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The Interrelation of Unemployment Rate, Labor Wages, and Poverty Rate with Economic Growth: Labor Absorption as an Intervening Variable

Iswan Gunadi[1], Cicih Ratnasih[2], Sugiyanto[3]

[1,2,3] Doctoral Program in Economics, Borobudur University, Jakarta-13620, (Indonesia)

ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze the interrelation between the unemployment rate, labor wages, and poverty rate on economic growth in Banten Province, with employment absorption as an intervening variable. Using a quantitative approach and path analysis method, this research processes annual secondary data from the Central Bureau of Statistics covering the period 2014–2024 across eight regencies/cities in Banten Province (a total of 80 observations). Data processing was conducted using EViews 12 software, with the selected estimation model being the Random Effects Model (REM) based on Generalized Least Squares (GLS), as it meets the necessary statistical assumptions. The results show that the unemployment rate, labor wages, and poverty rate each have a negative relationship with economic growth. In contrast, employment absorption has a small but positive effect on economic growth. In terms of mediation, employment absorption only mediates the relationship between unemployment and economic growth, but does not mediate the relationships between wages or poverty and economic growth. These findings reflect Banten's pattern of economic growth, which is not yet fully inclusive and tends to rely on capital- and technology-intensive sectors. The policy implications of these results highlight the importance of reorienting regional economic development strategies to focus more on sectors capable of creating productive jobs, such as manufacturing, tourism, and the creative economy. In addition, improving the quality of human resources is also a key element in driving sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

KEYWORDS: Economic Growth, Unemployment, Labor Wages, Poverty, labor absorption, Banten Province

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Barro & Sala-i-Martin (1992), sustainable regional growth must be inclusive by ensuring that economic gains translate into tangible welfare improvements, particularly in employment and poverty reduction. However, the tendency of growth to be capital-intensive challenges the labor market, especially in developing regions like Banten. The dynamics of regional economies today face complex challenges involving various interrelated macroeconomic variables. The interrelation between unemployment rate, labor wages, poverty rate, and economic growth has been a critical focus of research over the past decades (Wiasih & Karmini, 2021; Habanabakize et al., 2019). Particularly in regions with unique socio-economic characteristics like Banten, a deep understanding of these relationships is essential for developing effective and sustainable policies.

Economic growth is often viewed as an indicator of regional prosperity; however, high economic growth does not always correlate with reductions in unemployment or poverty rates (Dahliah & Nur, 2021; Kurnianto & Primandhana, 2023). This phenomenon, known as "jobless growth," occurs when increases in economic output are not accompanied by proportional increases in labor absorption (Rusydan & Wijaya, 2024). In the Banten region, with its distinctive demographic and economic profile, understanding this phenomenon is increasingly relevant.

Previous studies have indicated that labor absorption can serve as a significant intervening variable in the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction (Suaidah et al., 2023; Putra & Arif, 2023). However, the effectiveness of labor absorption is influenced by various structural and sectoral factors, including wage levels and labor force characteristics (Mutaqin & Amaliah, 2023; Mncayi & Shuping, 2021). In Banten, with its diverse economic base spanning tourism, agriculture, and small to medium industries, the dynamics of labor absorption carry distinct nuances compared to other regions in Indonesia.

Labor wages have been identified as a crucial factor in labor absorption dynamics, with studies showing mixed results. Some research indicates a positive relationship between wage levels and labor absorption (Wiasih & Karmini, 2021; Pratama et al., 2024), while other studies, such as the one by Habanabakize et al. (2019) in South Africa, suggest a negative long-term impact of real wages on labor absorption. In the context of Banten, with sectoral wage variations and the implementation of regional minimum wage policies, understanding these dynamics becomes increasingly complex.

