ANALYSIS OF LONG-TERM CAREER EXPECTATIONS AMONG FRESH GRADUATES: MEASURING THE IMPACT OF BELIEF IN JOB STABILITY

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh *Salary and Benefits*, *Career Development*, *Work-Life Balance*, *Corporate Image*, dan *Job Accessibility* terhadap *Long-Term Career Expectations* para *fresh graduate*, dengan *Belief in Job Stability*sebagai variabel mediation. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kondisi pasar tenaga kerja yang volatil dan kompetitif, yang menuntut lulusan baru untuk tidak hanya mengamankan pekerjaan pertama tetapi juga membangun arah karier jangka panjang yang berkelanjutan. Menggunakan desain kausal kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 120 responden *fresh graduate* melalui kuesioner skala Likert lima poin dengan teknik *purposive sampling*. Data kemudian dianalisis menggunakan metode *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM) dengan bantuan perangkat lunak SmartPLS. Hasil empiris menunjukkan bahwa kelima atribut pekerjaan tersebut berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap *Long-Term Career Expectations* baik secara langsung maupun melalui mediasi *Belief in Job Stability* ($p < 0{,}05$). Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa ekspektasi karier jangka panjang didorong tidak hanya oleh atribut pekerjaan yang kasat mata, tetapi juga sangat ditentukan oleh penilaian kognitif terhadap rasa aman dan stabilitas pekerjaan.

Kata Kunci: *Belief in Job Stability*, *Career Development*, *Fresh Graduates*, *Long-Term Career Expectations*, PLS-SEM.

Abstract

This research examines how Salary and Benefits, Career Development, Work-Life Balance, Corporate Image, and Job Accessibility influence the Long-Term Career Expectations of fresh graduates, exploring the mediating role of Belief in Job Stability. The study is prompted by volatile and highly competitive labor market conditions that require new graduates not only to secure initial employment but also to establish sustainable long-term career directions. Utilizing a quantitative causal design, empirical data were gathered from 120 fresh graduates selected via purposive sampling. Data were evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) executed on SmartPLS software. The empirical findings demonstrate that all five job attributes exert a positive and significant impact on Long-Term Career Expectations, both directly and through the mediation of Belief in Job Stability ($p < 0.05$*). These insights underscore that long-term professional aspirations among recent graduates are driven not merely by tangible job attributes but also by their internal cognitive appraisal of employment stability.*

Keywords: Belief in Job Stability, Career Development, Fresh Graduates, Long-Term Career Expectations, PLS-SEM.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition from higher education to the professional workforce represents a pivotal juncture for recent university graduates. In today's increasingly dynamic, volatile, and technology-driven economic landscape, the contemporary labor market presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Fresh graduates face a competitive job market characterized by rapid technological advancement, shifting organizational structures, and evolving employment models. Consequently, establishing clear and sustainable long-term career aspirations has become a critical objective for new entrants into the workforce. Fresh graduates are no longer merely seeking initial, entry-level job placement; rather, they are actively evaluating how early employment opportunities align with their broader, multi-year professional growth trajectory, financial security, and personal fulfillment.

Understanding the factors that shape long-term career expectations among fresh graduates is essential for both educational institutions and prospective employers. Job attributes offered by hiring organizations serve as primary signals during the job search process, heavily influencing how potential employees evaluate career prospective viability. Key operational job attributes—namely Salary and Benefits, Career Development opportunities, Work-Life Balance, Corporate Image, and Job Accessibility—form the foundation upon which individuals construct their career outlook. High-quality compensation packages and robust training programs signal organizational investment in human capital, whereas work-life balance and accessibility address individual well-being and daily operational sustainability. Furthermore, a strong corporate image enhances professional pride and social status, reinforcing a graduate's commitment to an industry or organization.

However, the direct link between external job attributes and long-term career expectations is nuanced and mediated by psychological and cognitive evaluations. One crucial cognitive mechanism in this relationship is the individual's Belief in Job Stability. In an era marked by economic uncertainty, contract-based employment, and rapid corporate restructuring, perceived job security and stability function as a vital psychological anchor. Fresh graduates who perceive that an employer offers job stability are more likely to develop sustained organizational commitment, lower turnover intentions, and optimistic long-term career outlooks. Thus, Belief in Job Stability serves as a key mediating bridge through which favorable job attributes translate into positive long-term career expectations.

