

Exploring the Factors Affecting the Skills Required for the Growth and Development of the Employees

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Abstract- This paper examines the major inputs in employee growth and development within the defense shipyards in India and in particular, the skills that are necessary in a fast moving and changing technological world. The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, which collected data on 300 employees who worked in various functional areas, such as design, construction, maintenance, and management. Stratified random sampling method was applied so as to be representative of the engineers, technicians, and the HRs. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data using a five-point likert scale to measure constructs, including technical skills, digital skills, learning orientation, organizational support, leadership and employee growth. The data collected was analyzed with the help of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS, and both measurement model and structural model were evaluated. The findings show that each of the suggested factors has a substantial impact on employee development. Among them, the most crucial determinant was the digital skills, followed by organizational support, leadership, technical skills, and learning orientation. The results imply the growing significance of digital skills in improving employee flexibility and advancement in their careers in the defense-related sectors. The research makes a contribution to the available body of literature by offering a framework of comprehensive integration of individual competencies and those of the organization in a specialized industrial environment. In practice, the results indicate that the defense shipyards must focus on digital upskilling, develop a culture of continuous learning, enhance the organizational support system, and promote positive leadership practices to improve employee development.

Keywords- Employee skill development; technical skills; digital skills; learning orientation; organizational support; leadership influence; workforce competency

1. Introduction

The strategic need to grow and develop the employee skills has become a strategic goal of organizations that work under highly technical and security sensitive environments like the defense shipyards in India. Defense shipyards are multifaceted industrial ecosystems that demand highly skilled personnel who can handle high-level engineering processes, digital technologies, critical safety operations, and high quality standards. The modern industrial environment with its rapid technological change, digital transformation, and the global competitive environment has changed the skills requirements of its employees significantly (Gouda, 2020; Bawono, 2021). Employee capability development in such knowledge intensive ecosystems is not restricted to technical aptitude but expands to cognitive, behavioral and digital aptitude.

The volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous nature of work, which is changing, has further intensified the necessity of being future-ready by having adaptable and volatile skill sets. According to Shet (2024), to be able to navigate dynamic operational conditions, modern employees need to have learning agility, problem-solving ability, and resilience. This is especially true of the case of Indian defense shipyards where technology upgrades, indigenization efforts and modernization programs require a workforce that could readily assimilate new information and adapt to the changing operational procedures. Empirical data indicate that structured skills development programs can greatly improve the level of competence, performance, and organizational effectiveness of employees (Geezengana et al., 2022; Rezaei et al., 2021).

Motivation, engagement, and satisfaction of employees are also key enablers of efficient skill development. According to studies, motivation and job satisfaction have a direct positive impact on the willingness to learn

and use new skills (Le et al., 2021; Ali and Anwar, 2021). Additionally, the practices of sustainable human resource management with the focus on the well-being of employees, their fair treatment, and professional growth provide the environment, in which continuous learning and innovation are possible (Sypniewska et al., 2023; Mohiuddin et al., 2022). In defense shipyards where job demands are both physically and psychologically demanding, such positive HR practices are necessary to maintain high percentages of job performance.

Another burning issue is the retention of skilled manpower. Healthcare and hospitality industries have shown that work-related stress is a primary contributor to high turnover and loss of knowledge within an organization (De Vries et al., 2023; Ghani et al., 2022). The same issues are becoming more evident in strategic state-owned manufacturing enterprises, such as defense shipyards, where the loss of highly skilled workers can undermine national industrial capacities (Oliinyk et al., 2021). Mechanisms of knowledge-sharing and effective talent management are thus essential to maintain institutional knowledge and to guarantee continuity of critical skills (Alghamdi et al., 2021; Kumar, 2022).

The leadership style and organizational culture are important factors in determining the outcomes of skill development. Transformational and ethical leadership have been reported to achieve innovative work behavior, psychological capital, and work engagement, which are required to solve complex problems and advance skills (Karimi et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2024). Employees are further empowered to learn and perform by a positive workplace environment that reduces stress and toxicity and enhances collaboration (Kim and Jung, 2022; Rasool et al., 2021; Zhenjing et al., 2022). These are particularly critical in the defense shipyards where safety, discipline and teamwork are the basics of defense operations.

