

Turning Learning into Performance: How Skill Development Shapes Service Quality

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Abstract

Background: *With the increasing emphasis on job-related skills, in service organizations performance quality will more and more be determined by employees' capabilities to learn how to perform their jobs. While work-based learning is well established, little empirical evidence has been presented to explain how these practices become a source of improved service performance. Objectives:* *To understand the relationship between learning in workplace and service performance quality, how employee skill development mediates this relationship is studied. Methodology:* *The study was a quantitative cross-sectional design. A sample of 286 employees working in service organizations and training institution in Tamil Nadu was selected for data collection by a structured questionnaire. A partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was applied in Smart PLS to test the relationships and mediations presented. Results:* *The findings reveal that workplace learning practices significantly influence employee skill development ($\beta = 0.883, p < 0.001$), and employee skill development significantly affects service performance quality ($\beta = 0.968, p < 0.001$). However, the direct relationship between workplace learning practices and service performance quality was not significant ($\beta = -0.042, p > 0.05$). The model explained 78.0% of the variance in employee skill development and 86.7% of the variance in service performance quality, confirming a full mediation effect. Conclusion:* *The study suggests that learning processes affect service performance positively but only if they result in substantive skill development. Focusing on skill-based interventions and experiential learning becomes indispensable for ensuring a sustained impact of performance.*

Keywords: Workplace learning practices, employee skill development, service performance quality, PLS-SEM, skill development

Introduction

In today service-excellence oriented organizations, ongoing performance depends more and more on employees' capacity to continuously gain, update and utilize work related competencies. Quick shifts in client needs, how services are delivered, regulations and the technology systems that support this work have only increased the need to learn on-the-job in a more formalized manner. In this regard, workplace learning activities have become an important organizational

asset that contributes to the employee capability and service performance quality.

Workplace learning activities allude to the formal and informal learning embedded within organizations, which include on-the-job training, mentoring and experiential learning as well as knowledge sharing. In contrast to short-training sessions in episodic intervals, the emphasis with

workplace learning is on continual learning combined with the employee's work activities where employees can sharpen their skills through hands-on practice and reflection. It has also been consistently shown previously that such learning behaviors enhance individual competencies, flexibility and performance (Billett, 2001; Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Nevertheless, even as an increased attention is drawn to workplace learning in the literature, there is a scarcity of empirical research that makes evident how instructional practices translate into performance outcomes in numeric terms in service-dominant settings where the quality of performance largely depends on employee knowledge and behavior.

Service performance quality is the capability of an organization to provide services that are dependable, repeatable and meet or exceed customer expectations. It is heavily influenced by the employees' technical skills, soft skills and ability to solve problems. Although there is some precedent for direct relationships between training and performance outcomes, such un causal perspectives often fail to account for the processes by which learning interventions impact on work behaviors. There is a growing body of scholars who contend that the development of employee skills represents a key mediating mechanism that translates inputs for learning into performance outputs (Noe et al., 2014; Salas et al., 2012).

Employee skill development is the process of building skills in employees which are necessary for performing their job effectively. Developing skills is not a natural by-product of learning programmes, but depends on the nature, relevance and application of learning experiences. Experiential, context-bound learning experiences that make use of feedback procedures are more likely to lead to learning and transfer as a meaningful skill to the job (Kolb, 1984). Thus, it is important to take this mediating role of skill development into account when interpreting the relationship between learning and performance.

Theoretically the study is anchored in Experiential Learning Theory and Human Capital Theory. Learning is based on the process of learning through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application in a cyclical process where individuals are encouraged to learn from experiences encountered in the workplace (Kolb, 1984). Human Capital Theory also posits that investing in figuring

out leads to an individual's development of skills, which will increase overall organizational performance (Becker, 1993). By combining these two perspectives, we are able to provide substantial evidence to investigate the mediating role of employee skill development as a contingent factor between workplace learning practices and service performance quality.