The unemployment rate, as another indicator of labor market conditions, has a multidimensional relationship with economic growth and poverty. Adianita et al. (2024) and Suaidah et al. (2023) emphasize that unemployment is not only influenced by labor absorption but also by factors such as education and minimum wage policies. In Banten, with its demographic characteristics that include a high proportion of the productive-age population, unemployment dynamics have significant socio-economic implications. Poverty, as a manifestation of socio-economic imbalance, is a major challenge faced by many regions in Indonesia (Sugiharti, et al., 2024; Amirtha et al., 2024), including Banten. Dahliah and Nur (2021) found that unemployment has a positive but insignificant effect on poverty levels, while the Human Development Index (HDI) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) show a negative effect. In Banten, with its regional development disparities, understanding the determinants of poverty is increasingly important.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, several other variables have also been identified as important determinants in the dynamics of the labor market and economic growth (Hedvicaková & Pozdílková, 2023). Mncayi and Shuping (2021) found that gender influences labor absorption, with an increase in male job seekers reducing absorption, while an increase in female job seekers enhances it. Meanwhile, Putra and Arif (2023) identified the Human Development Index (HDI) as a factor that has a positive and significant effect on labor absorption. In the context of Banten, with its distinctive demographic and social structure, understanding these factors can provide valuable insights.

Previous studies in regions like Banten have provided relevant perspectives. Mutaqin and Amaliah (2023) found that growth in the industrial sector actually shows a negative relationship with labor absorption due to technological advancement and automation. Setyadi and Oktaviana (2021) identified that investment focused on capital-intensive sectors does not significantly absorb labor, whereas the agribusiness sector is considered more potential in increasing labor absorption. In Banten, with its distinct economic structure, these dynamics need to be understood in their unique context.

These findings highlight the complexity of the relationship between economic growth, labor wages, unemployment, poverty, and labor absorption. However, most previous studies have focused on regions with economic characteristics that differ from those of Banten. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the interrelation between the unemployment rate, labor wages, poverty levels, and economic growth, with labor absorption as an intervening variable in the Banten region. With a better understanding of these dynamics, it is expected that more effective policies can be developed to address the socio-economic challenges in the region.

Specifically, this study aims to (1) analyze the interrelation between the unemployment rate, labor wages, and poverty levels with economic growth in Banten through labor absorption as an intervening variable and (2) identify relevant policy implications to promote inclusive economic growth in Banten. Thus, this research not only contributes to the academic literature on regional economics but also offers practical insights for the development of evidence-based policies.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Unemployment, labor wages, and poverty have a complex and interconnected relationship within the economic context. Wage levels and the size of the labor force significantly influence labor absorption, where competitive wages can encourage labor absorption if supported by economic growth and productivity (Wiasih & Karmini, 2021). High labor absorption, in turn, indicates a reduction in unemployment and has the potential to lower poverty levels in a region (Putra & Arif, 2023). However, it should be noted that minimum wages that are too high without corresponding increases in productivity can actually lead to higher unemployment (Rusydan & Wijaya, 2024; Dragulenko et al., 2024).

Economic growth is considered an important factor expected to be enhanced through labor absorption and to reduce unemployment. Nevertheless, some studies show that this relationship is not always direct but rather influenced by the economic structure and labor market policies of a given region (Wiasih & Karmini, 2021; Suaidah et al., 2023). The effectiveness of economic growth in reducing unemployment is significantly affected by labor market regulations and other factors such as education and minimum wage policies (Butkus et al., 2023). In other words, labor absorption functions as an intervening variable linking economic growth to reductions in unemployment and poverty (Suaidah et al., 2023; Putra & Arif, 2023).

Poverty is closely related to labor market dynamics, particularly in terms of labor force absorption. Low labor absorption increases unemployment and worsens poverty levels (Adianita et al., 2024; Putra & Arif, 2023). Therefore, policies that promote labor absorption—such as improving the quality of education, providing skills training, and managing fair wage systems—are essential for reducing poverty and fostering sustainable economic growth (Adianita et al., 2024; Habanabakize et al., 2019). There is empirical evidence of a strong negative relationship between unemployment rates and nominal wages, where rising unemployment tends to suppress wage growth (Hedvicaková & Pozdílková, 2023), thereby affecting people's purchasing power and poverty levels.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The research hypotheses are as follows:

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): "The Unemployment Rate (X1) affects Economic Growth (Y) through Labor Absorption (Z)."
- Hypothesis 2 (H2): "Labor Wages (X2) affect Economic Growth (Y) through Labor Absorption (Z)."
- Hypothesis 3 (H3): "Poverty Rate (X3) affects Economic Growth (Y) through Labor Absorption (Z)."

