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Empowering students in the digital age: Assessing of digital empowerment level of students in higher education

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Abstract
Digital technology has evolved as a critical commodity in today's rapidly developing world, revolutionizing how information is obtained and conveyed. The interconnection of networks has transformed communication, giving people throughout the world a sense of real-time connectivity. Access to digital media has become crucial for productive engagement in our modern society as its growth and dissemination have surged in the last two decades. Ensuring equitable accessibility to ICTs (Information and Communication Technology) has been perceived as an essential component in bridging societies' digital disparities. This study attempts to measure students' digital empowerment status by taking into account criteria such as access to technology, competency in digital skills, and their capacity to effectively take advantage of digital assets. This research endeavours' findings will cast light on the current state of digital empowerment among students and indicate potential areas for development. Policymakers and educators may build measures to create a more comprehensive and digitally empowered learning environment by acknowledging the barriers students encounter in accessing and harnessing digital technologies. Finally, this research aims to prepare the road for students to succeed in the digital age and take advantage of all the chances that the world of technology provides.

Keywords: Digital technology, empowerment, digital empowerment, ICT, higher education, PG students

Introductions

The latest technological advances have become an indispensable element of our everyday lives in the constantly evolving world of the twenty-first century. The emergence of digital media and network connectivity has revolutionised the way we receive and exchange information, generating a sense of immediacy and global interconnectivity. As digital technologies advance, their incorporation into different sectors, including education, has changed old learning paradigms and offered up new avenues for student empowerment. The use of digital technologies provides a remarkable range of resources and equipment that can enhance the learning experience and prepare students with critical skills for the future. As the world becomes more dependent on science and technology, ensuring that students are digitally empowered has become a top issue for educational institutions and the government. Digital empowerment encompasses the ability to make use of web-based resources responsibly and efficiently to foster learning, critical thinking, and innovation. Empowerment entails providing individuals with the expertise, abilities, and resources they need to take ownership of their own learning activities. It also involves strengthening their ability to deal with everyday issues as well as acquiring more control over their situations. Digital empowerment is not just about granting access to digital technologies; it is a multi-step process that enables individuals to acquire new skills and opportunities, allowing them to actively participate and express themselves in an interconnected world. (Sadiku *et al*., 2022) [11]. Digital empowerment involves several dimensions, including digital competence, digital economic inclusion, and service digitization. It also entails individuals becoming competent at utilizing technological tools and realizing their full potential (Akkoyunlu, *et al*., 2010) [1]. Digital empowerment enables individuals and communities to participate more inclusively in various aspects of life. It portrays a continuous and interconnected process where digital empowerment leads to greater involvement and inclusion in social, economic,

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and educational activities. Citizens' involvement and engagement can be enhanced through digital empowerment. It enables individuals to feel capable and enabled to pursue their priorities. It empowers people, helping them develop as capable individuals within their communities. (Mäkinen, 2006) [7]. Digital empowerment provides students with the tools they need to navigate and prosper in the digital age, encouraging active participation and expression in a variety of digital platforms and contexts. Khan & Aftab, 2015 [5] examined the notion of digitization and its beneficial effects on society, the economy, and the environment. The use of modern technology to generate, organize, share, and manage digital information is referred to as digitization. It entails transforming physical resources into electronic format in order to conserve and make valuable materials accessible. Digitization activities have resulted in major shifts in business, the community, and academics, increasing global access to knowledge. Digitization and the growth of the internet economy contribute to India's economic growth and create job prospects. When individuals are digitally empowered, it leads to the evolution of traditional career paths. This empowerment on economic dimensions is essential to capitalize on digitization opportunities, drive economic growth, and tackle digital economy challenges. By equipping students with digital skills and promoting digital literacy, societies can cultivate a new generation of digitally proficient individuals who can lead economic progress and positive social change. (Chaudhuri & Kumar, 2016) [3]. Digital empowerment with financial literacy and safety for students involves equipping them with knowledge and skills to use digital banking services responsibly. This not only ensures safer transactions but also fosters a sense of financial independence and inclusion for all segments of society. Empowered students will be better prepared to navigate the digital world, make informed financial decisions, and contribute positively to the digital economy. Mathangi*et al*. (2017) [8]. Students today have access to a multitude of information, educational materials, and chances for growth and learning because to the rapid rise of internet connectivity and technologies. The internet has changed the way students access knowledge, communicate with peers around the world, and participate in numerous educational activities. Students may use gadgets and the internet as strong devices for improving their learning experiences in the digital age. They may perform research, team up with others, and acquire key abilities that will prepare them for contemporary society's challenges. However, it is vital to teach youngsters about the appropriate and conscientious use of technology, as digital devices may be a source of distraction and potential danger if not utilized properly. In order to succeed academically and prepare themselves for a prosperous future, students are able to employ digital empowerment as effectively as business entities have done to maximize the advantages of technology for growth. It all comes down to acknowledging the immense opportunity that technology brings while being cautious about utilizing it wisely.

Methods and Methodology
The study aimed to analyse the digital empowerment status of the student's. Researcher adopted Quantitative research technique wherein Descriptive research method was used. The primary data was collected through structured Questionnaire, Digital Empowerment Scale developed by Kirthi & Dipak de was used which is a Five point Likert scale. Employing the item correlation technique, the scale has thirty-nine items divided into four subcategories: psychological (4 items), legal (3 items), financial (9 items), and technical ability (23 items). The test-retest reliability analysis revealed a highly significant correlation coefficient of $r = 0.607$, indicating that the study's measurements were remarkably stable and reliable over time. Data was obtained by means of a simple random procedure from 56 survey participants from the Department of Social Work at Kuvempu University. In addition, the researcher examined secondary sources consisting of academic documents. The researcher performed a descriptive statistical analysis and Jamovi 2.4.2 software to evaluate the data.