Moreover, modern work organization schemes like hybrid work models, work-life balance, and flexible work conditions have an impact on the learning capacity and performance of employees, especially among younger generations entering the workforce (Franken et al., 2021; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Jindain and Gilitwala, 2024). Though defense shipyards are traditionally based on on-site work, the use of digital tools and remote cooperation in the processes of designing, planning, and training continue to change the practices of skills development. Continuous learning and lifelong learning investments have been consistently linked with enhanced productivity and long-term organizational performance (Mustafa & Lleshi, 2024).

Here, it is imperative to comprehend the factors that influence the skills that are needed to build and develop the employees in defense shipyards in India. This research aims to analyze the individual, organizational, and environmental influences on the skills development in Indian defense shipyards. The research would be valuable to enhance the more effective workforce development strategies that can support the performance of the organization and the capacity of the nation to manufacture defense weapons.

2. Literature review

2.1 Technical Skills and Employee Growth

The technical skills have been widely accepted as the base of employee competence especially in complex and technology intensive work environments like defense shipyards. Such skills are job specific knowledge, operational skills and problem solving skills needed to carry out job related duties effectively and accurately. Highly skilled employees in terms of technical competencies are in a better position to handle operational challenges, enhance productivity, and promote organizational performance. The studies have shown that formal training and development programs can greatly improve employee competence and service delivery, particularly in technical areas (Gcezegana et al., 2022; Mustafa and Lleshi, 2024). Also, the value of technical skills in the digital age has been highlighted, and the employees are expected to have a strong domain knowledge and remain relevant and competitive (Gouda, 2020; Bawono, 2021). Moreover, the development of human capital and organizational performance are directly related to technical competencies since they allow employees to effectively use resources and technologies (Rezaei et al., 2021; Kim and Jung, 2022). Nonetheless, as much as technical skills are necessary, they are usually thought of as minimum competencies in contemporary organizations. They supplement job performance but might not drive significant growth on its own without being

combined with digital and behavioral capabilities (Shet, 2024; Oliinyk et al., 2021). Hence, technical skills add value to developing employees, but their impact is relatively weak as compared to more dynamic competencies.

H1: Technical skills have a significant positive impact on employee growth

2.2 Digital Skills and Employee Growth

In this fast changing technology world, digital skills have emerged as one of the most important determinants of employee development. The set of these skills includes the knowledge of how to use digital tools, information systems, analytics platforms, and emerging technologies. With organizations digitally transforming, employees who are highly digitally competent will be more likely to adapt to the technological changes, enhance their efficiency, and facilitate innovation (Chong et al., 2026; Bawono, 2021). Digital skills not only improve individual performance but also the agility and competitiveness of organizations in dynamic conditions (Shet, 2024; Mohiuddin et al., 2022). The necessity to have a workforce that is capable of functioning effectively in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) conditions further supports the importance of digital capabilities. Staff that has high digital skills show better adaptability, quicker learning and enhanced decision-making capabilities (Shet, 2024; Rezaei et al., 2021). Besides, the combination of HR analytics and digital tools has proven to have a significant positive impact on talent management and the alignment of the capabilities of the employees with the organizational objectives (Chong et al., 2026; Abraham et al., 2026). These results indicate that digital skills are not only enabling but also transformative in enhancing employee development and long-term career growth.

H2: Digital skills have a significant positive impact on employee growth

2.3 Learning Orientation and Employee Growth

Learning orientation is the willingness of a person to learn new information, adjust to changes and constantly master new skills. In contemporary organizations, lifelong learning is critical in ensuring competitiveness and adaptation to the changing job demands. Highly learning oriented employees are more proactive in skills development and thus perform better and advance in their careers (Mustafa et al., 2023). Studies indicate that LLL contributes immensely to the productivity, adaptability and innovation capacities of employees (Mustafa and Lleshi, 2024; Mohiuddin et al., 2022). Moreover, employees who are learning oriented are more prepared to handle changes in the organization and changes in technology making them an asset in dynamic work environments (Shet, 2024; Franken et al., 2021). The concept of learning orientation is also closely related to motivation and engagement, as employees with intrinsic motivation tend to engage more in development activities (Le et al., 2021; Ali and Anwar, 2021). Moreover, when a culture of lifelong learning and development is promoted by an organization, the levels of employee satisfaction and performance are likely to increase (Sypniewska et al., 2023; Jindain and Gilitwala, 2024). As a result, learning orientation is very important in enhancing the development of employees and long term success of the organization.

