

The Role of Emerging Technologies in Shaping Workforce Competencies Through Digital Learning and Development

Tanuja Tomer¹, Vivek Devvrat Singh²

¹ Research Scholar, School of Business Studies, Jigyasa University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India

² Associate Dean, School of Business Studies, Jigyasa University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India

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Abstract: As we get further into this period of fast paced innovation, the domain of learning and development (L&D) is undergoing significant change. Technologies like Artificial Intelligence, ML, VR, and adaptive learning systems are breaking new ground in training and enabling companies to build a more flexible and reliable workforce. This paper delves into the essential part of these technologies in reshaping L&D practices, focusing on their impact on workforce skills and competencies. By examining both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, the study explores how digital tools are attracting employee engagement, personalization of learning experiences, and the expansion of critical assistances required in a dynamic business environment. The difficulties of integrating these technologies are also covered in the paper, with concerns about data confidentiality, accessibility, and the digital divide. Practical recommendations are offered to help organizations strategically leverage emerging technologies to adopt a philosophy of continuous learning and adaptability. The study concludes by identifying future trends and research opportunities in the evolving field of digital learning and development.

Keywords - Digital learning, Emerging technologies, Workforce skills, Competency development, Adaptive learning, Artificial intelligence, Virtual reality.

I. Introduction

Organizations face previously unheard-of opportunities and challenges in managing workforce skills and competencies in the quickly changing digital landscape of today. In addition to altering conventional business models, the emergence of cutting-edge technologies like augmented reality, blockchain, machine learning, and artificial intelligence has entirely transformed how workers learn and grow in their positions. As industries increasingly rely on digital solutions, the need for a skilled, adaptable workforce becomes more crucial than ever.

Learning and development (L&D) strategies, once confined to classroom-based training and rigid career pathways, are undergoing a profound transformation. The digital age demands continuous learning, personalized development experiences, and a deeper integration of technology into the very fabric of skill acquisition. This shift is driving organizations to rethink their L&D frameworks, ensuring they are equipped to develop a workforce that can prosper in a future driven by technology. Organizations may well formulate for the future of work by comprehending the transformative potential of emerging technologies in the area of education and growth. It will attest to the competency and competitiveness of their workforce in a time of perpetual change. This paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital transformation in human capital management, offering practical recommendations for leaders and L&D professionals to effectively harness these technologies for sustained organizational growth.

As the digital revolution permeates every aspect of modern life, learning and development (L&D) dynamics in organizations are undergoing significant change. In addition to changing how companies operate, emerging technologies like blockchain, virtual reality, machine learning, and artificial intelligence are also changing how workers learn, use, and improve their skills.

In this context, the traditional paradigms of workforce development, once anchored in static training modules and linear career progression, are giving way to more agile, technology-driven learning ecosystems.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI is reshaping how organizations train their employees by enabling more efficient and personalized learning experiences. AI-powered platforms can analyse massive amounts of employee data, including learning behaviours, performance metrics, and skill gaps, to deliver targeted training programs. Some key contributions of AI to L&D include:

Personalized Learning Paths: AI algorithms analyse each learner's progress, preferences, and weaknesses to tailor training content specific to their needs. For example, AI can recommend different modules or exercises based on individual performance.

Automated Feedback: AI systems provide real-time feedback to learners, helping them improve without waiting for human intervention. This encourages faster skill acquisition and competency development.

Skill Gap Analysis: AI can predict future skill requirements based on organizational goals and industry trends, allowing L&D teams to design proactive training programs.

Natural Language Processing (NLP): NLP-powered AI systems enable chatbots and virtual assistants to facilitate learning by answering employee queries, suggesting learning resources, and tracking progress.