Although these theoretical perspectives were important, the empirical work conducted previously has been predominantly characterized by discussing learning, training or task performance in separate contexts ignoring the complex relations that connect them all within a single model. Furthermore, many studies were carried out in the manufacturing or knowledge-intensive area, and service-oriented organisational contexts are less often analysed. This gap indicates the requirement of a parsimonious, empirically testable model that will capture how workplace learning practices impact service performance quality through employee skill development.

It is in this context that the present study addresses the direct impact of workplace learning practices on service performance quality, together with the mediated effect through employee skill development. This study adds to the literature by employing a mediation framework and explaining how learning interventions result in performance outcomes. Pragmatically, the results provide useful implications for managers and policymakers to create effective learning systems in developing employee skills and improving service performance. In summary, the study has important theoretical and practical implications, in terms of enhancing our appreciation on how learning driven performance improvement from a service-oriented organisations operates.

Workplace learning includes a range of both formal and informal learning that takes place at the workplace and relates to employees' work context. Such practices are formal training courses, mentoring learning from each other and the learning-by-working concept. Researchers have highlighted that workplace learning is especially effective because it provides an opportunity for learners to gain information and skills in situational contexts, which they can immediately apply and practice (Billett, 2001).

According to (Marsick & Watkins, 2003), organizations that foster continuous learning condition people work and

live in ways so as to stimulate inquiry, talk and spread knowledge leading to better individual and organization results. Evidence indicates that workplace learning in practice can enhance employee effectiveness, commitment and capacity for change (Noe et al., 2014). However, the success of learning practices is contingent on how well they are aligned with job context and how much employees are able to utilize the knowledge gained in practice.

A number of studies have explored the direct impact of learning behaviours on performance outcomes, indicating that learning is associated with better service delivery and operational efficiency (Tharenou et al., 2007). Learning routines help employees to acquire knowledge of how services are produced, they contribute in error minimization and correct performance. However, the magnitude of the association is context-specific, suggesting that there are intervening processes.

H1: Workplace learning practices positively influences service performance quality.

Employee skills development are the improvements in employees capabilities to work, this includes technical and operational capability and other interpersonal competences. The development of skill is regarded as a major outcome of workplace learning and prototype determinant for quality of performance in service-oriented contexts (Salas et al., 2012).

As Kolb (1984) proposed in his experiential learning theory, skills are developed through a series of action and reflection cycles, underscoring the value of learning contexts that enable employees to test themselves with low financial exposure, receive feedback and refine their performance. It has been well documented that employees who are engaged in lifelong learning have advanced skill and job mastery (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). These results lend credence to the claim that organizational learning practices, are a critical precursor for employee skill development.

H2: Workplace learning practices positively influence employee skill development.

Quality of service performance measures how well employees perform services accurately, uniformly, and as stipulated. Service performance quality relies considerably on employee competence in service-dominant firms, as well

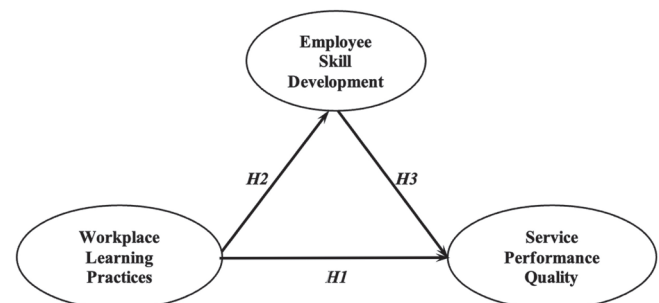
as by way of the application of staff members to create service outcomes through direct encounters and immediate troubleshooting (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Previous studies have shown that trained and experienced labour can better deal with the variability of the service encounter, manage customer expectation, and maintain high levels of performance (Bitner et al., 2008). Empirical evidence has also linked investment in employee learning and development to improvements in service efficiency, reliability, and customer satisfaction (Alan & Lisa, 2012).

H3: Employee skill development has a positive effect on service performance quality.