While existing literature has extensively examined individual job choice factors or short-term job satisfaction, there remains a critical gap in integrative empirical research analyzing how these five fundamental job attributes concurrently influence long-term career expectations, specifically through the mediating lens of Belief in Job Stability among Indonesian fresh graduates. Addressing this gap is particularly vital in emerging market contexts, where economic growth coexists with rapid labor transformation.

Therefore, this study aims to empirically investigate and measure the direct and indirect impacts of Salary and Benefits, Career Development, Work-Life Balance, Corporate Image, and Job Accessibility on the Long-Term Career Expectations of fresh graduates, with Belief in Job Stability acting as a mediating variable. By utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), this research provides actionable theoretical insights and practical recommendations for human resource managers, organizational strategists, and academic institutions seeking to attract, retain, and develop early-career talent effectively.

2. METHOD

This research adopts a quantitative causal-explanatory research design aimed at examining the direct and indirect relationships between job attributes (Salary and Benefits, Career Development, Work-Life Balance, Corporate Image, and Job Accessibility), Belief in Job Stability as a mediating variable, and Long-Term Career Expectations among fresh graduates. Quantitative methodology is selected to enable statistical testing of hypotheses and structural relationships using empirical survey data.

2.1 Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study comprises recent university graduates (*fresh graduates*) from various academic disciplines in Indonesia who entered the job market within the last two years. Because the exact population size of active fresh graduates seeking employment is indefinite, non-probability sampling via a *purposive sampling* technique was implemented. The inclusion criteria required respondents to: (1) have graduated with a bachelor's degree (S1) within the past 0–24 months, (2) be actively employed or actively seeking formal employment, and (3) be familiar with job evaluation criteria. Following the sample size recommendations for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which suggest a minimum sample size based on ten times the maximum number of structural paths pointing to a latent construct, a sample of 120 respondents was collected, exceeding the statistical power threshold required for robust structural evaluation.

2.2 Operationalization of Variables and Measurement

The conceptual framework consists of three categories of variables:

1. **Independent Variables (Exogenous Constructs):**
    - **Salary and Benefits (X_1):** Perceptions of competitive base compensation, bonuses, health insurance, and financial incentives.
    - **Career Development (X_2):** Perceptions of structured promotion paths, skills training, mentorship, and professional growth opportunities.
    - **Work-Life Balance (X_3):** Perceptions of manageable working hours, flexibility, workload equity, and boundary preservation between work and personal life. o **Corporate Image (X_4):** Perceptions of organizational reputation, prestige, corporate social responsibility, and market leadership.
    - **Job Accessibility (X_5):** Perceptions of workplace location, commuting convenience, remote/hybrid work flexibility, and operational accessibility.
2. **Mediating Variable (M):**

- **Belief in Job Stability:** Perceived job security, organizational continuity, protection against sudden layoffs, and long-term employment predictability.

3. **Dependent Variable (Endogenous Construct, Y):**
    - **Long-Term Career Expectations:** Individual projections regarding long-term tenure, career progression, professional fulfillment, and sustained organizational commitment over a multi-year horizon.

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adapted from established literature and refined for the fresh graduate context. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree").

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered through a structured online questionnaire distributed electronically across professional networking platforms (e.g., LinkedIn) and university career alumni groups over a four-week period. To ensure data integrity, the questionnaire opened with a screening question confirming graduation date and employment status. Furthermore, explicit informed consent and anonymity guarantees were provided to all participants in accordance with research ethics standards.

2.4 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) executed via SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its robustness in handling complex structural models with multiple mediating paths, non-normal data distributions, and exploratory-predictive research objectives. The evaluation followed a twostage analytical approach:

1. **Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model):** Evaluated for internal consistency reliability (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70), convergent validity (Outer Loadings ≥ 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted / AVE ≥ 0.50), and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait / HTMT ratio < 0.85).

2. **Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model):** Evaluated to test the hypothesized direct and indirect structural paths. Key metrics evaluated included the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), effect size (f^2), path coefficients (β), and statistical significance via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples at a 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$, $t \geq 1.96$). Mediation effects were analyzed using specific indirect effect bootstrapping procedures.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Profile of Respondents

Data were collected from 120 eligible fresh graduates who completed the online survey. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents ($N = 120$)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	48	40.0%
	Female	72	60.0%
Age	20–22 years old	38	31.7%
	23–25 years old	82	68.3%
Employment Status	Currently Employed	85	70.8%
	Actively Seeking Job	35	29.2%
Education Background	Business & Economics	64	53.3%

	Engineering & Tech	31	25.8%
	Social Sciences & Humanities	25	20.9%

3.2 Evaluation of Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The outer model evaluation confirms the reliability and validity of the latent constructs. Construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR), with threshold values exceeding 0.70. Convergent validity was established as all indicator outer loadings exceeded 0.70 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct surpassed the benchmark of 0.50.