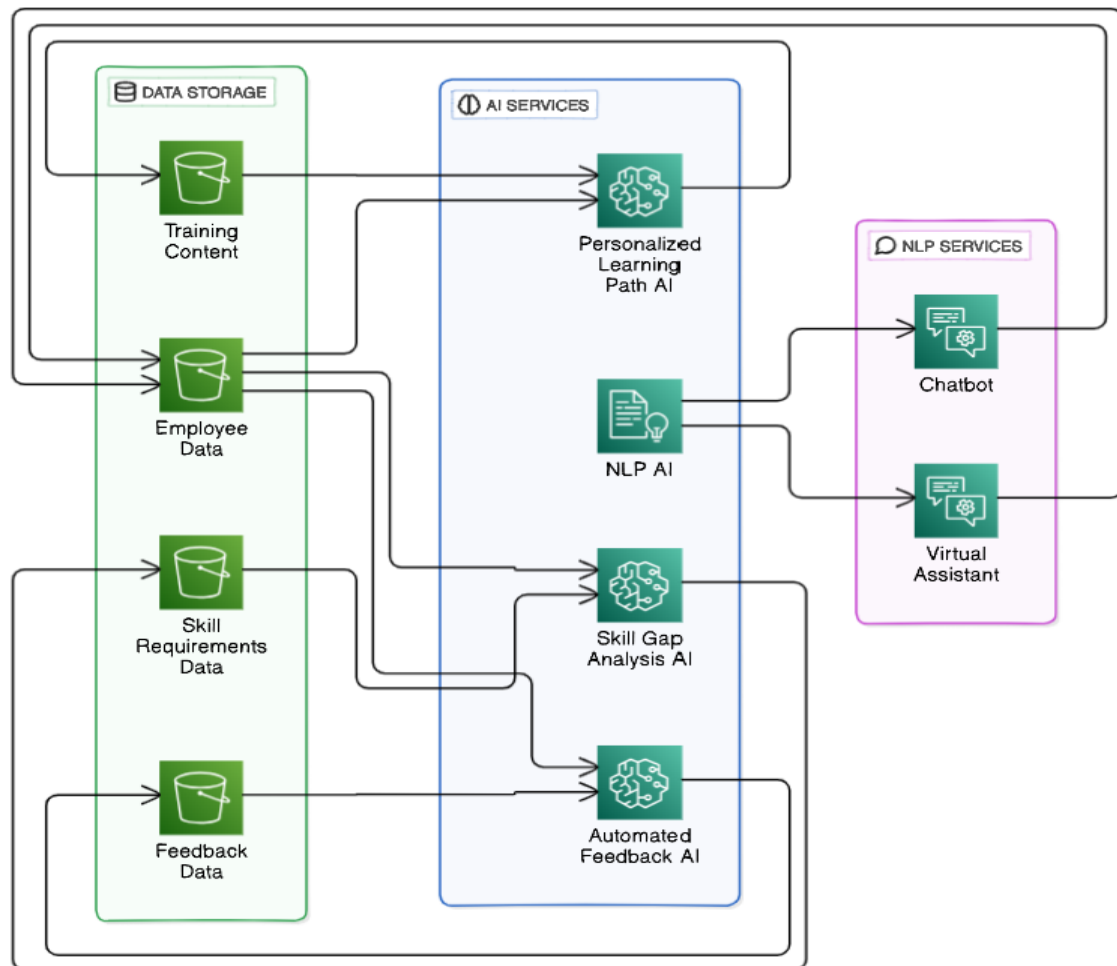


Fig.1. AI-Powered Employee Training System

Machine Learning (ML): Machine Learning, a subset of AI, is vital for enhancing the proficiencies of learning platforms by continuously improving training systems through data analysis. It enables adaptive and predictive learning experiences. ML's role in L&D is highlighted by:

Predictive Learning Outcomes: By analysing historical data and learning patterns, ML models can predict how a learner is likely to perform on upcoming modules or assessments, allowing instructors to step in and offer more assistance when required.

Adaptive Learning Systems: ML-powered systems animatedly regulate the difficulty, content, and leap of training grounded on real-time data. For instance, if a learner struggles with a particular topic, the platform might provide additional practice sessions or simplified content before moving to more advanced topics.

Performance Tracking: ML algorithms continuously monitor and evaluate the performance of employees during training programs. The system identifies trends, strengths, and areas of improvement, which helps in designing better training strategies.