Conceptual Model: The conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1, which explains the links of workplace-learning practices (WLP), employee skills development (ESD), and service performance quality (SPQ). They further posit model stating that WLP, in addition to having direct effects on SPQ, also have indirect influences through elevating ESD. ESD operates as an intermediary variable to account for how learning interventions are translated into performance outcomes. Training practices result in more reliable service delivery by improving employees hard and soft customer-related skills. Therefore, the model accounts for both direct and indirect effects of learning principles on service performance quality.

Figure 1
Proposed Model



Source: Authors' Work

This study makes important theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the learning performance relationship in service-oriented organizations. Theoretically, it advances existing literature by validating a mediation

framework in which employee skill development serves as the key mechanism linking workplace learning practices to service performance quality. By integrating Experiential Learning Theory and Human Capital Theory, the study moves beyond direct learning–performance assumptions and offers a process-oriented explanation of how learning investments generate measurable outcomes.

Practically, the findings highlight that learning initiatives enhance performance only when they lead to meaningful skill development. Organizations should therefore prioritize experiential and skill-focused learning strategies that facilitate the effective application of knowledge. By providing empirical evidence from an Indian context, the study also contributes to emerging economy research and offers guidance for designing structured learning systems that support sustained improvements in service performance

Objectives:

- To investigate the impact of workplace learning practices on the service performance quality.
- To examine the impact of workplace learning practices on employee skill development.
- To measure the effect of employee skill development on service performance quality.
- To explore the mediating role of employee skills development in the relationship between workplace learning practices and service performance quality.

Methodology

Research Design: This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among workplace learning practices, employee skill development, and service performance quality. A survey-based approach was adopted to enable systematic data collection and empirical testing of the proposed mediation model. The design is consistent with prior studies examining learning–performance linkages and is appropriate for structural equation modeling.

Locale: The study was conducted among service-oriented organizations and training institution located in Tamil Nadu. Data were collected over a three-month period from employees working in operational, supervisory, and managerial roles. The selected organizations emphasize structured learning and skill development practices as part of their operational framework.

Sampling Design: A purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure that respondents possessed adequate work experience to evaluate workplace learning practices and performance outcomes. Data were collected from employees across multiple service-oriented organizations. A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed through both online and offline modes. After screening for completeness and consistency, 286 valid responses were retained, resulting in an effective response rate of 89.4%. Sample size was sufficient for structural equation modeling and did surpass minimum recommended guidelines (Cochran, 1977). The final sample size exceeds the recommended minimum threshold for PLS-SEM analysis, ensuring sufficient statistical power and model stability. The respondents represented diverse age groups, experience levels and employment positions, thereby enhancing the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

Tools and Technique: Measurement instruments were adopted from previously validated scales. Workplace learning practices (WLP) were measured using five items adapted from Marsick and Watkins (2003) and Noe et al. (2014), capturing dimensions such as experiential learning, mentoring, and knowledge sharing. Employee skill development (ESD) was assessed using five items adapted from Herman and Kurt (2009) and Salas et al. (2012), reflecting improvements in technical and service-related skills. Service performance quality (SPQ) was measured using six items derived from Parasuraman et al. (1988) and Bitner et al. (2008), focusing on accuracy, consistency, and service effectiveness.

Sample items include: “I learn new skills through on-the-job experiences” (WLP), “My job-related skills have improved over time” (ESD), and “I deliver services accurately and consistently” (SPQ). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Minor modifications were made to ensure contextual relevance.

Data Analysis and Statistical Analysis: Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The analysis followed a two-step procedure involving assessment of the measurement model and evaluation of the structural model.

The measurement model was assessed by examining indicator loadings, Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) to establish

reliability and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

The structural model was then analyzed to test the hypothesized relationships by examining path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance. The significance of direct and indirect effects was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples at a 5% significance level.