Objectives
1. To assess the current level of digital empowerment among students studying social work.
2. To identify the digital skills and competencies possessed by students of social work.
3. To understand the extent of students' access to and utilization of digital technologies

Hypothesis
1. (H0): The distribution of digital empowerment levels among students of social work follows a normal distribution.
2. (H1): The distribution of digital empowerment levels among students of social work does not follow a normal distribution.
3. (H0): There is no significant difference in the digital empowerment levels between male and female students of social work.
4. (H1)There is a significant difference in the digital empowerment levels between male and female students of social work.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Frequencies of Gender

Gender	Counts	% Per.
Female	29	51.8 %
Male	27	48.2 %
Total	56	100%

The results of the preceding table clearly show that the majority of respondents (51.8%) are female, while the remainder (48.2%) are male.

Table 2: Descriptive

	Psychological	Legal	Economic	Technical
N	56	56	56	56
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.69	3.08	3.56	3.43
Median	3.75	3.00	3.56	3.37
Standard deviation	0.522	0.476	0.422	0.426

Table 3: Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

	W	p
Psychological	0.975	0.296
Legal	0.959	0.057
Economic	0.984	0.659
Technical	0.988	0.868

The table above illustrates the aggregate mean score of all four subcategories of female and male students' digital empowerment. Psychological: The average psychological competency score is 3.69±0.522. This implies that, on average, the respondents displayed a fairly high degree of psychological competency in the setting under consideration. Legal: The average legal competency score is 3.08±0.476. This suggests that respondents had a relatively low level of legal competency in the area under consideration on average. Economic: The average economic competency score is 3.56±0.422. This means that respondents displayed a reasonably high level of economic competence in the given setting on average. Technical: The average technical competency score is 3.43±0.426. This indicates that respondents had a modest level of competence

in the specific topic on average. According to the data, respondents had favourable mean scores in psychological and economic competencies, a moderate mean score in technical competency, and a poorer mean score in legal competency.

Because our sample size was limited, establishing the distribution of the variables was critical for selecting relevant statistical tests. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used for this purpose, and it found no indication of non-normality (psychological (W=0.975, P=0.296), legal (W=0.959, P=0.057), economic (W=0.984, P=0.659), and technical (W=0.988, P=0.868) as P > 0.05. Based on this result, it appears that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and the researcher opted to employ parametric testing.

Table 4: Independent Samples T-Test

		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	Lower	Upper
95% Confidence Interval								
Psychological	Student's t	1.2524	54.0	0.216	0.17401	0.139	-0.105	0.453
Legal	Student's t	0.2356	54.0	0.815	0.03023	0.128	-0.227	0.287
Economic	Student's t	0.6251	54.0	0.535	0.07095	0.114	-0.157	0.299
Technical	Student's t	-0.0773	54.0	0.939	-0.00888	0.115	-0.239	0.222

Group Descriptive	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Psychological	Female	29	3.78	3.75	0.532	0.0987
	Male	27	3.60	3.50	0.506	0.0974
Legal	Female	29	3.09	3.00	0.417	0.0774
	Male	27	3.06	3.00	0.539	0.1038
Economic	Female	29	3.60	3.56	0.432	0.0802
	Male	27	3.53	3.56	0.416	0.0801
Technical	Female	29	3.42	3.35	0.435	0.0808
	Male	27	3.43	3.43	0.424	0.0816

The researcher performed the t-test for mean equality (independent sample test).The mean results for each of the four sub-categories of the assessment scale among male and female are shown in the table above. The results clearly suggest that there is certainly not a significant difference in Psychological aspect scores between females (3.780±532) and males (3.600±0.506) because the P value (0.216>0.05) is bigger than 0.05. The results of the Legal aspect show that there are not significant variations in scores between females (3.09±0.417) and males (3.06±0.539) because the significance level (0.815>0.05) is bigger than 0.05. In terms of economics, the results show that there are no significant variations in scores between females (3.60±0.432) and males (3.53±0.416) because the significance level (0.535>0.05) is bigger than 0.05. Technically, the results show there are no are no significant disparities in the scores among female (3.42±0.435) and male (3.43±0.424) as P value (0.939>.05) is greater than 0.05. As a result, we can conclude that there are no significant variations in mean scores between men and women and that they are uniform in nature. As of such null hypothesis fails to be rejected.

Conclusion
Finally, this study has shed light on the significance of digital empowerment and its impact on numerous parts of everyday life for individuals. The studies have underlined the importance of digital technology in revolutionizing education, communication, business, and information access. The study stressed the importance of individuals

having psychological, legal, economic, and technical competences in order to effectively traverse the digital ecosystem. Overall, the findings show that respondents had positive psychological and economic competencies, as well as a modest level of technical proficiency. Their legal competency, however, appears to be lower. This implies that, while individuals have strengths in particular domains, they can grow in others. The study emphasizes the growing importance of digital technology in modern society, making it critical for individuals to be digitally empowered in order to excel in an array of areas. These findings have implications for education, legislation, and programs aiming at improving digital literacy and promoting a digitally inclusive. It is clear that digital empowerment is a complicated concept that necessitates on-going efforts and investments to guarantee individuals have the skills and knowledge required to succeed in the digital era. As technology advances at a rapid pace, remaining current and proficient in the digital environment becomes increasingly important. While this study gave valuable insights on the competencies of those polled, more research and analysis are needed to enhance our understanding and investigate the efficacy of digital empowerment efforts. We can create a more egalitarian, united, and enlightened society for all by solving the obstacles and capitalizing on the potential afforded by digital technology.

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