Virtual Reality (VR): VR technology is transforming learning and development by creating immersive, real-world simulations for employees to practice skills in a controlled environment. VR enables experiential learning, where learners can engage in practical exercises without the risks or costs associated with real-world scenarios. Some key benefits of VR in L&D include:

Immersive Learning: VR creates a highly interactive and immersive learning setting where staff members can engage in simulations that mimic real-world tasks. For illustration, a medical professional can practice surgery in a VR simulation without the risk of harming a patient.

Hands-On Training: In industries such as manufacturing, construction, or healthcare, VR is used for hands-on training without the risks associated with real-world exposure. Employees can practice skills repeatedly in a safe environment until they master them.

Soft Skills Training: VR is progressively being second-hand for evolving soft skills, such as leadership, communication, and conflict resolution. Employees can participate in virtual role-playing scenarios, which helps them build confidence and improve their interpersonal skills.

Adaptive Learning Platforms: Adaptive learning platforms leverage AI and ML to offer personalized and customized learning experiences. These platforms adjust the content, difficulty, and pace of learning constructed on the individual learner's progress. They focus on making learning further well-organized and targeted by adapting to the user's needs in real time. Key features include:

Real-Time Adjustments: These platforms track learner performance in real-time and make immediate adjustments to the training material. If a learner is struggling with a topic, the system might offer additional practice questions or lower the difficulty level.

Data-Driven Personalization: By analysing data on learner behaviour and engagement, adaptive platforms can offer personalized commendations, suggest specific modules, and alter the pacing of lessons.

Efficiency in Learning: Adaptive platforms make the learning process more effectively by making sure that learners spend time on the areas where they need the most improvement, rather than following a one-size-fits-all training program.

II. Literature Review

Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Virtual Reality (VR), and adaptive learning platforms have significantly transformed traditional Learning and Development (L&D) practices by enabling more personalized, data-driven, and immersive training experiences.

AI and ML, in particular, have revolutionized L&D by enabling intelligent automation, continuous feedback mechanisms, and personalized learning pathways. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) observe that AI-powered systems support adaptive learning through real-time analysis of individual learning behaviours, thereby customizing content to match learner profiles. Similarly, Popenici and Kerr (2017) argue that AI enhances workforce competencies by delivering targeted learning interventions and enabling self-paced learning experiences, which enhance knowledge retention and relevance. Moreover, ML algorithms allow organizations to mine large datasets to identify skill gaps, forecast future training needs, and optimize resource allocation (Lu et al., 2019). Sarkar and Chakraborty (2020) further highlight how the automation of routine L&D tasks enables human professionals to shift focus toward strategic initiatives such as competency mapping and organizational learning strategy, ultimately fostering greater workforce agility and innovation.

Beyond AI and ML, Virtual Reality (VR) has emerged as a compelling tool for experiential and simulation-based training. Pantelidis (2010) underscores VR's capacity to immerse learners in realistic environments, allowing for risk-free practice of complex tasks. Radianti et al. (2020) found VR especially effective in sectors like healthcare, aviation, and manufacturing, where hands-on training is critical to operational success. The technology facilitates the replication of intricate scenarios, encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making under simulated pressure (Freina & Ott, 2015). According to Pottle (2019), organizations integrating VR into L&D programs report improved learner engagement, higher knowledge retention, and enhanced transfer of learning to real-world situations.

Adaptive learning platforms, powered by AI and ML, further advance L&D by offering dynamic and tailored learning experiences. Johnson et al. (2016) note that these platforms continuously adjust learning content based on user performance, skills, and preferences, creating a highly individualized developmental trajectory. Kulik (2013) supports this by showing that personalization significantly boosts learner motivation and engagement, especially when employees perceive content as relevant and aligned with their roles. Schwendimann et al. (2018) argue that adaptive systems also improve scalability by automating the creation and distribution of customized content, enabling organizations to provide high-quality training at scale.

Despite these advancements, the literature also highlights key challenges in adopting emerging technologies. Data privacy and ethical concerns persist as organizations collect, process, and analyse sensitive employee data for personalization (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017). The digital divide remains a barrier, particularly in organizations with limited technological infrastructure or a workforce lacking digital proficiency (van Dijk, 2020). Additionally, the initial cost of deploying AI, VR, and adaptive platforms—including infrastructure, software, and training—continues to hinder widespread adoption (Lance, 2018).