Results and Discussion

Demographics: The demographic factors of the respondents turned out to be a diverse and relatively balanced sample as shown in Table 1. A majority of respondents are male (56.6%); a significant minority are female (43.4%). The majority of survey participants are in the age bracket 25–34 years (39.2%), followed by ages 35–44 years (27.3%), which is consistent with a largely mid-career workforce hereunder. Most have completed postgraduates (32.9%) and undergraduates (44.8%), indicating good levels of education exposure. In terms of work experience, the majority of respondents belong to the category of 3–6 years (33.6%) and a large proportion have more than seven years' working experience. Moreover, the sample is fairly representative of various levels including operational, supervisory and managerial for empirical inferences.

Table 1
Respondents Demographics

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	162	56.6
	Female	124	43.4
Age Group (Years)	Below 25	48	16.8
	26–34	112	39.2
	35–44	78	27.3
	45 and above	48	16.8
Educational Qualification	Diploma	64	22.4
	Undergraduate	128	44.8
	Postgraduate	94	32.9
Work Experience (Years)	Below 3	72	25.2
	3–6	96	33.6
	7–10	68	23.8
Employment Level	Above 10	50	17.5
	Operational staff	134	46.9
	Supervisory level	92	32.2
	Managerial level	60	21.0

Source: Authors' Work

Measurement Model Assessment: The strong psychometric properties of the model are also evidenced by the results in Table 2. The high average scores of a varying range of responses in all constructs show generally positive respondent perceptions and low standard deviation numbers reveal the variation from response to be small and systemically acceptable. All indicator factor loadings are above the recommended cut-off of 0.70 (Shatnawi et al., 2023), which demonstrates that all items adequately reflect their latent construct. The internal reliability of the constructs is found to be good, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.892 to 0.957, above the recommended minimum value of 0.70. Likewise, CR values for WLP, ESD and SPQ were all greater than 0.90 and thus reflect high construct reliability.

Convergent validity is met with AVE values of 0.701, 0.853 and respectively higher than the minimally accepted level of 0.50. All in all, these findings indicate that the measurement model exhibits adequate reliability and convergent validity which is supported the use of it for structural model testing (Sarstedt et al., 2022).

Table 2
Measurement Model Assessment

Items	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
WLP1	0.757	0.055	0.750	0.892	0.921	0.701
WLP2	0.880	0.028	0.878			
WLP3	0.886	0.028	0.888			
WLP4	0.867	0.038	0.866			
WLP5	0.799	0.055	0.796			
ESD1	0.929	0.018	0.929	0.957	0.967	0.853
ESD2	0.922	0.021	0.921			
ESD3	0.913	0.037	0.913			
ESD4	0.936	0.018	0.933			
ESD5	0.923	0.021	0.922			
SPQ1	0.891	0.031	0.889	0.933	0.948	0.752
SPQ2	0.914	0.019	0.912			
SPQ3	0.887	0.030	0.886			
SPQ4	0.933	0.014	0.932			
SPQ5	0.813	0.038	0.814			
SPQ6	0.755	0.058	0.759			

Source: Authors' Work

Discriminant Validity: Table 3 presents the discriminant validity assessment using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The diagonal values represent the square roots of the AVE for each construct, while the off-diagonal values indicate the inter-

construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Observing the table, average variance extracted (AVE) square root for ESD (0.924), SPQ (0.867) and WLP (0.837) are greater than the construct correlations with the other constructs.

These findings indicate that more variance is shared between each construct and its indicators than with other constructs in the model, thus supporting sufficient discriminant validity. Results suggested that WLP, ESD, and SPQ are empirically independent but theoretically conceptually related constructs. On the whole, the measurement model meets the discriminant validity condition, indicating construct measures are robust and its acceptable to conduct structural model examination.

