the fundamental traits within an individual that lead to successful and outstanding job performance. Vathanophas [36] expands on this, describing competence as an individual's ability to perform specific and appropriate actions. Competence is the relationship between one's ability and capability to complete tasks satisfactorily [37]. In public administration, competence is the ability to fulfill work demands effectively based on relevant principles and needs [38, 39]. Numerous studies have confirmed competence's positive and significant impact on employee

performance [40-44]. Employees with higher competence levels consistently produce better work outcomes [40]. Therefore, the first hypothesis proposed is:

H₁: Competence positively affects the performance of local public officers.

2.2. Employee Placement

Employee placement is a critical and complex aspect of human resource management, Sharafat [45]. Mathis and Jackson [46] define placement as assigning the right person to the right job. Proper placement is crucial for achieving high employee performance [47, 48]. Attribution theory suggests that a person's behavior is influenced by internal and external factors Heider [49]. Riggio [50] emphasizes that placement decisions determine employees' roles, often occurring during initial hiring or internal reassignments. Studies have shown that proper job placement significantly enhances organizational efficiency and employee performance [51-53]. Incorrect placement can decrease performance and hinder organizational goals [54]. Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

H₂: Job placement positively affects the performance of local public officers.

2.3. Career Development

Organizations play a pivotal role in career development, which involves continuous skill acquisition, knowledge enhancement, job mastery, and professional growth Valickas et al. [55] and Nadarajah et al. [56]. Roe [57] describes a career as a series of experiences directed at achieving personal and organizational goals. Career management is a joint responsibility between employees and the organization [58]. Organizations must provide the necessary structures, opportunities, tools, and support, while employees should actively manage their careers [59]. Research has shown that career development significantly boosts employee performance [60-63]. When organizations support career development, employees are more motivated and perform better [60]. Thus, the third hypothesis is:

H₃: Career development positively affects the performance of local public officers.

2.4. Education Level

Education level, representing one's academic credentials or degree, is crucial for skill acquisition and productivity [29, 64]. Higher education levels correlate with higher skill quality and productivity [65]. This study examines education level as a moderator in the relationship between competence and performance. Educational background often determines competence [30, 66]. Education aims to develop competencies essential for the workforce, Massing and Schneider [67]. Ng and Feldman [29] found that higher education levels positively impact performance assessments. Organizations with highly educated employees generally perform better [68]. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is:

H₄: The relationship between competence and employee performance is moderated by education level, being stronger for employees with higher education levels.

2.5. Job Tenure

Job tenure, the duration employees spend in an organization, generally correlates with higher performance [69, 70]. It is often used as a proxy for work experience [71]. According to career construction theory, career development is driven by adapting to various career tasks and experiences [72, 73]. Longer job tenure allows employees to gain relevant skills and experience, leading to higher performance [74, 75]. This study posits that career development's impact on performance is stronger for employees with longer tenures. Hence, the final hypothesis is:

H₅: The relationship between career development and employee performance is moderated by job tenure, being more vital for employees with longer tenures.

These hypotheses are summarized in the following research model (Figure 1).

