

Work Engagement as a Mediator of Learning Culture, Work Recognition, and Work Motivation on Employee Performance in Japanese Trading Companies

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Corresponding author:	Abstract
*Fany Elfida 122012411014@std.trisakti.ac.id Article History Submitted : January 15th, 2026 Final Revised : April 28th, 2026 Accepted : June 03rd, 2026   <i>This is an open access article under the CC-BY license Copyright ©2025 by Author, Published by Jurnal Psikologi Teori dan Terapan</i>	Background: In Indonesia, Japanese trading companies operate in a competitive environment, making it important to identify factors influencing employee performance. Objective: This study examines the influence of learning culture, work recognition, and work motivation on employee performance with work engagement as a mediating variable. Method: Data were analyzed using SEM with AMOS 21 based on 159 employees of Japanese trading companies in Jakarta and surrounding areas. The model shows a marginal fit (CFI = 0.922; TLI = 0.911; RMSEA = 0.091), and the results are interpreted with caution. Results: Work engagement and work motivation have significant positive effects on employee performance. Learning culture and work recognition do not have significant direct effects but significantly influence work engagement. Work engagement fully mediates the effects of learning culture and work recognition, and partially mediates the effect of work motivation on employee performance. Conclusion: Work engagement plays an important role in explaining employee performance, while learning culture and work recognition influence performance indirectly, and work motivation shows both direct and indirect effects. Keywords: Employee performance; Learning culture; Work engagement; Work motivation; Work recognition.

Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Performa karyawan merupakan faktor penting dalam kinerja bisnis. Di Indonesia, perusahaan dagang Jepang beroperasi dalam lingkungan yang kompetitif, sehingga penting untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi performa karyawan. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh budaya pembelajaran, rekognisi kinerja, dan motivasi kerja terhadap performa karyawan dengan keterikatan kerja sebagai variabel mediasi. **Metode:** Data dianalisis menggunakan SEM dengan AMOS 21 berdasarkan 159 karyawan, perusahaan dagang Jepang di Jakarta dan sekitarnya. Model menunjukkan tingkat kecocokan marginal (CFI = 0.922; TLI = 0.911; RMSEA = 0.091), sehingga hasil diinterpretasikan secara hati-hati. **Hasil:** Keterikatan kerja dan motivasi kerja berpengaruh positif signifikan terhadap performa karyawan. Budaya pembelajaran dan rekognisi kinerja tidak berpengaruh langsung, namun berpengaruh signifikan terhadap keterikatan kerja. Keterikatan kerja memediasi secara penuh pengaruh budaya pembelajaran dan rekognisi kinerja, serta memediasi secara parsial pengaruh motivasi kerja terhadap performa karyawan. **Simpulan:** Keterikatan kerja berperan penting dalam menjelaskan performa karyawan, sementara budaya pembelajaran dan rekognisi kinerja memengaruhi performa karyawan secara tidak langsung, dan motivasi kerja memiliki pengaruh baik secara langsung maupun tidak langsung.

Kata Kunci: Budaya Pembelajaran; Keterikatan Kerja; Motivasi Kerja; Performa karyawan; Rekognisi Kerja.

Introduction

In the era of globalization, business competition is becoming more intense, requiring organizations to manage their human resources effectively in order to maintain their position among global companies and improve business performance. Employees need to have good performance so that companies can grow (Velghe et al., 2024). In Indonesia, Jakarta serves as a central business hub for multinational companies, including Japanese firms. Based on Jakarta Japan Club membership data, there are approximately 700 Japanese companies operating in Indonesia, with around 73% located in Jakarta. According to a survey conducted by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) in 2023, around 71.4% of Japanese-affiliated companies in Indonesia expected to generate profits, and approximately 42.1% reported an increase in operational income compared to the previous year (Kantor Staf Presiden, 2024). These conditions indicate that companies need to continuously maintain and improve employee performance to remain competitive.

One of the crucial factors in achieving organizational goals is employee performance, which can improve the quality of products and services (Setiawan et al., 2025). The labor market is also becoming more competitive due to globalization, environmental changes, and dynamic market conditions, creating challenges in recruiting and maintaining talented employees as well as sustaining employee performance (Al-Romeedy et al., 2024). Based on a pre-survey using a questionnaire that was randomly distributed to 30 employees working in Japanese trading companies, 87% of respondents indicated that performance appraisal is implemented, and 100% stated that they have individual performance targets set by the company. These findings suggest that employees are expected to work effectively and efficiently to achieve organizational goals, and their performance is continuously evaluated.