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach using path analysis to investigate the interrelation between the unemployment rate, labor wages, and poverty rate with economic growth through labor absorption as an intervening variable in Banten Province. The data analyzed are annual secondary data sourced from Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik) over a 10-year period (2014–2024), covering 8 regencies/cities in Banten Province, resulting in a total of 80 panel data observations. Data processing was conducted using EViews version 12 statistical software to ensure accurate and comprehensive results.

In the path analysis, a series of classical assumption tests were conducted to determine the most appropriate panel data regression model. Before employing the REM, Chow and Hausman tests were performed to compare the pooled OLS, fixed effects, and random effects models. The Hausman test ($p > 0.05$) supported the use of REM, indicating that individual heterogeneity is not correlated with the explanatory variables. If the results indicate that the data do not satisfy the normality assumption under the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method, then the Random Effects Model (REM) using the Generalized Least Squares (GLS) method is selected. The REM is chosen on the assumption that it produces normally distributed residuals, satisfies the Jarque-Bera normality test (p-value ≥ 0.05), and effectively addresses issues of multicollinearity, autocorrelation, and heteroskedasticity in panel datasets (Gujarati & Porter, 2009).

To measure the explanatory power of the model, the Adjusted R-Square coefficient was used to assess how well the independent variables (unemployment rate, labor wages, and poverty rate) explained the variability of the dependent variable (economic growth). Furthermore, to test the mediating role of labor absorption, the Sobel Test was employed by inputting the path coefficient and standard error values into the online calculator at http://quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm. A mediation effect was considered significant if the absolute z-value exceeded 1.96 ($\alpha = 0.05$).

The use of path analysis in this study is consistent with the research objective, which is to explore both the direct and indirect effects of unemployment, wages, and poverty on economic growth through labor absorption. This approach enables the identification of causal relationships and the role of labor absorption in mediating these effects. The findings offer a more nuanced understanding of how labor market dynamics influence economic growth in Banten Province, supporting the formulation of more inclusive and employment-oriented development policies..

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Normality Assumption Test

This study uses path analysis, with the model consisting of X1, X2, X3, and Z as independent variables and Y as the dependent variable. The following are the results of the normality test for both models in this study:

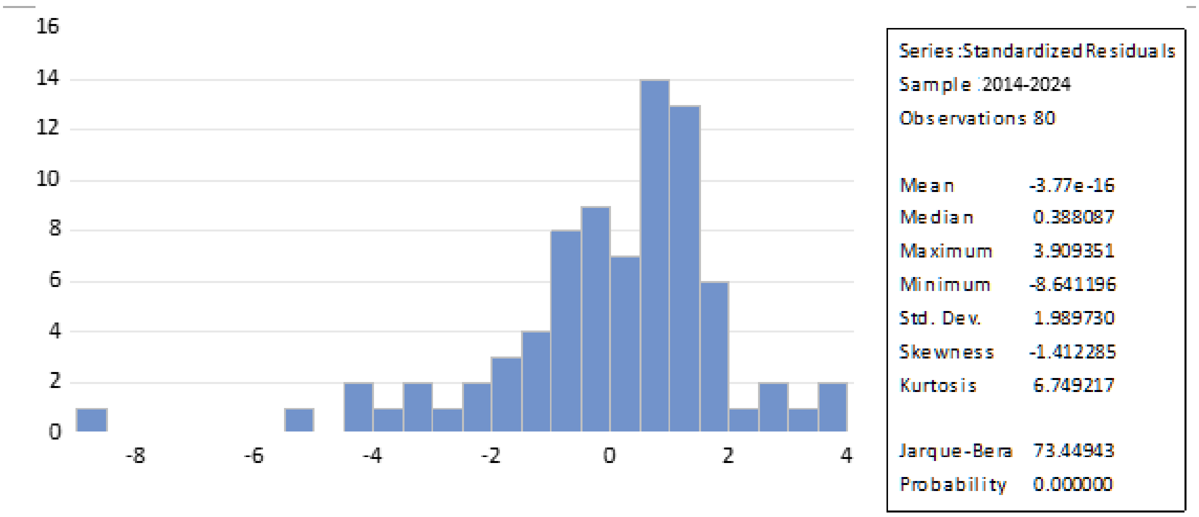

Figure 2. Normality Test of the Model
Source: EViews Version 12 Data Processing Results, 2025

Based on the EViews output above, the Jarque-Bera probability value of the model is less than 0.05, specifically 0.000 (<0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that the model is not normally distributed.