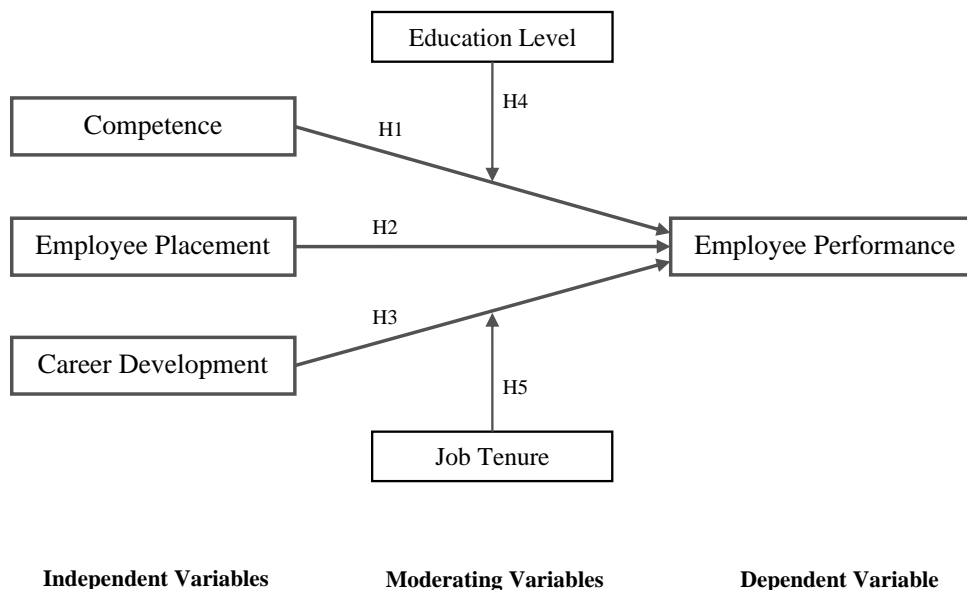


Figure 1. Research Model.

3. Research Method

This study employs a quantitative research approach to elucidate the relationships between variables through hypothesis testing. Primary data was collected using a well-structured questionnaire to capture responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was meticulously developed based on established indicators from previous research. Table 1 provides a summary of the research variables, the number of indicators used to measure each construct, and the respective sources or previous studies from which the indicators were adopted. Our sample comprised 325 civil servants from various regional apparatus organizations in Papua Province, ensuring a comprehensive representation.

Table 1. Variable Names, Number of Indicators, and Research Adopted.

No	Variable	Number of Indicators	Research
1	Competence	10	Le Deist and Winterton [76].
2	Employee Placement	7	Chivers and Flatten [77] and Sari and Sa'adah [78].
3	Career Development	9	Chen et al. [79].
4	Employee Performance	12	Isaac et al. [80]; Pahos and Galanaki [81], and Williams and Anderson [82].

For data analysis, we utilized the Structural Equation Model-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method with the assistance of SmartPLS 3 software. The SEM-PLS analysis involves three key stages: evaluation of measurement models, structural models, and hypothesis testing. First, Evaluation of Measurement Models, we assessed the measurement model by analyzing several metrics: (a) Factor Loading Value, to determine the contribution of each indicator to its respective construct, (b) Internal Consistency Reliability, measured using Composite Reliability (CR) to ensure the consistency of the constructs, (c) Convergent Validity, evaluated through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to confirm that indicators adequately reflect the construct, and (d) Discriminant Validity, assessed with the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to ensure that constructs are distinct from one another [83]. Second, the structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R-squared), which indicates the model's explanatory power [83]. An R-squared value provides insight into the variance explained by the independent variables on the dependent variable. Third, Hypothesis Testing in which hypothesis testing was conducted by evaluating the path coefficients and considering both t-statistics and p-values to determine the significance and strength of relationships between variables. Additionally, multi-group analysis was performed to explore the moderating effects of education level and job tenure.

Our methodological rigor ensures robust and reliable findings, offering valuable insights into the determinants of public officers' performance. This comprehensive approach confirms existing theories and contributes new knowledge to the field, particularly in the context of local government performance in emerging regions.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Characteristics

The demographic profile of the respondents was analyzed based on gender, education, age, years of service, and class/position. The majority of respondents were male (73.2%), aged between 41-50 years (38.8%), and had an undergraduate education level (55.4%). Most respondents had extensive work experience, over 15 years of service (53.8%), and held positions in Echelon III a/b (Table 2).

Table 2.
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Demography	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	238	73.2%
	Female	87	26.8%
Age	30-40 years	83	25.5%
	41-50 years	126	38.8%
	>50 years	116	35.7%
Education Level	High School	45	13.8%
	Diploma	34	10.5%
	Undergraduate	180	55.4%
	Graduate	66	20.3%
Job Tenure	<10 years	55	16.9%
	10-15 years	95	29.2%
	>15 years	175	53.8%
Group/Position	Echelon III a/b	143	44.0%
	Echelon IV	126	38.8%
	Executive	56	17.2%

4.2. Measurement Model Evaluation

The initial step in evaluating the measurement model involved examining the factor loading values for each variable. Nine items were removed from the model due to low factor loading values, including two competence items (X1.9 and X1.10), one employee placement item (X2.1), two career development items (X3.4 and X3.5), and four employee performance items (Y.2, Y.8, Y.9, and Y.12). The remaining indicators had factor loadings close to or above the recommended cut-off value of 0.7 [83] as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.
Factor Loading and Reliability Coefficients.

