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GRINDING THE INTERNAL STRENGTH: TRAINING, INCENTIVES, AND PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY IN INDONESIA

Andi Rahmawati[1], Andi Nonong Sunrawali[1], Andi Abdul Razak Ishak[1], Muhammad Rijal Alim Rahmat[2]
[1]STIE Tri Dharma Nusantara, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: How the future employees shape their job filling is subject to their innate capacities. This study investigates the neglected conversation in perceived employability is predicted from the confidence of having sufficient training and knowledge, while incentive potentially moderates the intention to have sufficient training for better knowledge. This study employs PLS-SEM to construct path and bootstrap coefficients by sourcing the data from 160 unemployed trainees of pre-work recipients in Indonesia. This study found that all proposed hypotheses are accepted, and the moderating effect is similarly reinforced. Training is a strong predictor to perceived employability, second to knowledge only. Incentive can boost, despite minimum relevance, the confidence that training is essential for knowledge generation. This study implies the best use of self-funding to advance the internal capacities and capabilities for better job absorption.

Keywords: Cognitive Style; Global Mindset; Self-Control; Organizational Capacity; Leadership

*Corresponding Author: andirahmawati959@gmail.com
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INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic has led to the turbulent condition in the economy, and job market. The Indonesian statistic bureau (BPS) reports that There was an increase in the population by 29.12 million people, and only in February 2021 did the working-age population decrease by 19.10 million. This population declines indicates the severity of the health condition in the countries, albeit related or not related. The data recorded an increase in unemployment due to COVID-19, rising by 2.56 million in August 2020 but decreasing by 1.62 million in February 2021. This was followed by other components, such as employed individuals experiencing reduced working hours, totaling 15.72 million in February 2021. Overall, the working-age population showed a declining trend in February 2021 compared to August 2020. Despite this downward trend, unemployment figures could continue to rise, considering the unpredictable duration of the COVID-19 pandemic (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021).

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment had already been a prevalent issue to be addressed (McGee, 2015), one of the main challenges being the mismatch between the skills possessed by job seekers and the demands of the job market (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Jamal et al., 2021; Solomon et al., 2021). Research conducted by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) revealed that Indonesia ranks third, after Bangladesh and Myanmar, among countries struggling to find a qualified workforce (The Jakarta Post, 2020). This indicates that the quality of Indonesia's labor force remains low, especially with the added challenges brought by the changes occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic (Amar et al., 2021; Hanushek et al., 2017; Sugihamretha, 2020). Workers who work from home are increasingly engaging directly with internet technology, while small and medium-sized business owners will continue to face the flow of information and communication technology that supports their businesses (Chu et al., 2022; Wolor et al., 2021). Both unemployed individuals and workers need upskilling to enhance their competitiveness in the workforce and ensure they remain employable (Birimoglu Okuyan & Begen, 2022). This dire condition encourages the government to take drastic measures by several policy, e.g., Kartu Prakerja (pre-work incentives).

This governmental program is related to this study's proposal of perceived employability (Doden et al., 2024). This notion refers to the individual's belief in their ability to obtain and maintain employment, both within their current organization and in the broader job market (Domagała-Zyśk et al., 2022). It is influenced by factors such as personal skills, work experience, education, labor market conditions, and professional networks (Vanhercke et al., 2014). The establishment of the pre-work initiatives can potentially boost the perceived employability. However, it must adopt a stringent session of digital training classes to obtain the associated funds in the program (Ng et al., 2022). This training will facilitate the increase of the knowledge from the construction of added hard/soft skills, inclusive of digital skills.

This study addresses an underexplored area in perceived employability, focusing on the role of training, knowledge, and incentives among unemployed job seekers. Unemployed recipients of the Kartu Prakerja program represent a critical target group for employability intervention, as they are directly exposed to training and incentive structures aimed at enhancing workforce readiness. Incentives provided from the program can also moderates the execution of training and the knowledge generation. This article will investigate this in several steps. First, it will provide the underlining reasoning for conducting a study as in the introduction. The theories underpinnings the academic conversation is provided. This study than construct the research method throughout the article. The result will report the data, and the discussion shall elaborate the result in academic manner, according to the previous papers, as well as potential managerial implication. The further study is presented in the final section to aid the future researchers in the study's path.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conservation of Resources Theory

The dynamic nature of labor markets highlights continuous skill development, training, and incentives to enhance workforce quality and employability (Singh et al., 2017). Indonesia's initiatives to curb unemployment such as Pre-Work Cards (*Kartu Prakerja*) equips individuals with

essential competencies, thereby strengthening their competitiveness. However, employability is not solely a function of internal capabilities; it is also shaped by external economic conditions and resource availability. This aligns with the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect valuable resources—such as skills, knowledge, and incentives—to maintain stability and achieve career success.