Table 3
Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Constructs	ESD	SPQ	WLP
ESD	0.924		
SPQ	0.916	0.867	
WLP	0.883	0.813	0.837

Source: Authors' Work

Hypothesis Results: Table 4 displays the results of the structural model analysis including path coefficients, t-values and significance levels for all hypothesized relationships (Hair et al., 2022). The positive effect on WLP from SPQ (H1) is not statistically significant because the path coefficient is negative and insignificant ($\beta = -0.042$, $t = 0.487$, $p = 0.626$). This finding implies that WLP power is not directly related to SPQ, which results in the rejection of H1.

In contrast, the relationship between WLP and ESD (H2) is positive and highly significant ($\beta = 0.883$, $t = 31.589$, $p < 0.001$), providing strong empirical support for the role of learning practices in enhancing employee skills. Similarly, ESD has a significant positive effect on SPQ (H3) ($\beta = 0.968$, $t = 13.210$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that enhanced skills substantially contribute to improved service performance.

Overall, the results indicate that WLP influence SPQ indirectly through ESD, thereby underscoring the importance of skill development as a key explanatory mechanism in the model.

Table 4
Hypothetical Relationships

Hypothesis	Beta	t-value	p-value	Decision	Remarks
H1 (WLP \rightarrow SPQ)	-0.042	0.487	0.626	Insignificant	Rejected
H2 (WLP \rightarrow ESD)	0.883	31.589	0.000	Significant	Accepted
H3 (ESD \rightarrow SPQ)	0.968	13.210	0.000	Significant	Accepted

Source: Authors' Work

R-square: Table 5 shows the R-squares and adjusted R-squares of endogenous constructs in the model (Henseler, 2010). The R^2 for ESD (0.780) shows that WLP explain the variance of 78.0% in employee skill development which is a considerable explanatory ability. The adjusted R^2 value (0.778) also proves the steadiness and validity of model.

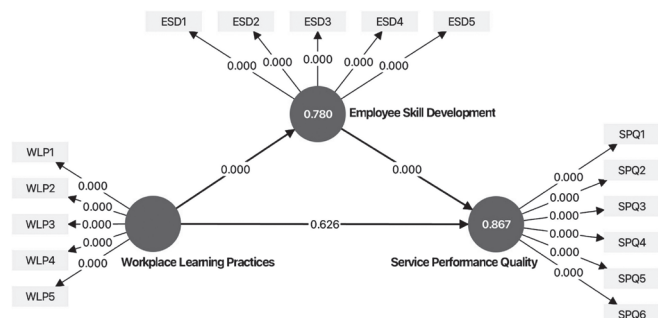
Similarly, R^2 value of SPQ = 0.867 indicate that there are 86.7% variation in the cost rationalization due to WLP and ESD. The high value of adjusted R^2 (0.864) shows low model bias and good predictive power. In general, these findings indicate that the structural model has good explanatory power, supporting its applicability in explaining learning-driven performance effects.

Table 5
R-square

Constructs	R-square	R-square adjusted
ESD	0.780	0.778
SPQ	0.867	0.864

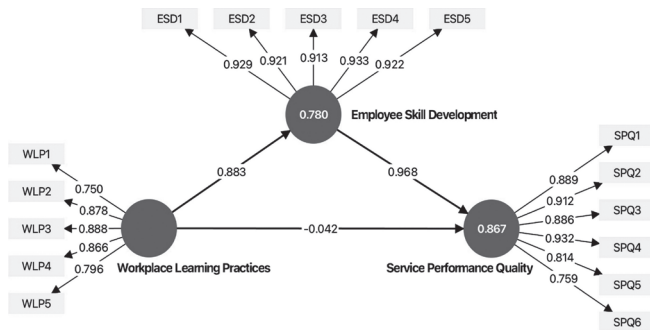
Source: Authors' Work

Figure 2
Bootstrapping Results



Source: Authors' Work

Figure 3
PLS-SEM Algorithm Results



Source: Authors' Work

The structural model results provide important insights into the relationships among workplace learning practices, employee skill development, and service performance quality. The following discussion interprets these findings in light of the study objectives and existing literature.