Variable	Indicator	Item	Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability
Competence	My talents and interests must be further explored to reflect my character as a hard worker in completing work assignments.	EC1	0.777	0.537	0.902
	My discipline and hardworking nature are some of the characteristics that can affect my performance because each person's character is different in completing their duties.	EC2	0.686		
	I work earnestly, regardless of praise from others, to produce a good performance.	EC3	0.803		
	Avoiding sanctions is my earnest motive in getting the job done.	EC4	0.625		
	I need to hone my talents to get the job done.	EC5	0.769		
	My work's main capital as a self-concept is the speed of thinking that arises in me to take the proper steps.	EC6	0.713		
	I know how to develop programs and activity plans according to my field.	EC7	0.758		
	I know the steps in preparing the Performance Accountability Report of Government Agencies.	EC8	0.718		
	My skills and thoroughness in work testify to my ability to get the job done.	EC9	Not valid		
	Creativity and innovation are two things that every employee must have in order to be professional in their field.	EC10	Not valid		
Employee Placement	My position in the office is based on my educational background.	PL1	Not valid	0.615	0.904
	The educational background of each employee needs to be considered to provide job satisfaction in completing his work.	PL2	0.628		
	The suitability of each employee's educational background and work placement can provide a comfortable working atmosphere to produce good performance.	PL3	0.704		
	The higher the working knowledge I have, the more opportunities and confidence I have to complete a job given by the leadership.	PL4	0.841		
	The work knowledge that I have can be used as a benchmark in measuring the results of the work I do.	PL5	0.884		
	Every employee who has work skills can be considered for his work placement.	PL6	0.870		
	According to his field of work, every employee who has work experience can directly demonstrate the quality of his work.	PL7	0.746		
Career Development	Every employee needs to get an education because education is self-development to produce good performance.	CD1	0.662	0.506	0.877
	I often turned down opportunities to continue my education because I feared my job would be neglected.	CD2	0.668		
	Every employee must be included in every training so that their human resources can keep pace with the development of science and technology.	CD3	0.687		
	Each regional apparatus organization should carry out internal training to prepare Government Agencies' Performance Accountability Reports to contribute information and innovation to the results of the performance report that the employee will make.	CD4	Not valid		
	If I can participate in the training, I will not take it because it will not affect my performance.	CD5	Not valid		

	The transfer of employees to a new place is a challenge and an opportunity for the transferred employee to get a good position.	CD6	0.743		
	If there is a mutation in a regional organization, I will support it because it is a way to develop a career.	CD7	0.730		
	I am always friendly and polite in providing services to employees who need information about my work.	CD8	0.740		
	My service is per the procedure, giving proof of maximum performance results.	CD9	0.742		
Employee Performance	The results of the work I have done so far are of much higher quality than before, which guarantees my performance.	EP1	0.692	0.505	0.891
	If I get new information, I immediately apply it to the work to ensure quality output.	EP2	Not valid		
	Completing many additional work assignments is not a barrier for me to produce good work results.	EP3	0.616		
	More work is not a barrier to producing good performance; it strengthens the working relationship with subordinates.	EP4	0.697		
	Time considerations are one aspect of producing good performance, so I always apply work discipline to my subordinates.	EP5	0.683		
	To produce a good job, I work carefully and not in a hurry; even so, the work results still reach the destination on time.	EP6	0.732		
	My ability to work by choosing ways and determining various options is an effective technique to produce the best performance.	EP7	0.734		
	Every job I do always shows my independence in working without involving other people to produce quality work.	EP8	Not valid		
	My work is directly related to preparing the Performance Accountability Report of Government Agencies, so the work system I apply must show independence in my work.	EP9	Not valid		
	Honesty manifests my commitment to my work, especially regarding finances related to preparing the Performance Accountability Report of Government Agencies.	EP10	0.743		
	In terms of work, I always invite staff to discuss completing tasks to perfect work results.	EP11	0.778		
	I also feel responsible for preparing the Performance Accountability Report of Government Agencies if the assessment is not as expected.	EP12	Not valid		