COR theory provides a framework for this research aims to understanding the training programs and incentives function as critical resources to navigate uncertain job markets (Bon & Shire, 2022). The governmental program like digital upskilling ensures workers stay aligned with job demands, upholding resilience, and productive behavior in times of economic downturn. As COR theory suggests, resource acquisition is context-dependent, meaning that future research should explore the interplay between personal agency, labor market conditions, and organizational support structures (Bardoel & Drago, 2021; Prapanjaroensin et al., 2017).

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory posits that individuals actively strive to acquire, preserve, and protect essential resources for their well-being and career success (Hollebeek et al., 2023). These resources encompass tangible assets such as money and job security, psychological assets like self-efficacy and skills, and social resources including networks and support systems (Orji, 2019). The theory emphasizes that resource loss—job loss or diminished skills—has a more profound psychological impact than resource gain. This condition makes individuals to adopt resilience strategies like upskilling or leveraging social capital (Hobfoll, 1989). Furthermore, resource investment plays a pivotal role in employability, as individuals dedicated to education and training are more likely to secure better career opportunities and economic stability, identified as resource caravans (Bon & Shire, 2022). Training, certifications, and education serve as key resource investments that enhance job market competitiveness, while economic conditions—such as recessions or industry disruptions—can lead to significant resource depletion, including job loss and reduced social capital (Figueiredo & Paiva, 2019). However, perceived incentives, both financial and social, act as crucial moderators, motivating individuals to engage in skill development and maximize resource acquisition.

Training

Humans constitute a crucial component of production factors, possessing the potential to contribute to the workforce in institutions, organizations, or companies (Yahya & Goh, 2002). Governments should implement training programs for the available human resources to ensure the stability of labor demand (Pereira & Bonito Filipe, 2018). Training and development initiatives are essential to enable individuals to continuously adapt to shifts in labor market demands (Umoren et al., 2020). Training serves as a means to foster a human resource environment in which individuals acquire the necessary skills and competencies required for available job opportunities (Lee et al., 2020). The International Labour Organization (ILO) states that training serves as a means to enhance the quality of both workers and job seekers. Through such training, the workforce is expected to utilize their acquired skills effectively, enabling them to contribute not only to their personal needs but also to the broader society.

Research on human resource strategies during the pandemic suggests that digital upskilling (*Kartu Prakerja*) enhances workers' experience and knowledge (Hitt et al., 2001), in response to the rapidly evolving digital transformation (Mazurchenko & Maršíková, 2019). Training in the digital upskilling makes use of the new tools and technologies required in the workplace (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). This process is facilitated through enhanced training programs and learning tools leading to a more skilled workforce (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). These arguments indicate that upskilling and training play a crucial role in expanding an individual's knowledge and competencies in their professional environment (Denford, 2013; Madhavan & Grover, 1998). Not every individual has the financial resources to participate in training programs, and many companies today prefer to hire already skilled workers rather than invest in employee training (Grant, 1996a). As a result, companies no longer allocate budgets for workforce training. Therefore, training programs are essential to help unemployed individuals secure jobs and ensure that young people entering the workforce are adequately prepared for employment (Galia & Legros, 2005; Lee et al., 2020), thus hypothesis.

