



Original Article

Empowering young girls through digital training programs in Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan

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ABSTRACT

Digital literacy gives young girls a sense of empowerment and improves their ability to make decisions and feel confident, in today's technologically advanced society, having the ability to use digital technology is becoming as important for personal wellbeing. The study was conducted in Hunza valley and Qualitative research design was used in the study. Population of the study is 60 female students of Innovate. Educate & Inspire (IEI) Pakistan Tech Sahelis Hunza. Purposive sampling technique was used to conduct interview with Female students of, Innovate. Educate & Inspire (IEI) Pakistan Tech Sahelis, who have completed their training and are currently working through online platforms for income generation. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings reveal that personal motivation and interest, learning digital skills, Financial independency and to explore unconventional career occurs as primary reason for young girls to join digital trainings in Hunza. Application of digital skills for income generation was found that Diverse entrepreneurial ventures, economic independence through freelancing and digital skills in E- Commerce. The study shows that educated girls in Hunza who choose to participate in digital training courses, with a concentration on technology-related disciplines, are heavily influenced by their personal interest and motivation. One major driving force behind a variety of entrepreneurial endeavors, including virtual store management and freelancing, is the desire for financial independence and self-sufficiency through online platforms. The attainment of financial independence is depending upon the learning of digital skills, so highlighting the transforming power of digital literacy on the lives of young girls in Hunza. In the end, these programs not only suit their interests personally but also prepare them for non-traditional jobs in the rapidly changing digital industry.

Introduction

Digital literacy is the capacity of an individual to find, evaluate, and obtain information using digital platforms and resources (Meyers et al., 2013). Digital literacy is seen as a fundamental ability required for opportunity and information searching in a world where

connectivity is growing (Luthfia et al., 2021). The early 21st century has seen tremendous advancements in digital technology across all spheres of society. Libraries are creating and reconsidering their IT-mediated services, just like other institutions (Ameen & Gorman, 2009).

In today's technologically advanced society, having the ability to use digital technology is becoming as important for personal wellbeing as reading and numeracy skills. People who lack control over technology face the risk of being manipulated by it or being cut off from local, national, and international groups (West et al., 2019). The advancement of technology has fundamentally changed civilization. Thousands of people use contemporary technologies worldwide (Islam & Rasool).

The process of raising knowledge and developing capacity is known as empowerment, and it results in increased involvement, influence over decisions, and transformative action (Rahman, 2013). Many prospects for female empowerment and more equitable female involvement in the financial, labor, and entrepreneurial sectors are made possible by digitalization (Sorgner & Krieger-Boden, 2017; Shah et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2024). Digital literacy gives young girls a sense of empowerment and improves their ability to make decisions and feel confident (Meherali et al., 2021). Additionally, content for digital training can be customized to each user's skills, values, and interests (Mrazek et al., 2019). In many organizations, digital technologies are essential for training, adult education, and developing human resources (Gegenfurtner et al., 2020). People with basic digital literacy abilities can function in society at a minimum level (Jan, 2018).

Because of Pakistan's social and familial norms, women do not make up the majority of the labor force (Kaabi et al., 2018). ICT can play a leading role in nurturing empowerment and involvement of both public and private levels (Mujahid, 2002). Lately, the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and political parties have been attempting to further women's education by establishing several female-only schools across the nation (Bushra & Wajiha, 2015).

It is acknowledged that Gilgit-Baltistan is among the most literate areas in Pakistan. Numerous female-focused organizations and establishments are also striving to enhance the social and economic status of women in the area. Hunza, which is in the Gilgit Baltistan region, is thought to have more powerful women than other regions of the Gilgit region. (Ahmed & Khatoon, 2018).

Research questions of the study are.

1. What reasons make educated young girls to choose certain digital training program?
2. How does the application of digital skills for income generation contribute to the financial independence?

The study looks at how digital training programs might help young girls in Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan, become more economically empowered by improving their abilities and opening up employment options. The study's emphasis on giving girls digital skills to empower them produces long-term cultural changes in addition to immediate economic effects. The study's goal of giving females digital skills is to empower them and create a generation that is more economically and technologically literate, which will lead to beneficial changes in society norms and expectations.

Material and Methods

Research Design

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. In fact, the research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted. It constitutes the blueprint for data collection, measurement, and analysis. A qualitative research design was used for this study, and this study is descriptive.

Research Instrument

The data was collected through interviews. Open-ended questions were asked during interviews with young educated girls who have successfully completed their digital training from Innovate. Educate & Inspire (IEI) Pakistan's Tech Sahelis Hunza and are currently working through online platforms. Additional instruments used in this study included note-taking materials, photographs, and audio recordings.

Population

The population of the study is 60 female students of Innovate. Educate & Inspire (IEI) Pakistan Tech Sahelis Hunza.

Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to interviews with Female students of Innovate. Educate & Inspire (IEI) Pakistan Tech Sahelis, who have completed their training and are currently working through online platforms for income generation.

Data Collection

Data collection is a systematic process of gathering observations or measurements. Data collection was proceeding by means of interview. Interview was conducted with 07 educated young girls who have completed digital trainings and are working through online platforms for income generation.