Composite reliability (CR) values were examined to assess internal consistency reliability. All CR values ranged from 0.877 to 0.904, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency. Convergent validity was confirmed by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, which ranged from 0.505 to 0.615, surpassing the minimum requirement of 0.50. Discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with values ranging from 0.072 to 0.868, well below the limit of 0.9 (Table 4).

Table 4.

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

	Career Development	Competence	Education	Employee Performance	Job Tenure	Placement
Competence	0.782					
Education	0.134	0.072				
Employee Performance	0.843	0.868	0.224			
Job Tenure	0.072	0.040	0.516	0.170		
Placement	0.802	0.866	0.077	0.777	0.034	

4.3. Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model's explanatory power was evaluated using the R-squared (R²) value. The R² value of 0.686 indicated that 68.6% of the variance in employee performance could be explained by competence, employee placement, and career development. R-square values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are considered substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively [83], suggesting that our model has a moderate explanatory power (Table 5).

Table 5.

R-Square Value.

Dependent Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employee Performance	0.686	0.682

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

Path coefficient analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between variables. The test results for the direct effect hypotheses are displayed in Figure 2 and Table 6. Competence was found to positively and significantly impact employee performance, with a path coefficient of 0.468 and a p-value <0.01. Similarly, career development positively and significantly affected employee performance, with a path coefficient of 0.341 and a p-value <0.01. Thus, hypotheses H1 and H3 are supported. However, employee placement did not significantly affect performance (p-value <0.05), leading to the rejection of hypothesis H2.

Table 6.

Results of Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing.

Hypothesis			Path Coeff.	T-stat.	P-values	Conclusion	Decision
H1	Competence	→	0.468	7.254	0.000	Significant	Accepted
H2	Employee Placement	→	0.076	1.329	0.184	Not significant	Not Accepted
H3	Career Development	→	0.341	4.326	0.000	Significant	Accepted