Organizations are required to continuously adapt to technological changes, information development, and product innovation, which demand employees to possess skills, flexibility, and a willingness to engage in continuous learning (Van Breda-Verduijn & Heijboer, 2016). A company that supports learning has the capacity to acquire new skills, adapt to environmental changes, and create a continuous learning culture that encourages innovation, which is a crucial factor for business success (Mohammad et al., 2024). Creating a learning culture is a challenge for organizations to develop employee capacity that can face changes in the environment (Asroh & Abdullah, 2017), and also is expected to improve performance. Learning culture creates an environment that promotes learning opportunities (Varughese & Rameshkumar, 2024), and previous studies show that it can improve employee productivity, service quality, and work engagement (Varughese & Rameshkumar, 2024). In this context, work engagement itself plays an important role in supporting performance, as improving work engagement is considered a strategy for optimizing employee performance and generating positive outcomes for both employees and organizations (Rasool et al., 2025).

In addition to learning culture, employees also tend to seek recognition for their contributions, as recognition makes them feel valued and part of organizational success (Asroh & Abdullah, 2017). Recognition refers to the acknowledgment of an employee's contribution, effort, or achievement through verbal praise, symbolic gestures, or formal commendations (Firani et al., 2025). Routine performance evaluations that provide feedback on employees' work, areas for improvement, and development needs can positively contribute to organizational outcomes (Rasool et al., 2025). Employees who are motivated tend to show higher productivity, remain involved in their work, demonstrate commitment, and experience greater job satisfaction, while recognition encourages employees to achieve organizational goals (Rasool et al., 2025). Work motivation is therefore considered an important factor that influences employee behavior and performance, as motivated employees tend to support organizational success with higher productivity (Setiawan et al., 2025). Therefore, organizations need to identify factors that motivate employees to perform to their full potential (Nilasari et al., 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, this study is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which proposes a motivational process in which job resources have motivational potential and lead to high work engagement, low cynicism, and improved performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to this model, job resources, including learning culture and work recognition, can

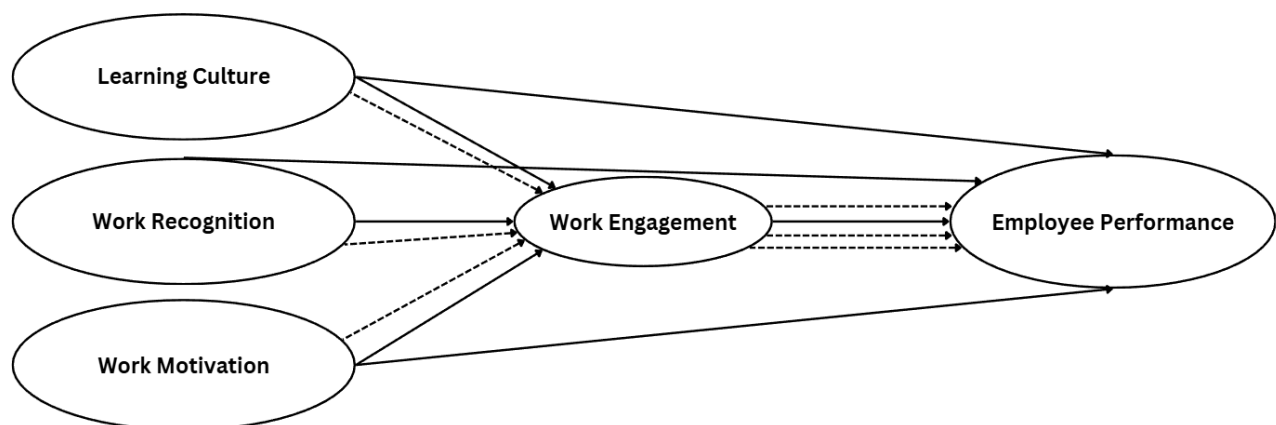
enhance employee motivation and engagement, which subsequently contribute to improved performance. Therefore, work engagement can be positioned as a key mechanism linking organizational practices and employee performance.