B. Panel Data Regression Analysis of the Model

The following are the results of the panel data regression analysis using the Random Effects Model (REM):

Table 1. Panel Data Regression Analysis Using the Random Effects Model

Dependent Variable: Y
Method: Panel EGLS (Cross-section random effects)
Date: 03/27/25 Time: 22:48
Sample: 2014–2024
Periods included: 10
Cross-sections included: 8
Total panel (balanced) observations: 80

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	13,63945	3,681786	3,704573	0,0004
X1	-1,91E-05	1,01E-05	-1,882752	0,0637
X2	-2,10E-06	2,95E-07	-7,128192	0,0000
X3	-0,533340	0,102568	-5,199847	0,0000
Z	3,77E-06	1,45E-06	2,606299	0,0111

Effects Specification	S.D.	Rho
Cross-section random	0,000000	0,0000
Idiosyncratic random	1,897500	1,0000

Weighted Statistics			
Root MSE	1,977255	R-squared	0,502442
Mean dependent var	5,236125	Adjusted R-squared	0,461546
S.D. dependent var	2,820799	S.E. of regression	2,069885
Sum squared resid	312,7630	F-statistic	12,28607
Durbin-Watson stat	1,371784	Prob(F-statistic)	0,000000

Source: EViews Version 12 Data Processing Results, 2025

Based on the table above, the panel data regression equation using the Random Effects Model (REM) approach is as follows:

Y = 13,63945 - 1,91E-05 X1 - 2,10E-06 X2 - 0,533340 X3 + 3,77E-06 Z

Notes:
X1: Unemployment Rate
X2: Labor Wages
X3: Poverty Rate
Z : Labor Absorption
Y : Economic Growth

From the equation above, it can be explained that the constant value of 13.63945 indicates that if all independent variables—Unemployment Rate (X1), Labor Wages (X2), Poverty Rate (X3), and Labor Absorption (Z)—are equal to zero, then Economic Growth (Y) is estimated to be 13.63945 units. The unemployment rate (X1) has a very small negative coefficient of -1.91E-05, meaning that a one-unit increase in the unemployment rate would reduce economic growth by 0.0000191 units. The Labor Wages variable (X2) has a coefficient of -2.10E-06, indicating that a one-unit increase in labor wages contributes to a decrease in economic growth by 0.0000021 units. Next, the poverty rate (X3) has a coefficient of -0.533340, meaning that each one-unit increase in the poverty rate reduces economic growth by 0.533340 units. Lastly, labor absorption (Z) has a positive coefficient of +3.77E-06, showing that each one-unit increase in labor absorption increases economic growth by 0.00000377 units, assuming all other variables remain constant. Thus, according to this model, all variables except Z have a negative relationship with economic growth. Labor Absorption (Z) is the only variable that has a positive, although relatively small, effect on Economic Growth (Y).

C. Hypothesis Testing of Indirect Effects (Mediation)

The role of a mediator can also be observed through the significance of the indirect effect. To assess the magnitude of the indirect effect and test its significance, the Sobel Test can be used. The output from the Sobel Test calculation is as follows:

Table 2. Results of Mediation Hypothesis Testing (Sobel Test)

Hypothesis	Sobel Test	p-value	Remarks
H1: X1 → Z→ Y	2,291	0,022*	Significant
H2: X2 → Z→ Y	-0,634	0,526	Not Significant
H3: X3 → Z→ Y	-0,272	0,785	Not Significant

* Significant at α = 5%

Notes:
X1: Unemployment Rate
X2: Labor Wages
X3: Poverty Rate
Z : Labor Absorption
Y : Economic Growth.