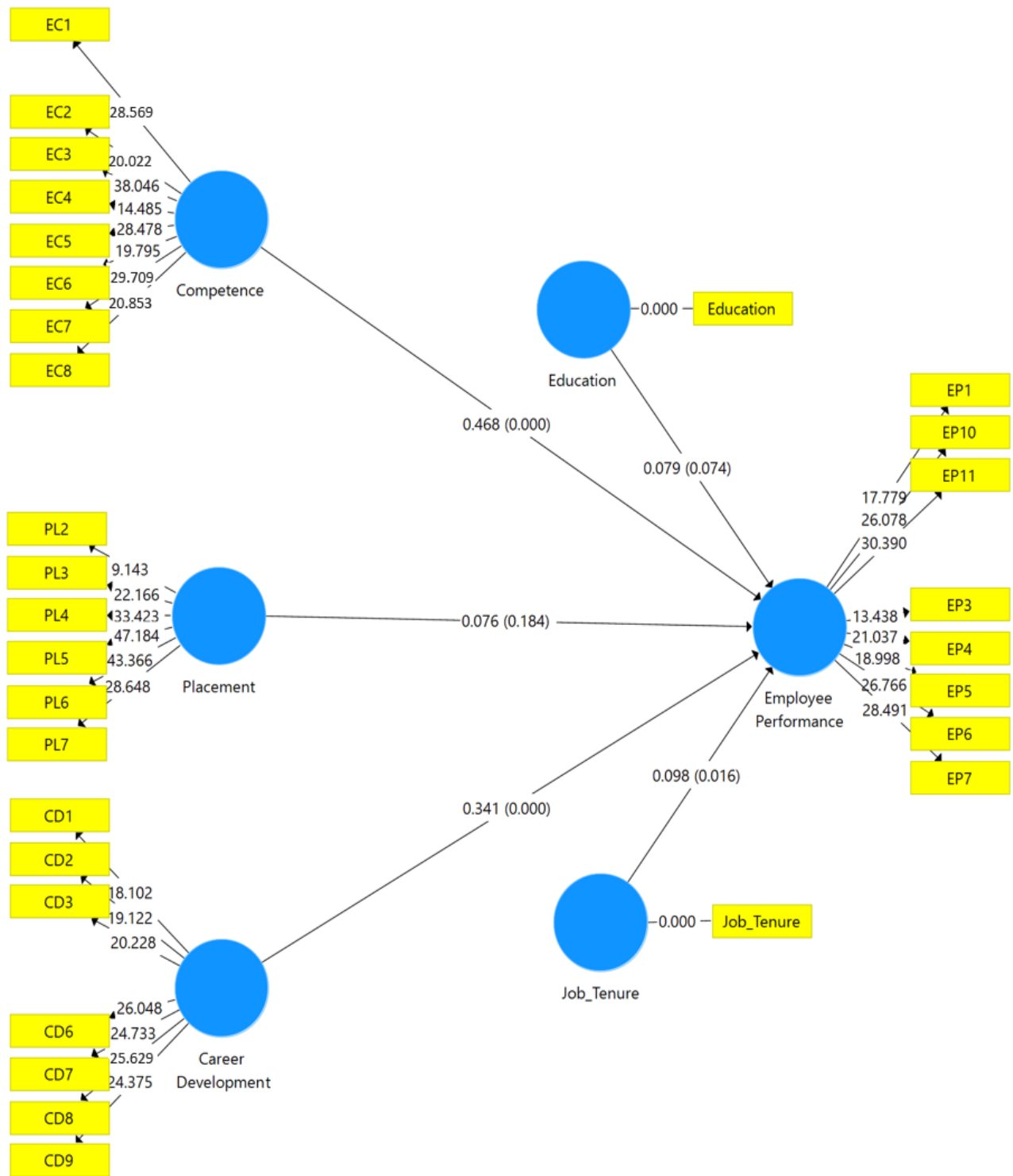


Figure 2.
Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing Results.

4.5 Moderating Effects

Multi-group analysis using PLS (PLS-MGA) was employed to examine the moderating effects of education level (H4) and job tenure (H5) on the relationships between competence, career development, and employee performance. Education was categorized into four groups: high school, diploma, undergraduate, and graduate. Six comparative analyses revealed significant differences among education levels (Table 7). The relationship between competence and performance was more robust for those with higher education levels, supporting H4.

Table 7.
Results of Multi-Group Analysis Level of Education.

Hypothesis	Group Comparison	Path Coeff. Difference	P-Value
H4 Competence Employee Performance →	Diploma vs Undergraduate	-0.303	0.094
	Diploma vs Graduate	-0.453	0.017**
	Diploma vs High School	0.092	0.650
	Undergraduate vs Graduate	-0.150	0.272
	Undergraduate vs High School	0.395	0.034**
	Graduate vs High School	0.545	0.007*

Note: *p<0.01 **p<0.05.

Job tenure was divided into three categories: low (<10 years), medium (10-15 years), and high (>15 years). Three comparative analyses highlighted one significant difference between high and medium tenure (Table 8). The effect of career development on performance was more substantial for employees with longer tenure, validating H5. Longer tenure allows employees to accumulate experience and skills, enhancing their performance.

Table 8.
Results of Multi-Group Analysis of Job Tenure.

Hypothesis	Group Comparison	Path Coeff. Difference	P-Value
H5 Career Development → Employee Performance	High vs Low	0.361	0.032**
	High vs Moderate	0.168	0.311
	Moderate vs Low	0.192	0.221

Note: **p<0.05.