H3: Learning orientation has a significant positive impact on employee growth

2.4 Organizational Support and Employee Growth

Organizational support is the level to which employees feel that their organization appreciates their efforts and offers them the resources that they need to grow. Employee growth and performance can be greatly improved by a favorable workplace, access to training, mentoring, and career development opportunities (Rasool et al., 2021; Abraham et al., 2026). Employees feeling supported will be more motivated, engaged, and committed to their organization, which will positively affect their professional development (De Vries et al., 2023; Ghani et al., 2022). It has been shown that organizational support is a significant factor that can diminish stress and improve the well-being of employees in the workplace (Kim and Jung, 2022; Alghamdi et al., 2021). Also, the supportive organizational practices, like talent management and retention strategies, help to develop skilled and committed workforce (Kumar, 2022; Arhinful et al., 2026). Furthermore, a favorable working environment promotes knowledge sharing and collaboration, which are necessary to achieve collective learning and building of capabilities (Rezaei et al., 2021; Zhenjing et al., 2022). Organizational support is thus an essential facilitator of

employee development by providing the circumstances that lead to an ongoing developmental process and improvement in performance.

H4: Organizational support has a significant positive impact on employee growth

2.5 Leadership and Employee Growth

Leadership is very crucial in influencing behavior, motivation and development of employees in organizations. A learning culture, innovation, and continuous improvement culture are developed through effective leadership, especially transformational and supportive leadership styles (Karimi et al., 2023; Hajiali et al., 2022). Leaders who guide, mentor, and encourage employees greatly improve employee engagement and skill development, resulting in improved performance and growth (Islam et al., 2024; Virgiawan et al., 2021). Studies have shown that leadership has an impact on the motivation and job satisfaction of employees, which are among the most important determinants of performance and development (Ali and Anwar, 2021; Le et al., 2021). Moreover, in order to provide a positive organizational culture, which facilitates learning and innovation, leadership also plays a crucial role (Kim and Jung, 2022; Mohiuddin et al., 2022). Particularly, transformational leaders have been found to increase innovative work behavior through the development of employees psychological capital and development of a growth-oriented mindset (Karimi et al., 2023; Zhenjing et al., 2022). Moreover, leadership helps to retain employees and develop them in the long term by offering career advice and career growth opportunities (De Vries et al., 2023; Kumar, 2022). Thus, a high standard of leadership is necessary to stimulate the development of employees and organizational success in changing conditions.

H5: Leadership has a significant positive impact on employee growth

Based on the above discussion, a conceptual model has been made which is shown in fig. 1.