Table 2. Measurement Model Evaluation (Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity)

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Salary & Benefits (X_1)	SB1	0.842	0.854	0.902	0.696
	SB2	0.819			
	SB3	0.838			
Career Development (X_2)	CD1	0.865	0.871	0.912	0.722
	CD2	0.840			
	CD3	0.844			
Work-Life Balance (X_3)	WLB1	0.811	0.832	0.888	0.665
	WLB2	0.825			
	WLB3	0.810			

Corporate Image (X_4)	CI1	0.850	0.849	0.900	0.691
	CI2	0.818			
	CI3	0.826			
Job Accessibility (X_5)	JA1	0.835	0.820	0.881	0.650
	JA2	0.801			
	JA3	0.782			
Belief in Job Stability (M)	BJS1	0.856	0.885	0.920	0.742
	BJS2	0.871			
	BJS3	0.857			
Long-Term Career Expectations (Y)	LTCE1	0.848	0.892	0.925	0.755
	LTCE2	0.873			
	LTCE3	0.885			

Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of the AVE of each construct (displayed along the diagonal) was higher than its correlation with any other construct. Furthermore, Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios were all below 0.85, confirming distinct construct validity.

3.3 Evaluation of Structural Model (Inner Model)

The structural model was examined to test the hypothesized direct and mediating relationships. Bootstrapping with 5,000 sub-samples was applied to estimate t-statistics and p-values.

3.3.1 Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

- **Belief in Job Stability (M):** $R^2 = 0.584$ (58.4% of variance explained by the five job attributes).
- **Long-Term Career Expectations (Y):** $R^2 = 0.672$ (67.2% of variance explained by job

attributes and Belief in Job Stability).

- **Predictive Relevance (Q^2):** Q^2 values for M (0.421) and Y (0.495) are both substantially greater than 0, establishing strong model predictive relevance.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results (Direct Effects)

Hypothesis	Direct Structural Path	Path Coeff (β)	Sample Mean (M)	Std Dev (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
H1a	Salary & Benefits → Long-Term Career Exp.	0.215	0.212	0.062	3.468	0.001	Supported
H1b	Career Development → Long-Term Career Exp.	0.248	0.245	0.058	4.276	0.000	Supported
H1c	Work-Life Balance → Long-Term Career Exp.	0.182	0.180	0.059	3.085	0.002	Supported
H1d	Corporate Image → Long-Term Career Exp.	0.165	0.168	0.061	2.705	0.007	Supported
H1e	Job Accessibility → Long-Term Career Exp.	0.142	0.140	0.057	2.491	0.013	Supported
H2	Belief in Job Stability → Long-Term Career Exp.	0.312	0.309	0.065	4.800	0.000	Supported

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results (Indirect / Mediation Effects)

Hypothesis	Indirect Path via Belief in Job Stability	Indirect Coeff (β)	T Statistics	P Values	Mediation Type	Decision
H3a	Salary & Benefits → BJS → LTCE	0.082	2.815	0.005	Partial Mediation	Supported
H3b	Career Development → BJS → LTCE	0.104	3.250	0.001	Partial Mediation	Supported
H3c	Work-Life Balance → BJS → LTCE	0.068	2.428	0.015	Partial Mediation	Supported

H3d	Corporate Image → BJS → LTCE	0.059	2.185	0.029	Partial Mediation	Supported
H3e	Job Accessibility → BJS → LTCE	0.051	2.040	0.042	Partial Mediation	Supported

3.3.2 Direct Effects of Job Attributes on Long-Term Career Expectations

The empirical findings confirm that all five job attributes significantly influence fresh graduates' long-term career expectations ($p < 0.05$).