Previous studies indicate that learning culture, work recognition, work motivation, and work engagement are important factors influencing employee performance. However, the findings regarding the direct relationship between learning culture, work recognition, and employee performance remain inconsistent. Some studies report a significant relationship, while others indicate that these variables do not directly affect performance. In addition, limited studies have examined the mediating role of work engagement in explaining these relationships, particularly within the context of Japanese trading companies. Japanese companies generally have structured systems and standardized practices related to employee performance, including learning culture and recognition. In such environments, these practices may be perceived as routine organizational processes rather than as direct drivers of performance. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of learning culture, work recognition, work motivation, and work engagement on employee performance, with a focus on both direct and indirect relationships, particularly within the context of Japanese trading companies in Jakarta.

The study will be exploring following hypotheses:

- H1: There is significant effect of learning culture on employee performance
- H2: There is significant effect of learning culture on work engagement
- H3: There is significant effect of work recognition on employee performance
- H4: There is significant effect of work recognition on work engagement
- H5: There is significant effect of work motivation on employee performance
- H6: There is significant effect of work motivation on work engagement
- H7: There is significant effect of work engagement on employee performance
- H8: Work engagement mediates effect learning culture on employee performance
- H9: Work engagement mediates effect work recognition on employee performance
- H10: Work engagement mediates effect work motivation on employee performance

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Method

Sample or Population

Purposive sampling was adopted based on predefined criteria. To facilitate access to respondents, a snowball approach was also used, where initial respondents referred other participants who met the same criteria. This approach was used to reach respondents within a specific organizational network. The population consists of employees working in Japanese trading companies in Jakarta, particularly in the industrial product, energy, infrastructure, and healthcare sectors. The sample includes employees who have been working for more than one year and are

willing to participate in the survey. A cross-sectional design was used, in which data were collected at a single point in time to address the research objectives (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to Hair et al. (2019), a sample size of 100–200 respondents is generally considered adequate for statistical analysis. A total of 159 respondents were collected from December 2025 to January 2026, which meets the recommended minimum sample size. The sample size is also considered adequate for SEM analysis given the number of indicators and estimated parameters in the model. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. All responses were collected anonymously and used solely for research purposes.

Data Measurement

Employee performance was measured using indicators adapted from Rasool et al. (2025), for example *“Having a supportive manager will motivate your work performance positively.”* Learning culture was measured using indicators adapted from Biswakarma and Subedi (2024), which were originally developed by Yang (2003), for example *“My organization makes its lessons learned available to all employees.”* Work recognition was measured using indicators adapted from Rasool et al. (2025), which were originally based on Furnham et al. (2021), for example *“In my organization, I receive enough recognition for my work.”* Work motivation was measured using indicators adapted from Rasool et al. (2025), which were originally based on Gegenfurtner and Quesada-Pallarès (2022), for example *“Being empowered by your manager to take decisions will motivate your work performance positively.”* Work engagement was measured using indicators adapted from Schaufeli et al. (2006), for example *“At my work, I feel bursting with energy.”* All items were translated into Bahasa Indonesia to ensure respondents’ understanding and were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Construct validity was assessed using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while Composite Reliability (CR) was used to evaluate construct reliability. The results show that most constructs fall within the recommended ranges for convergent validity and reliability. The AVE value for employee performance is slightly below the recommended range, while its composite reliability meets the recommended level. The lower AVE value may be influenced by the limited number of indicators, which makes the estimate more sensitive to individual loadings. This is taken into account in interpreting the findings.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability

Variable	Indicators	Factor Loadings	AVE	CR
Employee Performance	EP2	0.541	0.444	0.700
	EP3	0.805		
	EP4	0.625		
Learning Culture	LC1	0.878	0.718	0.938
	LC3	0.851		
	LC4	0.831		
	LC5	0.933		
	LC6	0.810		
	LC7	0.773		
Work Recognition	WR1	0.916	0.817	0.947
	WR2	0.919		
	WR3	0.889		
	WR4	0.891		
Work Motivation	WM1	0.841	0.606	0.926
	WM2	0.924		
	WM4	0.836		
	WM5	0.878		
Work Engagement	WE1	0.898	0.695	0.962
	WE3	0.827		
	WE5	0.938		
	WE6	0.921		

WE7	0.910
WE8	0.904

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS 21 to test direct effects from independent variables on dependent variables. Bootstrapping was applied to test the indirect effects (mediation) in the model. Hypothesis testing was conducted based on the p-value, where a value of ≤ 0.05 indicates a significant effect.

Result

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample is dominated by male respondents and staff-level employees. Most respondents fall within the 35–45 age group and have 1–5 years of work experience. The majority of respondents also hold a bachelor's degree.