The findings reveal that workplace learning practices do not have a significant direct effect on service performance quality, leading to the rejection of H1. This suggests that learning initiatives alone may not directly translate into improved service outcomes unless they are effectively transformed into actionable skills. This result contrasts with earlier studies (Tharenou et al., 2007; Alan & Lisa, 2012), which reported a direct positive relationship between training and performance. However, it supports more recent perspectives that emphasize indirect pathways through mediating variables. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding aligns with Human Capital Theory, which argues that learning contributes to performance only when it enhances employees' productive capabilities.

The study finds a strong and significant relationship between workplace learning practices and employee skill development, supporting H2. This indicates that structured learning activities such as mentoring, experiential learning, and knowledge sharing play a crucial role in enhancing employee competencies. This finding is consistent with prior research (Herman & Kurt, 2009; Salas et al., 2012), which highlights the effectiveness of workplace learning in building job-relevant skills. It also reinforces Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), which posits that learning through experience leads to meaningful skill acquisition and behavioral change.

The results also demonstrate that employee skill development has a significant positive impact on service performance quality, supporting H3. This implies that employees with higher levels of technical and interpersonal skills are better equipped to deliver consistent and high-quality services. This finding aligns with prior studies (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Bitner et al., 2008), which emphasize that service quality is largely dependent on employee competence and the ability to effectively manage customer interactions.

Importantly, the findings confirm that employee skill development fully mediates the relationship between workplace learning practices and service performance quality. This indicates that learning practices influence performance only through their ability to enhance employee skills. This result provides strong support for both Experiential Learning Theory and Human Capital Theory, emphasizing that the effectiveness of learning lies not in the process itself but in its outcomes in terms of skill acquisition. It highlights that organizations must focus on translating learning into practical competencies to achieve performance improvements.

The absence of a direct relationship between workplace learning practices and service performance quality may be attributed to the nature of learning interventions, which often focus on knowledge acquisition rather than skill application. In service-oriented contexts, performance is largely behavioral and requires the application of learned competencies in real-time situations. Therefore, unless learning is effectively converted into job-relevant skills, its impact on performance remains limited.

Overall, the findings address the study objectives by demonstrating that while workplace learning practices significantly enhance employee skill development, their impact on service performance quality is indirect. The results highlight the central role of skill development as a key mechanism linking learning and performance.

This research provides relevant theoretical and practical implications on learning-induced performance outcomes. Theoretically, the results indicate that work-based learning processes contribute indirectly to the quality of performance provision as a function of employee skill development, and thereby support Experiential Learning Theory and Human Capital Theory. By demonstrating the full mediation effect, this research extends previous literature by not solely relying

on direct learning–performance assumptions and stressing skill as the primary mechanism through which learning influences performance.

From a practical standpoint, the findings imply that organizations should temper their expectations when it comes to whether learning improves performance on the job unless such learning directly ties in with relevant skills for the job. Managers and trainers need to thus emphasize on experiential learning methods practices that allow skill acquisition, practice and application. The significant role played by developing skills sheds more light on the importance of monitoring skill outcomes in addition to learning interventions. In summary, the study offers direct implications for structuring learning systems that strategically focus on skill development to facilitate durable improvements in service performance quality.

Conclusion

This research explored how on-the-job learning practices affect the quality of service performance mediated by employee skill development. Results show that the impact of workplace learning practices on service performance quality is not direct, but indirect through its effect on employee skills. It emphasizes the role of employee acquisition and development of skills as mediating mechanism that connects training endeavours with performance.

By verifying a full mediation, the study works to develop theory based upon a process framework of learning effectiveness as is suggested in Experiential Learning Theory and Human Capital Theory. The findings suggest that only learning activities which results in the gaining and using of job relevant abilities enhances performance. On a more practical level, this study highlights the need for educational practices which favour hands-on learning and skill-oriented pedagogies. Overall, the results offer some important implications regarding how workplace learning can be employed as a strategy for skills development and continuous service performance quality improvement.

Conflict of Interest

Author(s) possess no conflict of interest

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