H1: Training is essential for knowledge acquisition

H2: Training increases the perceived employability for the pre-work recipients

Knowledge and Perceived Employability

The governmental efforts to curb unemployment through digital upskilling and knowledge training programs during the COVID-19 pandemic can be maintained by knowledge (Grant, 1996b; Nieves et al., 2014). It refers to the accumulation of skills, competencies, and expertise necessary for individuals to adapt to evolving job market demands (Felin & Hesterly, 2007). It compiles both theoretical understanding and practical abilities to effectively utilize digital tools, navigate remote work environments, and enhance workers perceived employability (Al Mamun et al., 2019). These efforts to increase digital literacy, technical training, and industry-relevant education, are equipping job seekers and workers with substantial knowledge required to remain competitive in an increasingly digital economy (Deng et al., 2023). Perceived employability refers to an individual's self-assessed ability to secure and maintain employment, either within their current organization or in the external labor market (Vanhercke et al., 2014). It is influenced by factors such as skills, qualifications, work experience, professional networks, and the overall demand for labor in a given industry. Perceived employability also depends on personal confidence in adapting to job market changes, career resilience, and access to opportunities for professional development, such as training and upskilling programs (Siregar & Syahrizal, 2024).

Knowledge is the essential pavement of future employment; hence, it creates the sense of perceived employability from gaining access to improved capacities (Nieves et al., 2016). Researchers mostly agrees on the role of this function. Furthermore, all construction of previous theoretical discussion constructs the potentiality of the mediating proposal that training increases the obtained knowledge (Galia & Legros, 2005; Lee et al., 2020), and thus drives the perceived employability (Coetzee & Engelbrecht, 2020). Aside from the gained knowledge, the pre-work recipients also receive fresh funds for conducting and paying the digital classes (Coetzee & Engelbrecht, 2020). This kind of remuneration provides the urge to enroll in the necessitated digital classes. Thus, incentive increases the role of conducting the training and finally knowledge generation (Galia & Legros, 2005). Drawing from COR Theory, we hypothesize that training serves as a foundational resource investment that improves knowledge and, in turn, perceived employability (H1–H4).

H3: The knowledge leads to the increase of the perceived employability
H4: The relationship of training and perceived employability is mediated by knowledge

METHODOLOGY

This study employs quantitative research focused on the systematic collection and interpretation of numerical data. Through statistical analysis, this approach reveals underlying patterns and relationships within measured variables. The investigation commenced in May 2024, with data collection conducted across the recipients of pre-work programs in Indonesia as a strategic governmental program to tackle unemployment following the Covid-19 adversaries. Survey responses were quantified using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to ensure standardized measurement of participant perspectives.

For data analysis, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was implemented through the use of Smartpls 4 software. This advanced analytical technique enables concurrent evaluation of both structural relationships between theoretical constructs (independent and dependent variables) and measurement relationships between latent variables and their observable indicators. A distinctive advantage of PLS-SEM lies in its capacity to integrate measurement error estimation within the analytical framework while simultaneously conducting confirmatory factor analysis and hypothesis testing. PLS-SEM was selected over CB-SEM given its suitability for exploratory models, smaller sample sizes, and its ability to estimate complex models with moderation and mediation simultaneously (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013), making it particularly suitable for exploratory research contexts as of this study.

The measurement model establishes the validity and reliability of constructs by defining relationships between latent variables and their corresponding indicators. Convergent validity is evaluated by assessing the strength of associations between individual indicators and their assigned constructs, quantified through standardized loading factors. Indicators with loadings

exceeding 0.7 demonstrate strong alignment with their theoretical constructs. Discriminant validity, tested via cross-loading comparisons and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (comparing the square root of Average Variance Extracted [AVE] to inter-construct correlations), ensures that constructs are empirically distinct—verified when indicators correlate more strongly with their parent construct than with others.

Construct reliability is evaluated through composite reliability (internal consistency) and Cronbach's alpha, with thresholds above 0.7 indicating robust reliability. While composite reliability accounts for indicator weightings, Cronbach's alpha complements this by assessing internal consistency, collectively confirming measurement stability. The inner model is analyzed by examining R^2 values of dependent latent variables, interpreted similarly to regression analysis with t-value 1.96 as the anchor for 5% margin of error. These values quantify the proportion of variance explained by predictor constructs. The sample size suffices for the analysis as the data exceeds the minimum sample size of 150 responses for PLS-SEM analysis. The sample of unemployed pre-work recipients was selected due to their direct participation in the government's Kartu Prakerja program, which provides training and financial support—making them a fitting population to study perceived employability pathways. The amount of research data meets the medium effect size as of Power analysis by Cohen (1992).