Research Gap and Unique Contribution

The majority of studies tend to concentrate on specific technologies (such as only AI or VR) or analyse their technical aspects without thoroughly examining how they collectively influence the development of workforce competencies—such as adaptability, critical thinking, and continuous learning—even though the literature provides significant insight into the capabilities and advantages of emerging technologies in L&D. Furthermore, there is frequently a lack of research on the connections among employee engagement, personalized learning, and the development of adaptive learning environments.

By providing a comprehensive viewpoint on how a variety of emerging technologies—rather than just one tool—influence workforce competency development through tailored and flexible learning mechanisms, this study fills these gaps. Beyond the technical implementation, it also looks at how these technologies affect learning motivation and employee engagement. The study also suggests and validates a conceptual model that uses adaptive learning frameworks to connect emerging technologies with

competency outcomes, offering empirically supported insights that can guide strategic learning and development choices in globally evolving companies.

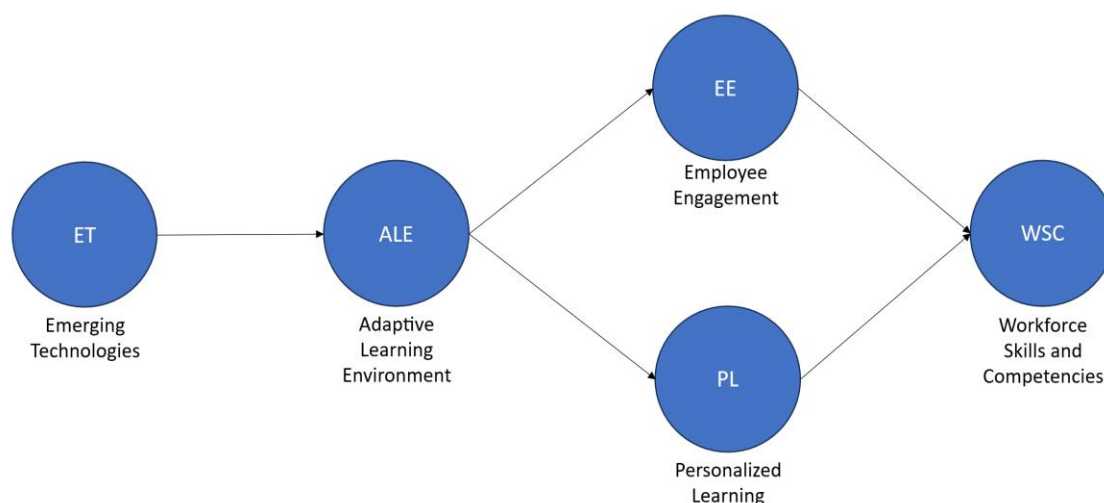
Objectives

To investigate how organizations' approaches to learning and development (L&D) are evolving as a result of new technologies.

To investigate the effects of technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and learning management systems on staff skill development and training.

To appraise the long-term suggestions of digital transformation on workforce development and organizational growth.

Conceptual Framework



Hypothesis 1 (H1): There exists a momentous relationship between Emerging Technologies (ET) and the development of Adaptive Learning Environments (ALE) within organizations.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Adaptive Learning Environments (ALE) significantly influence the level of Employee Engagement (EE).

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Adaptive Learning Environments (ALE) are positively associated with the promotion of Personalized Learning (PL).

Hypothesis 4(H4): There exists a significant relationship between of Employee Engagement (EE) and the enhancement of Workforce Skills and Competencies (WSC).

Hypothesis 5(H5): There exists a significant relationship between Personalized Learning (PL) and the enhancement of Workforce Skills and Competencies (WSC).