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents

Profile	Remark	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Men	117	73.6%
	Women	41	26.4%
Age	18 - 24	20	12.6%
	25 – 35	46	28.9%
	35 - 45	55	34.6%
	45 – 55	32	20.1%
	> 55	6	3.8%
Education	SMA/SMA/STM	54	34%
	D3	10	6.3%
	S1	86	54.1%
	S2	9	5.7%
Position	Staff	104	65.4%
	Assistant Manager	27	17%
	Manager	15	9.4%
	Senior Manager	9	5.7%
	General Manager	4	2.5%
Year of Service	1-5	58	36.5%
	> 5 - 10	46	28.9%
	> 10 - 15	16	10.1%
	> 15 - 20	9	5.7%
	> 20 - 25	17	10.7%
	> 25	13	8.2%

Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation of each variable. Learning culture ($M = 3.30$) and work engagement ($M = 3.28$) have the highest scores, while employee performance shows the lowest value ($M = 3.02$). Overall, the results indicate a moderate level across all variables.

Table 3. Mean and Std. Deviation of Variable

Variable	Average Mean	Average Std. Deviation
Employee Performance	3.02	0.679
Learning Culture	3.30	0.671
Work Recognition	3.22	1.081
Work Motivation	3.17	0.948
Work Engagement	3.28	0.762
Source: SPSS 24		

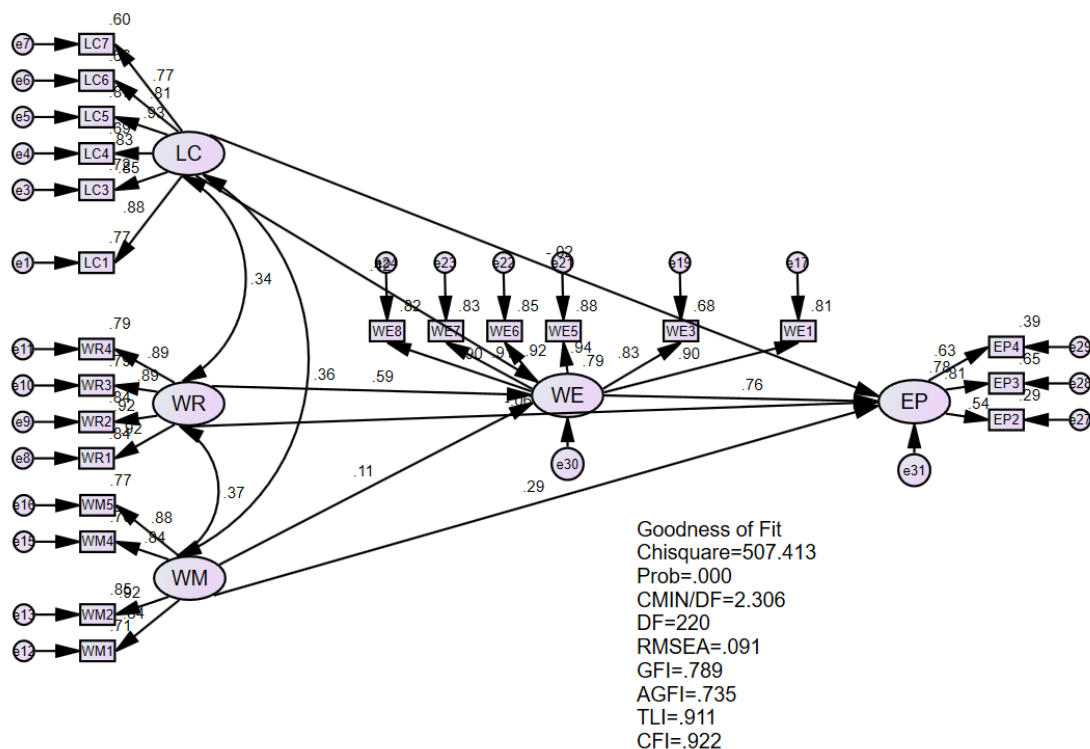
The model was adjusted by removing several indicators based on their factor loadings and conceptual considerations. EP1 and WM3 were excluded due to insufficient factor loadings. Several

work engagement indicators (WE2, WE9, and WE4) were removed due to similarity in meaning with other indicators, indicating potential redundancy. In addition, LC2 was excluded as it reflects interpersonal trust rather than direct learning processes, making it less aligned with the concept of learning culture. The remaining employee performance indicators (EP2, EP3, and EP4) were retained to represent the construct. The model demonstrates a marginal level of fit, with CFI (0.922), TLI (0.911), and CMIN/DF (2.306) meeting the recommended criteria, while RMSEA (0.091) falls within the marginal range. Therefore, the structural relationships will be interpreted with caution.