Measures

Perceived employability is measured through scales assessing individuals' confidence in securing and maintaining jobs, encompassing internal employability (skills, knowledge, adaptability, career management), external employability (job market opportunities, demand for skills, employer recognition), and career resilience (ability to recover from job loss) (Domagała-Zyśk et al., 2022). Training enhances work-related knowledge and skills (Galia & Legros, 2005), while incentives gauge workers' motivation to join Indonesia's Kartu Prakerja program (Lee et al., 2020). Knowledge refers to information about the program, including completed training and the use of incentives.

RESULTS

This quantitative work provides analysis by following the PLS-SEM procedure. Firstly, the outer model measurement has to clarify with some standardized rules, i.e., the loading factor, the Cronbach's alpha, the rho alpha, the composite reliability, and the average variance extractor. This study complements the analysis by providing the collinearity tests for each scale as in the variance inflation factor. Table 1 presents the outer model indicators, confirming internal consistency and convergent validity, as all Cronbach's alpha and AVE values exceed minimum thresholds.

Table 1. The Outer Model Measurement Summarized

Code	Constructs	VIF	Loading	alpha	rho_a	CR	AVE
IncX1		1.785	0.755				
IncX2		1.573	0.720				
IncX3		2.007	0.761				
IncX4	Incentive	2.877	0.846	0.856	0.859	0.894	0.586
IncX5		2.896	0.854				
IncX6		1.403	0.636				
Knwld10		2.287	0.778				
Knwld11		2.327	0.730				
Knwld3		1.600	0.590				
Knwld4		1.532	0.656				
Knwld5	Knowledge	1.799	0.747	0.882	0.887	0.905	0.516
Knwld6		1.858	0.723				
Knwld7		2.081	0.792				
Knwld8		1.673	0.699				
Knwld9		2.299	0.731				

Code	Constructs	VIF	Loading	alpha	rho_a	CR	AVE
PercEmp1		2.979	0.839				
PercEmp2		3.327	0.853				
PercEmp3		2.603	0.832				
PercEmp4	Perceived Employability	3.717	0.862	0.926	0.927	0.941	0.694
PercEmp5		3.307	0.846				
PercEmp6		2.468	0.790				
PercEmp7		2.327	0.805				
Train2		2.493	0.818				
Train3		2.671	0.852				
Train4		1.726	0.731				
Train5	Training	2.043	0.756	0.874	0.876	0.905	0.615
Train6		2.019	0.751				
Train7		1.993	0.790				

Source: Adapted Smartpls 4 output, 2024

The obtained data in Table 1 reveals a major sufficiency of data from the cut-off criteria in PLS-SEM analysis. The VIF scores sits below 3, to indicate the absence of multicollinearity, and the potential of common bias problem. The loading factor is above 0.6 and the majority of 0.7 indicating scales quality. The Cronbach's alpha is also higher than 0.7, as well as the rho alpha, and the composite reliability. Furthermore, the more stringent average variance extractor results the scores higher than 0.5. This study provides the testament of the quality of the discriminant validity test by conducting the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) tests as in Table 2.

Table 2. The Heterotrait-Monotrait Test of Discriminant Validity

Related Constructs	Incentive	Knowledge	Perceived Employability	Training
Incentive				
Knowledge	0.914			
Perceived Employability	0.833	0.896		
Training	0.815	0.896	0.875	
Incentive x Training	0.347	0.246	0.284	0.397

Source: Smartpls 4 Output, 2024

The critera to measure the HTMT finding is simple yet more stringent than the Fornell-Larcker test or the cross-loading test. Our findings point to the data quality as all scores is under 0.9 aside from one data that is above 0.9, yet it is not too far from the cut-off. Conclusively, this data meets the arguments for the model's discriminant validity. These aforementioned tables allow the researchers to arrange the revelation of the hypothesis testing as in Table 3, and the graphical presentation as in Figure 1.