III. Research Framework Methodology

In this research, a mixed-methods approach was employed to explore the effect of developing technologies on Learning and Development (L&D), focusing on workforce skills and competencies. This methodology integrates both quantitative and qualitative research to offer an inclusive analysis, combining the strengths of each method. The quantitative aspect elaborates designed surveys distributed to 500 HR and L&D professionals across various industries. The survey was designed to measure the extent of AI, machine learning (ML), virtual reality (VR), and adaptive learning platform integration and their effects on workforce skill development, engagement, and learning personalization. The survey achieved a 60% response rate, yielding 302 completed surveys for analysis.

Data collection involved a blend of surveys, and constructed on a structured questionnaire. The quantitative data was observed using statistical methods such as descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, regression analysis, and SEM-Smart PLS to evaluate the effect of technology on skill development and organizational outcomes. Thematic analysis was used to estimate the qualitative data, and themes pertaining to technology execution strategies, difficulties, and the potential of these technologies in L&D in the

future emerged. Additionally, the study took measures to guarantee validity and reliability. The survey instrument experienced pilot testing to guarantee clarity, and cross-validation of results was aided by triangulation of data sources. Member checking was used to verify interview data accuracy, and inter-coder reliability was maintained during qualitative analysis to ensure consistency. All participants provided their well-versed permission, confidentiality was guaranteed, and data protection procedures were in place as part of the rigorous adherence to ethical standards. For researchers and practitioners hoping to use these technologies to improve L&D outcomes, the findings provide insightful information.

Sample profile

Table 1 displays the respondent's demographics.

Table 1: An overview of the sample profile

Variable		N= 302	%
Gender	Male	210	69.5
	Female	92	30.5
Age	20-25 Yrs.	101	33.4
	26-30 Yrs.	108	35.8
	31-35 Yrs	58	19.2
	36-40 Yrs.	35	11.6
Marital status	Single	189	62.6
	Married	113	37.4
Profile	Employees	198	65.6
	Supervisors	89	29.5
	Managers	15	5

Influence of Sample Characteristics

Perceptions of emerging technologies in L&D can be greatly influenced by the demographic distribution of respondents, especially by age, job role, and technological exposure. Nearly 70% of the sample consisted of younger participants (20–30 years old), who might be more accustomed to and at ease with AI and VR, which could result in more favourable assessments. On the other hand, because of legacy training models or worries about implementation complexity, older respondents or those in managerial positions might show more cautious optimism or skepticism. To guarantee accurate insight into the dynamics of technology adoption across hierarchical and generational lines, results interpretations must be contextualized within the demographic composition.

Analysis

For analysis of data based on study objectives and to verify the hypothesis, PLS-SEM has been in use for data analysis. Consequently, Smart PLS 3.0 software was used to bootstrap 302 samples in order to estimate parameters and validate the hypothesis (Ali et al., 2018; F. Hair Jr et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2019).

Measurement model analysis

It was confirmed that the measurement model satisfies the requirements of discriminant validity, convergent validity, and reliability before assessing the relationship between the constructs (refer table 2). The indicators used for the validation of the reliability were Cronbach α coefficient ≥ 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951), the composite reliability index $CR \geq 0.7$ (Ali et al., 2018; Hair Jr. et al., 2017), and the AVE ≥ 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All five constructs meet the required criteria as the loading values are above 0.7 (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; Hair et al., 2012).

Table 2: Instrument's Validity and Reliability

Construct	Item	Outer FL	α	CR	AVE
Emerging Technology (ET)	ET1	0.460	0.728	0.775	0.510
	ET2	0.457			
	ET3	0.560			

	ET4	0.563				
Adaptive Learning Environment (ALE)	ALE1	0.774	0.810	0.875	0.637	
	ALE2	0.830				
	ALE3	0.788				
	ALE4	0.799				
Employee Engagement (EE)	EE1	0.875	0.778	0.871	0.694	
	EE2	0.888				
	EE3	0.727				
Personalised Learning (PL)	PL1	0.822	0.814	0.890	0.729	
	PL2	0.885				
	PL3	0.853				
Workforce Skills and Competencies (WSC)	WSC1	0.799	0.840	0.893	0.675	
	WSC2	0.860				
	WSC3	0.816				
	WSC4	0.810				
Note: FL = Factor Loadings; α = Cronbach's alpha coefficient ≥ 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951); CR = Composite Reliability $CR \geq 0.7$ (Ali et al., 2018; Hair Jr. et al., 2017); AVE = Average Variance Extracted $AVE \geq 0.5$ (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)						

(Source: Analysis by the author)

Because the square roots of the AVE of the constructs were greater than the correlation values between all the constructs, Fornell & Larcker's (1981) criterion was applied to investigate discriminant validity. (Refer Table 3).