Table 4. Goodness of Fit Result

Goodness of Fit Index	Cut of Value	Value
<i>Chi-square</i>	Preferably low	507.413
<i>Probability</i>	≥ 0.05	0.000
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.091
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.789
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.735
CMIN/DF	≤ 5.00	2.306
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.911
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.922

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model



The results of the structural model are presented in table 5. EP represents employee performance, LC represents learning culture, WR represents work recognition, WM represents work motivation, and WE represents work engagement. Learning culture does not show a significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = -0.17$, $p = .807$), and work recognition also does not show a significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = -0.025$, $p = .628$). These findings indicate that both learning culture and work recognition are not directly associated with employee performance. The negative coefficients indicate an inverse but non-significant relationship. In contrast, learning culture and work recognition have positive and significant effects on work engagement ($\beta = 0.464$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 0.409$, $p < .001$). Work motivation also shows a positive and significant effect on both employee

performance ($\beta = 0.162$, $p < .001$) and work engagement ($\beta = 0.094$, $p = .031$). Furthermore, work engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.480$, $p < .001$), indicating its important role in explaining employee performance within the model.

Table 5. Structural Model Results

Path	β	S.E	CR	p
LC→EP	-0.17	0.068	-0.244	.807
LC→WE	0.464	0.059	7.298	$p < .001$
WR→EP	-0.025	0.051	-0.465	.628
WR→WE	0.409	0.038	10.754	$p < .001$
WM→EP	0.162	0.044	3.644	$p < .001$
WM→WE	0.094	0.044	2.155	.031
WE→EP	0.480	0.110	4.372	$p < .001$
* $p < .05$				

This study also examines the indirect effects of independent variables on employee performance, with work engagement as the mediating variable, as presented in table 6. The results show that all indirect effects are significant, as the confidence intervals do not include zero. This indicates that work engagement mediates the relationships between learning culture, work recognition, and work motivation with employee performance. Furthermore, the mediation effect is full for learning culture and work recognition, as their direct effects are not significant, while work motivation shows partial mediation since both direct and indirect effects are significant.

Table 6. Indirect Effect Result

Path	CI	
	Lower	Upper
LC→WE→EP	0.122	0.398
WR→WE→EP	0.098	0.334
WM→WE→EP	0.002	0.130

Discussion

Employee performance is an important factor in determining organizational sustainability and success (Eshete et al., 2025). It reflects employees' ability to perform their job responsibilities based on work results, efficiency, initiative, quality, and work attitude (Setiawan et al., 2025). Organizations typically evaluate performance to identify areas for improvement and adjust organizational support (Rasool et al., 2025). Previous studies have identified several factors influencing employee performance, including work motivation, employee involvement, knowledge management, rewards, and compensation (Setiawan et al., 2025).

The results of this study indicate that H1 and H3 are not supported, meaning that learning culture and work recognition do not have a significant direct effect on employee performance. This result differs from several previous studies (Sangperm & Jermstittiparser, 2019; Yang et al., 2022), but is consistent with Udin et al. (2023). One possible explanation is that employees may perceive learning culture and recognition as standard organizational practices rather than as direct drivers of performance. Udin et al. (2023) suggest that this may occur because organizational learning practices do not always align with the demands of change and job requirements. As a result, employees may become accustomed to internal learning processes while paying less attention to acquiring external knowledge and developing innovative ideas (Udin et al., 2023). On the other hand, recognition needs to be timely, sincere, and personalized to effectively motivate employees, particularly when managers continuously adapt recognition practices and provide specific appreciation to maintain their credibility and impact (Tessema et al., 2013). This result may also be related to the context of Japanese organizational culture, where decision-making tends to be collective and emphasizes harmony and group involvement (Dujarric, 2024). Learning culture may be continuously encouraged and socialized to employees as part of continuous improvement values. While on the other hand, work

recognition tends to be standardized and systematically planned. Employees may perceive learning culture as a demand, and may not perceive work recognition as encouragement to do their best in performance because they will receive recognition regardless of individual outcomes. In such environments, organizational practices, including learning culture and recognition, may be perceived as part of routine organizational processes rather than as distinctive factors that directly influence performance. Therefore, learning culture and work recognition may not directly contribute to performance improvement, as their role is more likely to influence employees' internal states rather than immediate work outcomes. This suggests that their impact may be more indirect, particularly through mechanisms such as work engagement, which is supported by the significant relationships identified in this study.