1. **Career Development ($\beta = 0.248, p = 0.000$):** Exhibits the strongest direct impact among independent variables. Fresh graduates prioritize clear career progression ladders, continuous skill enhancement, and mentorship. When organizations provide structured growth paths, early-career employees construct more optimistic long-term career projections within the firm.
2. **Salary and Benefits ($\beta = 0.215, p = 0.001$):** Remains a major determinant. Competitive compensation addresses primary financial needs and signals market valuation, directly enhancing long-term organizational commitment.
3. **Work-Life Balance ($\beta = 0.182, p = 0.002$):** Reflects a generational shift in workforce values. Fresh graduates increasingly value sustainable workloads and personal time boundary preservation, recognizing that long-term career success requires personal health sustainability.
4. **Corporate Image ($\beta = 0.165, p = 0.007$):** Organizational prestige and public reputation boost psychological empowerment and social standing, encouraging graduates to envision extended tenure.
5. **Job Accessibility ($\beta = 0.142, p = 0.013$):** Daily commuting convenience and work-location flexibility significantly reduce operational burnout, fostering sustained long-term engagement.

3.3.3 Direct Effect of Belief in Job Stability on Long-Term Career Expectations

Belief in Job Stability demonstrates a powerful direct positive effect on Long-Term Career Expectations ($\beta = 0.312, p = 0.000$). In a volatile economic landscape, psychological safety and job security act as foundational prerequisites. Fresh graduates who believe their jobs are stable feel confident making long-term professional commitments, planning skill investments, and building extended tenure.

3.3.4 The Mediating Role of Belief in Job Stability

The mediation analysis confirms that Belief in Job Stability significantly mediates the indirect relationships between all five job attributes and long-term career expectations ($p < 0.05$). Because both direct and indirect paths are statistically significant, **partial mediation** is established across all hypotheses (H3a–H3e).

This finding reveals an essential cognitive mechanism: job attributes (such as compensation, development, and balance) not only fulfill immediate operational needs but also serve as structural signals that reinforce a graduate's belief in job stability. Favorable job attributes build institutional trust and psychological safety; in turn, this heightened belief in stability encourages fresh graduates to set ambitious, sustained long-term career expectations.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

This research empirically evaluates the determinants of fresh graduates' long-term career expectations by examining the direct impact of five key job attributes—Salary and Benefits, Career Development, Work-Life Balance, Corporate Image, and Job Accessibility—as well as the mediating role of Belief in Job Stability using a PLS-SEM approach. Based on empirical analysis of 120 fresh graduate respondents, several core conclusions are drawn:

1. All five evaluated job attributes exert a positive and statistically significant direct influence on fresh graduates' Long-Term Career Expectations ($p < 0.05$). Among these attributes, Career Development ($\beta = 0.248$) and Salary and Benefits ($\beta = 0.215$) demonstrate the strongest direct predictive power.
2. Belief in Job Stability exerts a robust direct positive effect on Long-Term Career Expectations ($\beta = 0.312, p = 0.000$), underscoring the vital role of cognitive job security in shaping early-career professional aspirations.
3. Belief in Job Stability serves as a significant partial mediator ($p < 0.05$) in the relationships between all five job attributes and long-term career expectations. Favorable job attributes enhance graduates' perception of job stability, which subsequently fosters optimistic long-term career outlooks.

4.2 Managerial and Practical Implications

The findings offer actionable insights for human resource practitioners and organizational leaders seeking to attract and retain early-career talent:

- **Structured Career Pathways:** Organizations should establish transparent promotion ladders, formal mentorship programs, and clear professional development benchmarks, as growth opportunities represent the primary driver of long-term retention among fresh graduates.
- **Competitive Compensation & Security Messaging:** Beyond offering competitive base salaries and benefits, hiring managers should explicitly communicate organizational stability, continuity, and long-term business prospects during recruitment to satisfy graduates' need for psychological safety.
- **Flexible and Sustainable Work Environments:** Incorporating work-life balance initiatives, operational job accessibility, and hybrid work arrangements addresses modern workforce values, mitigating early career burnout.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While providing valuable insights, this study possesses certain limitations that offer avenues for future investigation:

1. **Sample Scope:** The sample was restricted to 120 fresh graduates in Indonesia. Future research could expand the sample size across broader geographical regions and specific industry sectors (e.g., tech vs. manufacturing) to enhance generalizability.
2. **Cross-Sectional Design:** Data were gathered at a single point in time. Longitudinal research designs are recommended to track how career expectations evolve as fresh graduates gain cumulative workplace experience.
3. **Additional Variables:** Future studies could incorporate additional moderating variables, such as organizational culture, leadership style, or individual psychological resilience.

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