Table 3. Discriminant validity assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)					
	AVE	ALE	EE	ET	PL
ALE	0.637	0.798			
EE	0.694	0.764	0.833		
ET	0.510	0.659	0.641	0.714	
PL	0.729	0.755	0.687	0.559	0.854
WSC	0.675	0.776	0.735	0.607	0.754
*Fornell & Larcker's (1981) criterion was used. It was determined because the correlation values between all the constructs are greater than the square roots of the AVE of the constructs (Source: Author's analysis).					

Structural model analysis

The most popular and well-known metric for assessing it is to use standard root square residual (SRMS) values that are obtained through bootstrapping. In order to reject any discrepancies with pragmatic relationships and validate a model as fit, a value that does not surpass the 0.08 limit is accepted (Henseler et al., 2016; Hu & Bentler, 1999). The model is found to be fit in the current analysis since $SRMR = 0.049 < 0.08$. Since Smart PLS was used to test the model, the two standard statistical criteria for determining the amount of variance in the dependent variable by the independent variable are R^2 and Q^2 , respectively. All of the constructs in the current study (ALE, EE, PL, and WSC) had R^2 values near 0.50, indicating that the independent variables had a moderate impact on the dependent variable's variance (# Hair et al., 2011, 2013). The PLS path model's predictive accuracy was demonstrated by the medium to large range of Q^2 values that were found (Hair et al., 2013, 2014, 2019) (Ali et al., 2018; Hair et

al., 2014, 2019). This is evident from the Smart PLS 3.0 output (see Table 4), which serves as a reliable gauge of the prediction's accuracy.

Table 4: Values of R ² and Q ²		
	R ²	Q ²
ALE	0.435	0.270
EE	0.584	0.400
PL	0.570	0.410
WSC	0.657	0.440
(Source: Author's analysis)		

PLS-SEM Model analysis

We must continue testing our hypotheses for all the variables after evaluating the measurement and structural models. For this, 10,000 subsamples were made in order to bootstrap the PLS path model estimation and ensure the stability of the results (Ali et al., 2018). For H1 (ET on ALE: $\beta = 0.659$, $t = 16.95^{***}$), H2 (ALE on EE: $\beta = 0.764$, $t = 23.720^{***}$), H3 (ALE and PL: $\beta = 0.755$, $t = 21.233^{***}$), H4 (EE on WSC: $\beta = 0.410$, $t = 7.753^{***}$), and H5 (PL on WSC: $\beta = 0.472$, $t = 8.920^{***}$), the results showed a significant positive impact of independent variables on the dependents. All of the hypotheses were thus accepted, and the evidence backs them up. (Refer Table 5 & Figure 2).

Table 5: Results of Hypothesis testing						
Hypothesis	Path	β	STDEV	T Statistics	p Values	Result
H1	ET -> ALE	0.659	0.039	16.95***	0.000	Supported
H2	ALE -> EE	0.764	0.032	23.720***	0.000	Supported
H3	ALE -> PL	0.755	0.036	21.233***	0.000	Supported
H4	EE -> WSC	0.410	0.053	7.753***	0.000	Supported
H5	PL -> WSC	0.472	0.053	8.920***	0.000	Supported
(*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001) (Source: Author's analysis)						