Table 3. The Summary of Findings

Paths	Effect size	*t*-value	*p*-values
Training -> Knowledge	0.484	7.426	0.000
Training -> Perceived Employability	0.634	11.341	0.000
Knowledge -> Perceived Employability	0.508	6.576	0.000
Training -> Knowledge -> Perceived Employability	0.246	5.229	0.000
Interaction Effect: Incentive Mod. Training → Knowledge	0.076	2.463	0.014
R^2 to Knowledge		0.745	
R^2 to Perceived Employability		0.720	

Source: Adapted Smartpls 4 Output (2024)

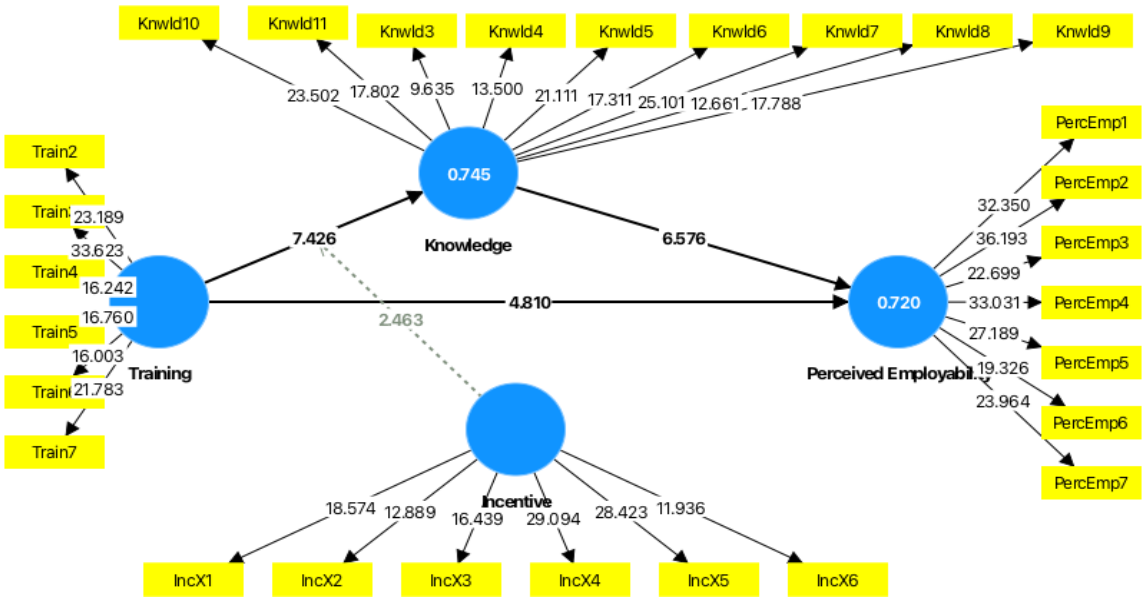

Figure 1. The Path Display
Source: Smartpls 4 Bootstrap Image Presentation, 2024

DISCUSSION

Training is an activity designed to enhance an individual's knowledge and work-related skills (Van Hootegem et al., 2019). It is typically conducted by training institutions or government bodies and is considered essential, as its primary objective is to equip both employed and unemployed individuals with additional knowledge, skills, and behavioral adaptations to improve productivity (Galia & Legros, 2005). Research findings provide statistical evidence supporting Hypothesis 1, which posits that training is a crucial factor in shaping the knowledge of prospective workers. Data on human resource strategies during the pandemic indicate that digital upskilling initiatives enhance workers' experience and cognitive abilities in adapting to the rapidly evolving digital transformation (Abbu et al., 2020; Mazurchenko & Maršíková, 2019). Digital upskilling refers to learning activities focused on utilizing new tools in the workplace and is facilitated through enhanced training programs or learning tools to develop a more skilled workforce. This underscores that upskilling and training significantly contribute to increasing individuals' work-related knowledge (Deng et al., 2023). As a government intervention aimed at enriching workers' expertise, this initiative has a positive impact on knowledge generation and accumulation among participants (Kurniasih et al., 2022).

The findings strongly support Hypothesis 2, affirming that *Kartu Prakerja* training enhances participants' perceived employability. The program equips individuals with relevant skills and practical knowledge, which increases their confidence in securing and maintaining employment. Individuals, hence, become more aware of their strengths and how their skills align with job market demands (Solomon et al., 2021). This sense of preparedness makes them feel more capable of competing for job opportunities, and adaptability, essential in an ever-changing job market (Bon & Shire, 2022). Participants develop problem-solving skills, digital literacy, and industry-specific knowledge, enabling them to respond to shifts in employment trends and technological advancements (Abas et al., 2019). The availability of digital upskilling within *Kartu Prakerja* further supports this resilience, ensuring competitiveness turbulent times.