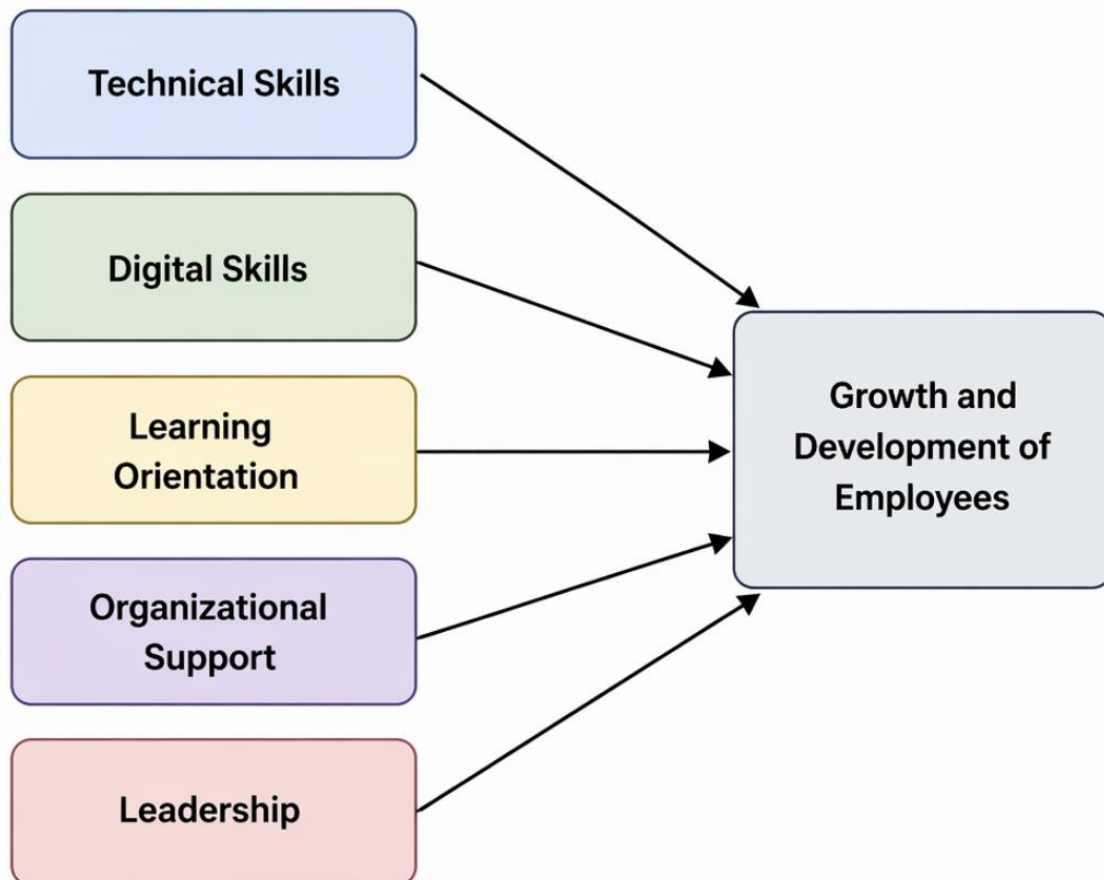


Fig. 1: Conceptual model

3. Research method

3.1 Research Design

In this research, the research design is quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design to investigate the factors that influence the skills required in the growth and development of the employees working in the defense shipyards in India. The existing skill levels, skill gaps, training needs, and developmental requirements within the functional units were analyzed using a descriptive and explanatory approach. To provide sufficient representation, stratified random sampling method was used to include major functional areas, including design, construction, maintenance and management. It will be stratified in such a way that it will have equal representation of the various job roles, as well as, the various organizational levels including the engineers, technicians, HR professionals and the executives. Cochran's formula was used to determine the final sample size to assure statistical adequacy and overallizability of results. The design will allow systematically comparing skill requirements across functions and hierarchical levels in defense shipyards.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The study target population is employees who work in Indian shipyards that manufacture defense ships. A sample of 300 respondents was chosen, which includes 160 engineers/executives, 100 technicians (technical and support staff), and 40 HR managers and staff. This yields a final sample size of 300. The structured questionnaire was used to collect data, which was distributed to the chosen participants through official email. The questionnaire was comprising of closed-ended questions using Likert-scale and multiple-choice formats to obtain quantitative data on existing skill levels, perceived skill gaps, training exposure and opportunities of career development. In order to achieve maximum response rate, follow-up reminders were dispatched occasionally. The questionnaire was made to be short, easy to use and it only took about 10-15 minutes to complete. The data will be collected in four weeks and the replies will be automatically put in a secure database to be analyzed statistically.

3.3 Survey Methodology

Survey methodology is used with quantitative data collection. The questionnaire was structured such that it measures the key constructs, including technical competencies, digital skills, soft skills, learning orientation, motivation to enhance skills, and perceived organizational support. The survey was conducted to the employees in the design, construction, maintenance and management divisions of defense shipyards to ensure functional diversity. Although stratified random sampling will be used to determine the sample, random selection of the sample within the stratum will be introduced to reduce sampling bias. The data collected was analyzed in terms of statistical methods including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis to identify significant factors that contribute to the development and growth of employee skills. This methodological approach is such that it guarantees the objectivity, reliability and robustness in determining the factors of skill-development within the context of defense shipyard.

3.4 Measurement

The measures of the constructs applied in this study were measured with a structured questionnaire that contained validated items based on the recent literature. All variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree. Technical Skills: 4 items were used to measure the level of Technical Skills; the items aimed to test the job-specific knowledge, the technical expertise and the ability of the employees to solve problems. These items were based on the recent competency-based research that has highlighted the significance of technical competencies to improve employee performance (Arhinful et al., 2026).

The four items that assessed digital skills included the capability of employees to effectively utilize digital tools, information systems and emerging technologies. The growing importance of digital competencies is emphasized in the studies on HR analytics and workforce transformation (Chong et al., 2026). The Learning Orientation was measured with five items that capture willingness of employees to learn, adapt and continually acquire the new competencies. Previous studies suggest that a high learning orientation can play a crucial role

in the development of skills and improvement of performance (Menezes et al., 2025). The four items used to measure organizational support were based on the perceptions of employees on the availability of training, resources, and a conducive work environment. Organizational support is determined as a crucial factor in employee development and commitment (Abraham et al., 2026).