Referring to Table 2 above, the results of the mediation hypothesis tests (Sobel Test) in this study are as follows:

1) Hypothesis Test 1 (H1): “The Unemployment Rate (X1) affects Economic Growth (Y) through Labor Absorption (Z).”

The calculated Z-value is 2.291 with a p-value of 0.022. Since Z > 1.96 and p < 0.05, hypothesis H1 is accepted. This indicates that labor absorption acts as a significant mediator in the relationship between the unemployment rate and economic growth. This means that the negative effect of the unemployment rate on economic growth can be mediated by labor absorption. In other words, a decrease in the unemployment rate accompanied by an increase in labor absorption will have a positive impact on economic growth.

2) Hypothesis Test 2 (H2): “Labor Wages (X2) affect Economic Growth (Y) through Labor Absorption (Z).”

The calculated Z-value is -0.634 with a p-value of 0.526. Since |Z| < 1.96 and the p-value > 0.05, hypothesis H2 is rejected. This means that Labor Absorption does not significantly mediate the effect of Labor Wages on Economic Growth. The result indicates that Labor Absorption is not the pathway through which this relationship occurs. This may suggest that wage increases become a burden for businesses when not accompanied by productivity improvements, thereby failing to generate additional employment and potentially slowing down economic growth..

3) Hypothesis Test 3 (H3): “The Poverty Rate (X3) affects Economic Growth (Y) through Labor Absorption (Z)”

The calculated Z-value is -0.272 with a p-value of 0.785. Since |Z| < 1.96 and the p-value > 0.05, hypothesis H3 is rejected. This means that Labor Absorption is not a significant mediator in the effect of the Poverty Rate on Economic Growth. Most likely, poverty contributes to economic slowdown through other aspects such as low purchasing power, low productivity, or limited access to education and healthcare, rather than through labor absorption.

D. The Interrelation of Unemployment, Wages, Poverty, and Economic Growth in Banten with Labor Absorption as an Intervening Variable

The results of the study reveal that labor absorption is a significant mediator in the relationship between the unemployment rate and economic growth in Banten Province (Z = 2.291; p = 0.022). This finding confirms previous research by Kurnianto and Primandhana (2023) and Irawan (2022), which stated that economic growth has a negative and significant effect on the unemployment rate. However, this study makes a new contribution by empirically demonstrating that the effect is mediated by labor absorption. This is in line with the study by Saputra and Rusdi (2024), which emphasizes the importance of job creation in transmitting the benefits of economic growth. Although labor absorption mediates the relationship between unemployment and economic growth, its effect is relatively small, with a coefficient of only 0.00000377. This indicates that economic growth in Banten has not yet been inclusive and has not optimally contributed to job creation.

Meanwhile, the results of the second hypothesis test show that labor absorption does not significantly mediate the effect of labor wages on economic growth (Z = -0.634; p = 0.526). This finding contradicts the theoretical assumption that wage increases will enhance labor absorption and subsequently drive economic growth. On the contrary, it supports the argument by Mutaqin and Amaliah (2023), who stated that technological development and automation in Banten's industrial sector may actually reduce labor absorption despite growth in the industrial sector. This finding aligns with Desmawan et al. (2023), who observed that minimum wage increases in Banten may paradoxically constrain labor absorption, reflecting a wage-productivity imbalance. When wage increases are not accompanied by productivity improvements(Butkus et al., 2023), business actors tend to shift toward more capital-intensive technologies as a substitute for labor. The statistically significant but small mediation effect of labor absorption (Z = 2.291; p = 0.022) in the unemployment-growth nexus suggests structural rigidity in the local labor market. Despite economic expansion, Banten's labor market remains constrained by skill mismatches, sectoral concentration, and automation-induced displacement. This underlines the urgent need for a human capital-oriented growth strategy.