Data Analysis

The data was collecting by researcher through interview. qualitative data was analyzed by thematic analysis. On the basis of data analyzed summary of finding of the study is presented.

Findings and Results

Factors that drive educated young girls to select digital training programs in Hunza.

- **Personal motivation**

Participants constantly highlighted personal motivation and interest as essential factors influencing their choice of digital training programs. Personal interests, such as graphic design, web development and technology, played a crucial role in shaping educational interests. Participants stated that they need to learn practical skills.

- **Learning digital skills**

Motivation to join digital training was learning digital skill and work independently through online platforms. Participants stated that they don't like to go to office for job, they want to work from home through different online platform by using their digital skills.

- **Financial independence**

Financial independence was also the main factor for young girls to join digital trainings to become financially independent. Participants stated that they want to earn by applying their digital skills.

- **Explore unconventional career**

Young girls join digital training to explore unconventional career paths to aligning with current trends in the job market. Girls stated that they want to explore unconventional area which will inform them the current jobs demand.

Application of Digital Skills for Income Generation

- **Diverse Entrepreneurial Ventures**

Participants shared experiences of starting freelancing, showing the entrepreneurial spirit fueled by their digital skills, like Initiation of online stores appeared as a common avenue, illustrating how acquired skills enabled participants to establish and manage digital businesses independently.

- **Economic Independence through Freelancing**

Participants stated that digital skills helped them to work on different projects independently and they earn from different projects. This demonstrated how digital skills facilitated autonomy in income generation.

- **Digital Skills in E-Commerce**

The experiences shared by participants highlighted the essential role of digital literacy in creating and managing online platforms for selling products, reaching a broader audience, and establishing sustainable income sources.

Discussions

The findings of this study underscore the profound impact of digital training programs on the educational and vocational choices of educated young girls in Hunza. The study reveals that personal motivation and interest play a pivotal role in driving young girls to select digital training programs. Learning digital skills was a major factor which motivate women to pursue digital skills, in previous study it is found that Digital skills are increasingly important for labor market outcomes and social participation (Pagani et al., 2016).

The modern world depends on technology, and everyone is attempting to acquire digital abilities. This study found that young, educated girls in the Hunza Valley are similarly driven to acquire these skills. In Hunza Valley, educated young women expressed a desire to pursue non-traditional career paths through the acquisition of digital skills. An earlier study highlighted the significance of skills, emphasizing their critical role in boosting individuals' self-esteem and optimizing the benefits of digitalization in society (Vasilescu et al., 2020). In an increasingly

connected world, digital literacy is observed as a primary needed skill for information seeking and opportunity searching (Luthfia et al., 2021). To thrive in the technological age, one must acquire digital literacy. Research from the past supports this notion, stating that women who lack digital literacy are not able to pursue lifelong learning and growth (Lin et al., 2012). (Lin and others, 2012). In the digital age, the economy has benefited greatly from the advancement of information and communication technology (ICT), which distributes, stores, adds value, and manages information to create limitless prospects for economic growth (Afiani, 2018).

Young girls said they joined digital skills to become financially independent, and prior research has indicated that digital skills give young girls a catalyst to break away from the cycle of poverty and take charge of their own lives (Chetty et al., 2018). Additionally, a different study noted that digital literacy training programs may result in economic empowerment, which is also measurable by employment and education-seeking behavior (Mukherjee et al., 2024). Digital skills are essential for improving residents' living standards, according to another study. Long-term gains in the nation's economy can result from spending in human capital and improving digital skills (Stofkova et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The study's conclusions provide insight into the variety of variables influencing educated girls in Hunza to select digital training courses. Individual motivation and interest were found to be important determinants, as individuals expressed a strong desire to follow educational pathways that matched their love of technology, data analysis, web development, and graphic design. The desire to become self-sufficient and gain digital skills via online platforms was the primary motivating factor behind enrolment in digital training programmes. As participants attempted to use their digital abilities for income production, financial independence became apparent as a key motivator, demonstrating a dedication to self-reliance. The study also revealed that participants were thinking about unusual career paths more often, which implies that they were aware of recent changes in the labour market. The capacity to adjust to new enterprises and evolve with the times demonstrates the optimistic outlook of Hunza young girls on life. The participants applied their newly acquired digital skills in their entrepreneurial pursuits. They found that freelancing was a popular way to show off their entrepreneurial spirit and the independence that comes with being knowledgeable about technology. The establishment of virtual stores served as an example of how these skills enabled participants to manage their own and manage digital businesses.

One interesting finding was that people who worked freelance reported being financially independent after earning their own money by working on a range of projects. The study demonstrated the significance of digital literacy for the creation and management of online e-commerce platforms, allowing users to expand their audience and establish regular revenue channels. In essence, the study shows how digital training programmes significantly improve the lives of educated young girls in Hunza. In addition to teaching children new skills, these initiatives equip them with the means to pursue non-traditional careers, achieve financial independence, and participate in the evolving digital landscape. Consequently, promoting digital literacy among young girls in Hunza aligns with their interests and equips them with the necessary skills to thrive in the contemporary jobs and attain financial independence.

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