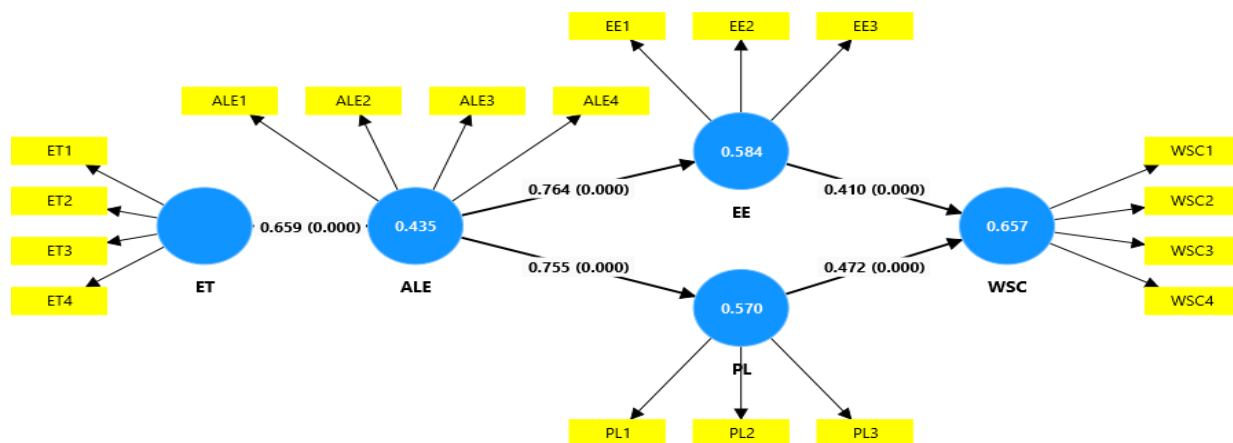


Fig. 2: Bootstrapping output with β and significance level in Smart PLS 3 SEM (Source: Author's analysis)

IV. Conclusion

The study's objectives were to (a) Examine how emerging technologies (ET) are changing learning and development (L&D) practices in businesses and (b) Examine how ET is influencing Personalized Learning (PL) and Employee Engagement (EE) by

establishing an Adaptive Learning Environment (ALE). The study's findings validated the suggested conceptual model's predictive accuracy, predictive relevance, and predictive relevance.

The findings reveal that these technologies are instrumental in enhancing technical expertise, problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability, which are essential in today's dynamic and competitive business environment. Organizations that strategically adopt these tools can foster continuous learning and adaptability, positioning themselves to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

The study also highlights how strategically important it is to foster a culture of continuous learning, aided by smart technologies that match learning materials to the needs of individual employees, their career paths, and the objectives of the company. The study also emphasizes the substantial benefits that digital learning and development programs can have for employee happiness, talent retention, and overall organizational agility.

Limitations

Notwithstanding these noteworthy results, it is important to recognize the study's limitations. First, the study mostly used self-reported data, which could be biased or inaccurate due to perception. Second, the sample was restricted to particular industries and geographical areas, which might have limited the findings' applicability to other sectors or cultural contexts. Third, the study concentrated on the uptake and efficacy of new technologies, but it did not thoroughly examine implementation issues like a lack of digital literacy, infrastructure preparedness, or employee or leadership resistance to change.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study only records a single moment in time and ignores the long-term effects of emerging technologies on workforce development. Furthermore, because digital tools are always changing, some of them might be replaced or become outdated, which would reduce the findings' long-term applicability.

Suggestions for Future Research

These limitations could be addressed in a number of ways by future research. First, to evaluate the long-term effects of digital learning technologies on organizational outcomes and employee competencies, longitudinal studies are advised. Second, comparative studies across various industries, organizational sizes, or cultural contexts can offer more in-depth understanding of the best practices and challenges in the adoption of digital learning and development that are unique to a given industry or region.

Future research should also look at how organizational preparedness, change management techniques, and leadership support contribute to successful digital L&D transformations. Examining ethical and privacy issues with AI-driven learning platforms, especially those pertaining to data usage and employee surveillance, is another exciting field. Finally, qualitative research that includes focus groups or interviews with students, instructors, and human resources specialists may offer deeper, more complex insights into how people actually experience and perceive digital learning environments.

In conclusion, a comprehensive strategy that takes into account organizational, technological, and human factors is necessary for the successful adoption of emerging technologies, even though they present enormous potential to mold workforce competencies through personalized and adaptive learning. The workforce of the future can be further strengthened by adopting a more ethical, inclusive, and evidence-based approach to digital learning and development.

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