Four items that measure managerial support, mentoring, guidance, and encouragement in employee development were used to measure leadership. The connection between leadership and engagement as well as development is essential (Al-Romeedy et al., 2025). Employee Growth, the dependent variable, was measured with five items as responding to improvements in: the knowledge, skills, competencies, and overall professional development of employees.

4. Data analysis

The data that was collected in this study was analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) that is widely used in examining complex relationships between latent constructs as well as is suitable in exploratory research involving relatively small to medium sample sizes. SmartPLS was used to analyze the data. The PLS-SEM methodology was carried out in two phases: the measurement model and structural model.

4.1 Measurement model assessment

Measuring the model was done to measure the reliability and validity of the constructs i.e. the technical skills, digital skills, learning orientation, organizational support, leadership and employee growth using the PLS-SEM model in SmartPLS. The reliability of the indicators was initially tested using the outer loadings of all items of the measurements. It was found that all the indicator loadings was more than the recommended value of 0.70, and this indicated that the items were sufficiently representative of their respective constructs.

Cronbachs alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to measure internal consistency reliability. All the values of the constructs exceed the acceptable level of 0.70 which shows that the level of reliability and consistency of the measurement items was high. The evaluation of convergent validity was done through the use of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The AVE values of all constructs were above 0.50, which confirmed that each construct explained more than half of the variance in its indicators, and consequently, established sufficient convergent validity (see table 1).

Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. As shown in table 2, The square root of AVE for each construct was higher than its correlations with other constructs, satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Additionally, all HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.85, confirming that the constructs were distinct from one another (see table 3). Finally, the results of the measurement model assessment indicated that the model demonstrated satisfactory levels of reliability and validity. Therefore, the constructs were deemed appropriate for further analysis in the structural model.

Table 1: Measurement model assessment (Reliability and Convergent Validity)

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Technical Skills	4	0.86	0.90	0.68
Digital Skills	4	0.84	0.89	0.66
Learning Orientation	5	0.88	0.91	0.67
Organizational Support	4	0.85	0.89	0.65
Leadership	4	0.87	0.91	0.71
Employee Growth	5	0.89	0.92	0.70

Table 2: Discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	TS	DS	LO	OS	LD	EG
Technical Skills (TS)	0.82					
Digital Skills (DS)	0.61	0.81				
Learning Orientation (LO)	0.58	0.63	0.82			
Organizational Support (OS)	0.55	0.59	0.66	0.81		
Leadership (LD)	0.57	0.60	0.64	0.69	0.84	
Employee Growth (EG)	0.68	0.65	0.71	0.70	0.73	0.83

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Construct Pair	HTMT Value
Technical Skills – Digital Skills	0.72
Technical Skills – Learning Orientation	0.70
Technical Skills – Organizational Support	0.68
Technical Skills – Leadership	0.69
Technical Skills – Employee Growth	0.78
Digital Skills – Learning Orientation	0.75
Digital Skills – Organizational Support	0.73
Digital Skills – Leadership	0.74
Digital Skills – Employee Growth	0.79
Learning Orientation – Organizational Support	0.80
Learning Orientation – Leadership	0.81
Learning Orientation – Employee Growth	0.84
Organizational Support – Leadership	0.82
Organizational Support – Employee Growth	0.83
Leadership – Employee Growth	0.85

4.2 Structural model assessment

Following the determination of the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated using the PLS-SEM in SmartPLS in order to test the hypothetical relationships between the technical skills, digital skills, learning orientation, organizational support, leadership, and employee growth. The path coefficients (5000 resamples of the bootstrapping technique) and the t-statistic and the p-value were assessed using the bootstrapping technique (5000 resamples). The findings showed that all the five independent variables were positively and significantly affecting employee growth.

In particular, there were strong positive impacts of technical skills (0.158, $p < 0.001$) and digital skills (0.731, $p < 0.001$). One of the strongest predictors turned out to be learning orientation (0.151, $p < 0.001$), meaning that

employees who are willing to learn and adapt all the time achieve higher growth outcomes. Additionally, the organizational support (0.44, $p < 0.01$) was identified to significantly affect the growth of the employees, which implies that supportive work environments, training access, and resource availability contribute to the increased development opportunities among the employees. The significance of managerial guidance, mentoring, and encouragement in any type of employee development was also significant and positively correlated with leadership (= 0.194, $p = 0.001$).