This study provides robust empirical evidence that education and tenure significantly influence the relationships between competence, career development, and employee performance. These findings offer valuable insights for public organizations aiming to optimize their human resource strategies.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the significant influence of competence and career development on civil servant performance two factors highlighted early in this research as key human resource challenges in emerging countries, particularly Indonesia. Competence emerged as a critical driver of employee performance, affirming prior research by Aprianto and Rabeta [84] and reflecting the Indonesian government’s emphasis, as stated in Law No. 43 of 1999, on professional, skilled public officers. The competencies of civil servants spanning knowledge, technical skills, and behavioral attributes, are central to delivering quality public services [85]. Especially in remote and resource-rich but underperforming areas like Papua.

In contrast, employee placement did not show a statistically significant effect on performance, deviating from earlier studies that stressed alignment between job roles and qualifications [84]. However, this finding may reflect the realities of decentralized local governance, where limited staffing options and targeted training compensate for suboptimal placements. The lack of significance may also be due to adaptability and cross-functional training that equips employees to perform effectively across varying roles, as often practiced in regional bureaucracies. These findings align with more recent findings from Tedi [20] and Dyah et al. [19].

Career development, meanwhile, had a significant positive impact on performance, reinforcing the importance of structured growth pathways in public institutions and supporting prior research [60-63]. Career development represents a strategic effort by organizations to prepare qualified personnel for future roles and responsibilities [56]. When civil servants perceive career advancement opportunities within their organizations, they are more motivated to enhance their competencies and strive toward performance excellence [60]. This motivation fosters individual growth and, consequently, improved organizational outcomes.

Importantly, this study also confirms that education level and job tenure moderate these relationships. The competence-performance link was stronger among highly educated civil servants, supporting the argument that formal education enhances the ability to apply knowledge effectively in complex public sector tasks [67]. Similarly, longer tenure amplified the effect of career development on performance, likely due to accumulated institutional knowledge and greater exposure to development opportunities [75]. These findings align with the observations of Gordon et al. [86] and Jacobs et al. [87], who noted that organizations often reward seniority with increased compensation and career opportunities, under the assumption that longer tenure is associated with stronger job performance. Collectively, these insights underscore the importance of tailoring human resource strategies to individual characteristics for instance, by prioritizing advanced training for long-serving employees and designing career pathways that account for both educational background and job tenure.

Overall, these results align with the study’s goal of identifying critical human resource factors that can help improve public governance in underperforming and remote areas. They provide evidence-based insights to inform policy reforms and talent development in Indonesia’s public sector, especially within regions like Papua, which face chronic performance issues despite rich natural resources.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that competence and career development significantly enhance the performance of civil servants, whereas employee placement does not exhibit a measurable impact. These findings align with national regulations and address the persistent human resource challenges facing Indonesia's public sector, particularly in remote and underperforming regions like Papua. They highlight the urgency of prioritizing competency-based recruitment and development from the outset, as emphasized in Law No. 43 of 1999 and Presidential Decree No. 29 of 2014. Comprehensive competency enhancement through structured training, mentoring, workshops, and job rotations is essential to ensure that civil servants can adapt to dynamic administrative demands and contribute effectively to service delivery.

Furthermore, this research reinforces the value of collaborative career development, where public organizations actively engage with employees to support their professional goals. Tailored development plans, informed by employee aspirations and performance reviews, can increase motivation and productivity. The study also confirms that education level and job tenure significantly moderate these relationships: higher education enhances the competence-performance link, while longer tenure strengthens the benefits of career development. These insights suggest that public institutions should consider individual attributes when designing HR strategies, particularly in decentralized settings with limited resources.

However, the study is not without limitations. Its geographic focus on Papua Province may limit the generalizability of findings across Indonesia or to other emerging regions. Additionally, it only examines three key factors: competence, placement, and career development, while other relevant variables such as leadership, motivation, and organizational culture remain unexplored. Future research should broaden the scope across different provinces or public sectors and incorporate additional HRM dimensions to build a more holistic understanding of public officer performance. Additionally, the study establishes the moderating role of education level and job tenure, providing a foundation for future research. Further investigations could explore these moderating variables in relation to other factors affecting employee performance, enhancing our understanding of human resource management in the public sector.

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