In addition to the non-significant results, the negative coefficients observed in H1 and H3 indicate that learning culture and work recognition may not always lead to higher employee performance. This may suggest that when these practices are perceived as routine or not aligned with employees' actual work needs, they could create additional demands rather than support, potentially reducing their effectiveness. In this context, employees may view learning activities or recognition practices as formalities rather than meaningful resources, which may explain the negative direction of the relationships.

From a theoretical perspective, the results can also be explained using the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which suggests that job resources contribute to employee well-being and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and are strongly associated with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). According to the JD-R model, job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reducing job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, and stimulating personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), for example autonomy, skill variety, performance feedback, and opportunities for growth (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job resources may exist at multiple levels, including the organizational level such as pay, career opportunities, and job security; the interpersonal and social relations such as supervisor and co-worker support and team climate; the organization of work such as role clarity and participation in decision making; and the level of the task such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and performance feedback (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Supportive colleagues and proper feedback from supervisors increase the likelihood of achieving work goals and also promote work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This implies that the presence of organizational support alone may not be sufficient to improve performance unless it enhances employees' psychological involvement in their work, particularly work engagement.

In contrast, the results support H2 and H4, indicating that learning culture and work recognition have significant positive effects on work engagement. This result is consistent with previous studies (Song et al., 2014; Saputra, 2018; Baqir et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2019), which suggest that organizational support, recognition, and opportunities for development can enhance employee engagement. Work recognition is also considered an important managerial practice that can influence employee behavior and performance outcomes (Masri & Suliman, 2019). When employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to become emotionally and cognitively involved in their work. Saks et al. (2006) also suggest that employees who get support from the company, have high work characteristics, and accept fair reward and recognition will show high work engagement.

Furthermore, H5 and H6 are supported, showing that work motivation has a significant positive effect on both employee performance and work engagement. This result is in line with previous studies (Mahimbo & Mtamike, 2025; Hameed et al., 2023; Engidaw, 2021), which highlight motivation as a key factor influencing employee performance and work engagement. Guo et al. (2024) said that the most important result from motivation is personal performance. Work motivation also creates positive feelings and grows productivity and encourages employees to stay longer in the organization (Rasool et al., 2025). The motivation comes from individual needs and expectations, and outside incentive that affect commitment and performance (Guo et al., 2024). Work motivation is also defined as a drive that creates enthusiasm and behavioral changes to be better including effort

that stimulate employee to work (Lussa et al., 2023). Motivated employees tend to demonstrate higher effort, commitment, and enthusiasm, which contribute to both better performance and stronger engagement. Internal motivation encourages dedication and work engagement thus showing work enthusiasm and better result (Rasool et al., 2025). Employees who have eagerness and motivation tend to support company to achieve success with high productivity (Setiawan et al., 2025). Motivation also becomes effort for employees to fulfill their needs and achieving company goals (Setiawan et al., 2025). The results also support H7, indicating that work engagement has a significant positive effect on employee performance that is consistent with prior research (Anitha, 2013; Dumalang & Tanuwijaya, 2023). Work engagement focuses on the positive attitude of employees toward their job including optimistic feeling, creativity, and loyalty (Le Xu et al., 2022).

In terms of mediation, the results support H8, H9, and H10, indicating that work engagement plays an important mediating role. Specifically, work engagement fully mediates the relationships between learning culture and employee performance, as well as work recognition and employee performance. This suggests that these organizational factors influence performance indirectly through engagement. Mediating effect of learning culture on employee performance in line with previous study from Ramdhan et al. (2025) and Song et al. (2014). Organization needs to create learning facility by giving attributes that can affect employee's attitude, value and behavior thus support learning and improve creativity and innovation (Van Breda-Verduijn & Heijboer, 2016). Creating learning culture is a challenge for company to develop employee capacity so that employees are capable of responding to environmental changes (Asroh & Abdullah, 2017), and is expected to improve performance. Therefore, it is important to manage a strong learning culture as a facilitator for improving work engagement and consequently encourage employee performance (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2024).