The results of the third hypothesis test also show that labor absorption is not a significant mediator in the effect of poverty levels on economic growth (Z = -0.272; p = 0.785). This finding confirms the complexity of the relationship between poverty and economic growth, as highlighted by Tamba et al. (2024). This study strengthens the argument that poverty influences economic growth through channels other than labor absorption, such as low purchasing power, limited productivity, and restricted access to education and healthcare services. This is also consistent with the findings of Muhayaroh et al. (2024) and Putri et al. (2023), which indicate that factors such as inflation, investment, and human development indicators play a crucial role in shaping economic dynamics in Banten. High poverty levels reduce the quality of human resources; thus, even when labor absorption occurs (Mulyadi et al., 2024), productivity remains low, ultimately resulting in an insignificant contribution to economic growth (Silvia, et al., 2025).

The theoretical implication of this study is the importance of considering mediation effects when analyzing relationships between macroeconomic variables, particularly at the regional level. Practically, the findings highlight the need for policies that not only focus on aggregate economic growth but also emphasize the quality of growth that can generate productive employment opportunities. As stated by Irawan (2022) and Saputra and Rusdi (2024), economic growth that is not accompanied by optimal labor absorption—especially due to industrial automation—may limit the positive impact of growth on reducing unemployment. Therefore, economic policy in Banten should be directed toward the development of labor-intensive sectors with high added value, as well as the improvement of human resource quality through education and skills training aligned with the demands of the modern labor market, particularly in the era of digitalization and industrial automation.

E. Relevant Policy Implications for Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth in Banten

Based on the study's findings, which show that labor absorption significantly mediates the relationship between the unemployment rate and economic growth—albeit with a relatively small effect—there is a need for policies focused on creating quality employment opportunities. The Banten Provincial Government should develop labor market policies oriented toward labor-intensive sectors with high added value, such as export-oriented manufacturing, sustainable tourism, and the creative economy. As noted by Saputra and Rusdi (2024), economic growth that does not result in optimal labor absorption will limit its positive impact on reducing unemployment. Therefore, fiscal incentives and streamlined licensing processes for labor-intensive industries, especially those that hire local workers, should be prioritized to foster more inclusive economic growth in Banten.

The finding that labor absorption does not mediate the effect of wages on economic growth—aligned with Mutaqin and Amaliah's (2023) argument on the impact of industrial automation—highlights the need for policies that enhance workforce skills relevant to digital transformation. The Banten government needs to design vocational training programs aligned with the demands of industries in the era of digitalization and automation and promote partnerships between educational institutions and the private sector to bridge the skills gap. Minimum wage policies should also consider a balance between worker welfare and the industry's capacity to absorb labor, in line with Desmawan et al. (2023)'s findings on the complexity of the relationship between minimum wage and poverty. Programs aimed at improving labor productivity through training in technology and modern management can help workers maintain their relevance in an ever-evolving labor market.

Referring to the results of the third hypothesis test, which indicate that labor absorption does not mediate the effect of poverty on economic growth, poverty alleviation policies must be more comprehensive than merely focusing on job creation. In line with the findings of Tamba et al. (2024) and Muhayaroh et al. (2024), factors such as purchasing power, access to education, and healthcare services play a crucial role in shaping economic dynamics in Banten. Therefore, the government needs to integrate poverty reduction programs with improved access to basic services, strengthened social safety nets, and community economic empowerment. Developing social and economic infrastructure in underdeveloped areas of Banten will enable poor communities to participate more actively in productive economic activities, thereby accelerating regional economic transformation toward more inclusive and sustainable growth.

F. Limitations

This study relies on secondary panel data, which may not capture informal employment or sector-specific variations in job quality. Moreover, the study uses aggregate annual data, limiting the ability to identify seasonal or short-term shocks such as pandemic-related disruptions. Future research may benefit from using micro-level labor force surveys and exploring dynamic panel models (e.g., GMM).

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals the complex dynamics between the unemployment rate, labor wages, and poverty rate in relation to economic growth in Banten Province, with labor absorption as an intervening variable. The main findings indicate that labor absorption only mediates the relationship between unemployment and economic growth but does not mediate the relationships between labor wages and economic growth nor between poverty and economic growth. This reflects the nature of economic growth in Banten, which is not yet fully inclusive and remains reliant on relatively capital- or technology-intensive sectors. This phenomenon aligns with the trend of industrialization in Banten, which is increasingly oriented toward technology and automation. As a result, rising wages do not necessarily lead to greater labor absorption but instead tend to drive labor substitution with technology.

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