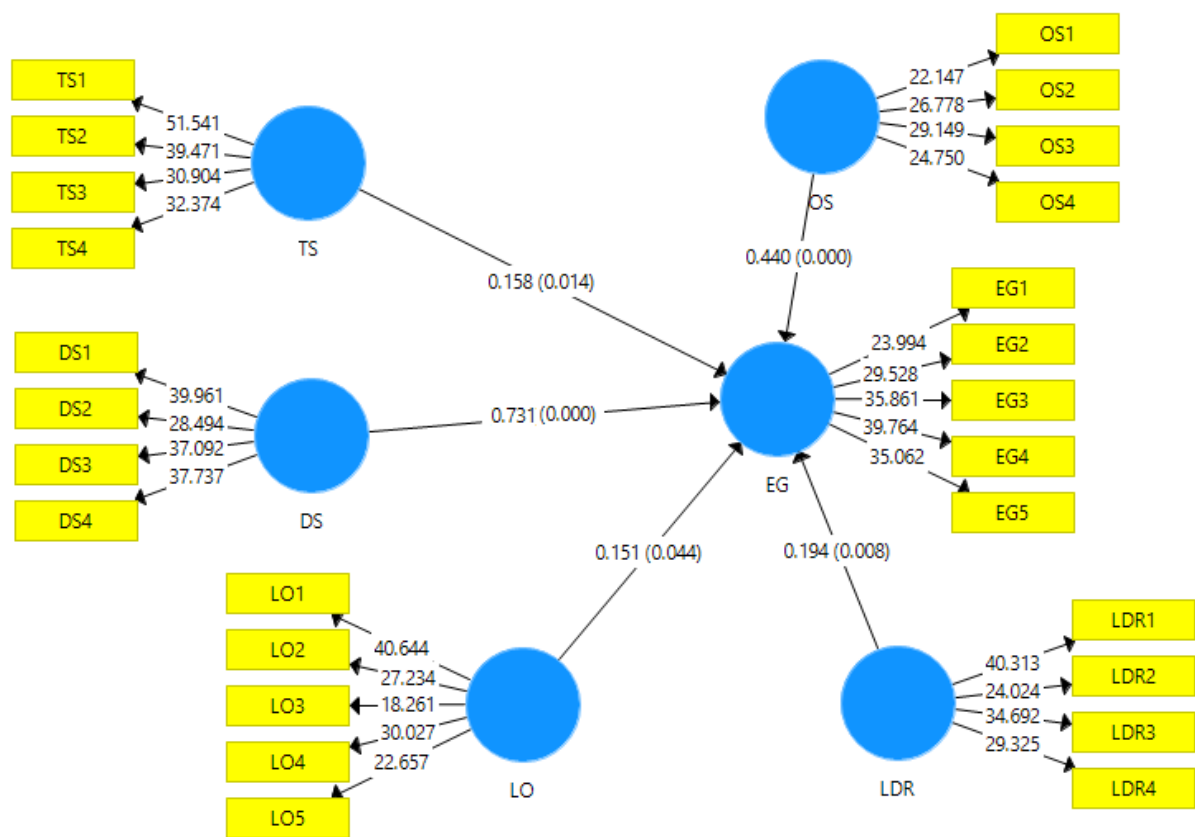


Fig. 2: SEM model

Table 4: Structural model results and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Technical Skills → Employee Growth	0.158	4.85	0.014	Supported
H2	Digital Skills → Employee Growth	0.731	4.21	0.000	Supported
H3	Learning Orientation → Employee Growth	0.151	5.32	0.044	Supported
H4	Organizational Support → Employee Growth	0.440	3.67	0.000	Supported
H5	Leadership → Employee Growth	0.194	4.56	0.008	Supported

5. Findings and discussion

The findings of the structural model indicate that all the five hypothesized relationships have a significant impact on employee growth. To start with, technical skills demonstrate a positive and significant influence on employee growth ($\beta = 0.158, p = 0.014$), which means that although the impact of technical competence on employee development is positive and significant, it is rather moderate in comparison with other factors. This is consistent with the results of Gouda (2020), who stressed that technical skills are the key to competence and career growth in the digital age of employees. Conversely, digital skills have the strongest impact on employee development ($\beta = 0.731, p = 0.000$), indicating that employees with high digital skills are well placed to adapt, perform and grow in contemporary organizations. This is corroborated by Shet (2024), who observed the significance of digital competencies in developing a VUCA-ready workforce, and Bawono (2021) who also linked technological skills to improved human capital, and productivity.