The research findings confirm that the hypothesis 3—"The knowledge of Kartu Prakerja recipients positively influences perceived employability"—is accepted. This indicates that an increase in participants' knowledge through training and incentives leads to improved labor absorption rates (Coetzee & Engelbrecht, 2020). In other words, successful employment placement is supported by individuals' ability to compete in the job market. Rising unemployment is not solely due to limited job availability but also stems from the low quality and intellectual capacity of the working-age population (Indriyani MS et al., 2022). Meanwhile, labor market demands continue to evolve, requiring continuous skill development and adaptation. The

technology gap affects economic growth, making it essential to bridge this divide by enhancing technological knowledge and fostering innovation (Secundo et al., 2019). Increasing expertise in technology and promoting innovation are key strategies for achieving balance in economic development. Research findings confirm that these two variables—technological knowledge and innovation—have a significant impact on economic progress (Sayangbatti, 2021).

This study constructs the hypothesis of mediating variables that knowledge gained is the result of the training in the pre-work training, and leading to the perceived employability. The statistical analysis accepts this hypothesis 4 formulation in a positive linearity. Developing a high-quality workforce requires a strong emphasis on education and training (Ng et al., 2022). Education serves as the foundation for acquiring essential knowledge, while training helps individuals apply that knowledge in real-world job settings (Baygin et al., 2016). A low level of education limits a person's ability to understand new concepts, acquire specialized skills, and adapt to technological advancements (Mitchell et al., 2015). Employees with insufficient knowledge often face difficulties in meeting productivity expectations, hindering overall business performance and increasing their likelihood of being laid off (Taimur & Onuki, 2022). These factors contribute to a more resilient and competitive workforce, ensuring that individuals remain employable and capable of contributing effectively to economic growth.

This research examines how the perceived incentives from the Kartu Prakerja program serve as a moderating factor in enhancing the effectiveness of training, as well as the generation and absorption of knowledge. Incentives, whether financial or non-financial, play a crucial role in motivating participants to engage more actively in training programs (Galia & Legros, 2005). The particular study explores whether these incentives strengthen individuals' ability to absorb, retain, and apply the knowledge gained, ultimately increasing their employability. The findings confirm the acceptance of Hypothesis 5, which posits that perceived incentives positively moderate the impact of training on knowledge acquisition and absorption. Incentives act as external motivators that strengthen participants' engagement in training activities, thereby enhancing knowledge acquisition. This effect is less relevant in the path from knowledge to perceived employability, which is more cognitively internalized. This suggests that when participants perceive incentives as valuable, they are more likely to fully engage in the training process, leading to improved learning and skill development (Lee et al., 2020; Springs, 2021). Kartu Prakerja not only provides education and training but also enhances the overall effectiveness of workforce development by ensuring that individuals are both motivated and well-equipped to compete in the job market.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

This study confirms the crucial role of education, training, and incentives in enhancing workforce quality and employability. Pre-Work Cards (*Kartu Prakerja*) training significantly improves perceived employability by equipping participants with essential skills and knowledge, strengthening their competitiveness in the job market. Findings also support the hypothesis that knowledge gained through training mediates the relationship between skill development and employment outcomes. Digital upskilling helps workers adapt to evolving job demands, ensuring the productive and resilient behavior in dire economy. Perceived incentives positively moderate the impact of training on knowledge acquisition and absorption. When participants see incentives as valuable, they engage more actively, leading to better learning retention and skill application. They paved the foundation for human resource recovery for boosting economy turn around during adversaries.

This study does come with notable shortcomings. The sample size needs increase to picture better population and draw better conclusion for policy making. The construction of perceived employability is not only from the internal strengthening from the human resources, but strictly attached to economic growths, hence cross-functional research design can be applied. The person-fit theory fills the ground working of this investigation. Future researches can embark on the investigation regarding the myriad internal factors, economic drives, industrial pushes, and organizational behavior for a richer discussion.

ETHICAL CLEARENCE

This study received approval from respondents to collect and record their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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