The result of work engagement as mediating role between work recognition and employee performance also in line with previous study from Rai et al. (2018) that studied sales retail in India. Work recognition is an important management act that affects employee performance and improves employee intention to take more responsibilities and encourage ethical practice that support healthy working environment (Masri & Suliman, 2019). According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, engaged individuals are motivated to sustain their engagement by actively creating their own job resources, such as autonomy, feedback, and support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which can enhance their performance. In this context, work recognition can function as a form of job resource, and its effectiveness may be strengthened when employees are highly engaged. For example, constructive feedback as a form of recognition not only improves employees' effectiveness in performing their tasks but also enhances communication between supervisors and employees, allowing both parties to improve their performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Reward and recognition that are received from the organization improve engagement of employees (Saks et al., 2006). Work recognition makes employee feel engaged with their job and directs employees to achieve organizational goals (Rasool et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, work engagement partially mediates the relationship between work motivation and employee performance, as both direct and indirect effects are significant. The result in line with study from Lussa et al. (2023) in Indonesia that show work engagement acts as mediating effect of work motivation and employee performance. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory proposes that motivation positively influences job performance as motivated and engaged employees tend to be more goal-oriented, focused, and energized to perform their work effectively (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). It is important to understand the mechanisms through which work engagement leads to favorable outcomes, as engagement facilitates self-regulation or goal-directed behavior due to employees' energy ("can do") and motivation ("want to do"), which in turn enhances their performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Employee motivation can lead to improved work engagement, which is followed by higher job satisfaction, better job performance, and a reduction in employee turnover in the organization (Rasool et al., 2025).

These findings suggest a distinction between external and internal drivers of employee behavior, which is reflected in the different patterns of relationships identified in this study. From the

result, we can also see that learning culture and work recognition are drivers that may come from outside employees' personal factors, which are environmental support systems such as learning facilities and acknowledgment from managers, peers, or the company. On the other hand, work motivation and work engagement are drivers that may come from within employees themselves. Although there is extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation can become a more significant driver of behavior. Work motivation creates positive feelings and grows productivity (Rasool et al., 2025). It can result in good employee performance. Saks et al. (2006) stated that work engagement is a unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components associated with employee performance. Positive feelings and experiences that arise from work engagement will give positive work results (Saks et al., 2006). Employees who feel engaged will link themselves to their job, feel enthusiastic, and give their best effort (Mohammad et al., 2024). Increasing engagement level will lead to a greater readiness of employees to participate in new projects, collaboration, and pursue more opportunities for development (Mohammad et al., 2024). This distinction helps explain why external factors such as learning culture and work recognition do not directly influence employee performance, while internal factors such as motivation and engagement show stronger relationships with performance outcomes in this study.

Unfortunately, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the employee performance construct was measured using a limited number of indicators, which may not fully capture the complexity of the construct. This limitation may also partially explain the relatively weaker relationships involving employee performance in this study. Second, the relatively complex structural model with multiple variables and paths may affect the stability of the estimation results and contribute to the marginal model fit. Third, the findings of this study may be influenced by the organizational setting examined, and therefore may not fully represent other organizational settings or industries.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that work engagement and work motivation are associated with employee performance. Work engagement demonstrates both a direct relationship and a mediating role, while work motivation is related to performance both directly and indirectly through work engagement. In contrast, learning culture and work recognition do not show a significant direct relationship with employee performance, although both variables are associated with work engagement, indicating a potential indirect role in influencing performance outcomes. These findings indicate that employee performance may be more closely related to internal psychological conditions, particularly engagement and motivation, rather than solely to organizational practices.

This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the role of work engagement as a linking mechanism between organizational factors and employee performance. The findings suggest that learning culture and work recognition may function as supporting conditions that foster engagement rather than as direct determinants of performance. In addition, the results provide insight within the context of a Japanese trading company, where organizational practices such as learning culture and recognition may be perceived as routine. This context may explain why these practices do not directly influence performance, but instead operate through engagement. At the same time, this also indicates that the findings may be specific to the organizational setting examined.

Based on these findings, organizations may consider focusing on strategies that enhance work engagement and motivation, as these variables show more consistent relationships with employee performance in this study. Efforts to strengthen learning culture and work recognition may be directed toward improving their relevance and alignment with employees' needs so that they can more effectively support engagement. However, given the contextual scope of this study and the limitations of the model, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Future research is encouraged to include more comprehensive indicators of employee performance, consider more parsimonious model structures, and examine different organizational contexts and industries to provide a broader understanding of these relationships.

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