Moreover, learning orientation can also have a significant positive impact on employee growth ($\beta = 0.151, p = 0.044$), meaning that employees who are constantly seeking learning opportunities are more likely to achieve better growth results. This result aligns with Mustafa and Lleshi (2024), who pointed to the fact that lifelong learning and investing in employee development can considerably enhance productivity and performance. Another strong predictor ($\beta = 0.440, p = 0.000$) is organizational support which proves that positive working environments promote the growth of the employees by maintaining their motivation, engagement, and well-being. The former is supported by Rasool et al. (2021), who found that organizational support is a critical factor in enhancing employee engagement and performance, and De Vries et al. (2023), who emphasized the significance of conducive environments in employee retention and development.

Lastly, the practice of effective leadership also plays a significant role in employee growth ($\beta = 0.194, p = 0.008$), showing that effective leadership practices also have an impact on employee growth, albeit to a moderate degree. This finding is in line with Hajiali et al. (2022), who found that leadership style significantly impacts employee performance and satisfaction, and Karimi et al. (2023), who demonstrated that transformational leadership fosters innovative work behavior and employee growth. In general, the findings indicate that although all the factors are significant, the most important drivers of employee development are digital skills and organizational support.

6. Conclusion and implications

The research concludes that the growth of employees is dependent on a mixture of personal abilities and organizational conditions. The results indicate that technical skills, digital skills, learning orientation, organizational support, and leadership have a significant positive correlation with employee growth. Among them, the skill to adapt to technology and to do the job within a digital environment became the most influential factor among them, which means that the ability to keep up with technology and to do the job in a digital environment is critical in employee development in the current workplace environment. Technical skills are important but have a more supporting role, helping the employees to perform well but contribute less to the overall growth as compared to digital competencies.

The orientation of learning is also an influential factor, as it indicates that employees who actively participate in the further development of learning and skills can achieve a higher level of growth. Another strong predictor was found to be organizational support, which is relevant to the importance of a supportive work environment in the enhancement of employee motivation, engagement, and development. When systems, advice, and support are provided to employees, their results in terms of growth will be enhanced dramatically. Although it has a moderate influence, leadership is a key factor because good leaders are able to guide, motivate and provide employees with development opportunities.

Theoretically, the research is a contribution as it provides an exhaustive framework that incorporates both personal and organizational factors that determine employee development. It underlines that development does not necessarily rely on competency alone but also on the surrounding where the workers work. In practical sense, the results imply that companies are better off increasing the amount of money they spend on the

development of digital skills of employees and persist in enhancing technical skills. Promoting a spirit of life-long learning can also contribute to increasing employee flexibility and long-term development. Also organizations must aim at establishing effective support systems and effective leadership practices to help create an environment that encourages employee development. All in all, a moderate solution including skill development, learning experience, organizational support, and leadership performance is necessary to optimally maximize employee growth.

7. Limitations and future scope

Although this study has provided valuable insights, it has a number of limitations which would be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research is founded on cross-sectional data that reflects the relationship at a single point in time and does not allow drawing causal conclusions. The development of employees is a dynamic process, and longitudinal studies would give a better insight into how these relationships change over time. Second, the research is based on self-reported information, which can introduce bias in responses, including social desirability or subjective understanding of constructs. Third, the model considers the selected variables, including technical skills, digital skills, learning orientation, organizational support, and leadership but omitted other potentially relevant variables such as organizational culture, employee engagement, work-life balance, and psychological well-being. Also, there is risk that the findings are not generalizable in case the sample is limited to a particular region, sector or group of people.

The following limitations can be overcome by future research by adopting longitudinal or experimental research designs to be able to capture causal relationships and changes in employee growth over time. The model can also be expanded by researchers who seek to add more variables e.g., employee engagement, innovation capability, organizational culture, and technological readiness to create a more comprehensive model. It may even be more effective to compare the studies in different industries, regions, or countries to improve the generalizability of the results. Additionally, further research can be conducted on mediating and moderating effects, including the role of employee engagement, motivation, or organizational culture, to further understand the underlying mechanisms that affect employee growth. Lastly, the qualitative or mixed-method methodologies may also be adopted to provide a more in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of employees to add depth to the comprehension of growth and development in the workplace.

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