THE ROLE OF ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORMS IN BRIDGING THE SKILL GAP FOR GEN Z GRADUATES

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KEYWORDS

ONLINE PLATFORMS, GEN Z, SKILLS, EMPLOYABILITY

ABSTRACT

The rapid evolution of technology and globalization has transformed the job market, creating an increasing demand for highly skilled professionals across various sectors. Generation Z graduates, born between 1997 and 2012, face the challenge of adapting to a fast-changing work environment, where the gap between skills acquired through traditional education and the competencies required by employers continues to grow. Online learning platforms have emerged as valuable tools in addressing this gap. These platforms offer flexibility, accessibility, and personalized learning experiences, enabling students to acquire industry-relevant skills, enhance their knowledge base, and remain competitive in the workforce. This study explores how online learning platforms contribute to bridging the skills gap for Gen Z graduates, focusing on their role in developing both technical and soft skills. It also examines the challenges and limitations associated with these platforms and how they can be optimized to better align with the needs of Gen Z learners in an evolving job market.
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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology and globalization has significantly transformed the job market to have more demands for high-skilled professionals in different sectors. Graduates of Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012, have to deal with the ever-changing job market, making it full of challenges but also a lot of opportunities. The greatest concern for most in this generation is the increasing gap between skills acquired through traditional education and the specific competencies employers require. Online learning platforms have thus emerged as powerful tools in bridging the gap. Online learning platforms are flexible, accessible, and diverse in their course offerings, responding to the changing needs of students and employers alike. These platforms offer opportunities for personalized learning experiences that enable Gen Z graduates to acquire industry-relevant skills, enhance their knowledge base, and remain competitive in the workforce. This manuscript explores the role of online learning platforms in closing the skills gap for Gen Z graduates, examining how they contribute to the development of technical, soft, and transferable skills. In addition to this, it examines how these platforms might pose challenges or limitations and how they may be optimized to ensure that their needs are met to address the evolving nature of the modern job market. Through an

analysis of prevailing trends, case studies, and emerging technologies, the paper seeks to provide the reader with a comprehensive appreciation of how online education will reshape the career prospects for the next generation of professionals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hernandez et al. (2016) examined the emerging "knowledge society," arguing that citizens require information and new, unanticipated abilities to navigate a changing reality. As digital natives, Generation Z students had distinct cognitive profiles than earlier generations, which placed pressure on education to modernize. It also showed how university competition for global talent and the necessity for graduates of unimagined jobs increased demand. Technology accelerates and improves teaching and learning, according to this study. It noted that the university invested more in technology for innovative education. It explored how technology improved learning and helped grow other skills and competencies. Thus, the paper reviewed education technologies, Gen-Z student preferences, and HEI developments. Effective creative teaching methods for Generation Z students were given and explored.

Fang et al. (2024) examined Generation Z college students' views on job selection and how digital technology affects their career choices and job search. Grounded theory was used to answer research questions with 15 in-depth interviews. Six job ambitions themes emerged for Generation Z students. Based on participants' recent job searches, the authors created a job selection process model. This model shows how Generation Z job searchers choose a career. Future research should incorporate a more broad participant pool from different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Future quantitative research could examine job selection, performance, and satisfaction. The study's Generation Z job preferences themes may help HR practitioners comprehend this emerging talent pool. College career service personnel can also use the four-stage job selection process model to create more customized training programs to help students find jobs.

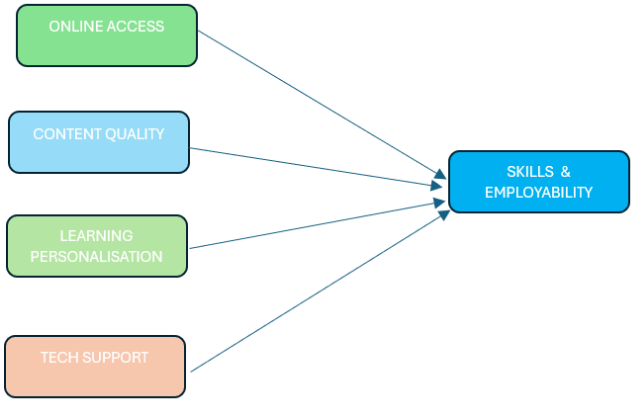
Wilson et al. (2024) examined Gen Z employees' digital literacy in higher education and its implications for HRD research and practice, contributing to the HRD literature on Gen Z workers in the 21st century. The study asked how Gen Z employees in higher education experience digital literacy, what gaps exist in their skills, and what actions higher education institutions may take to close these gaps for Gen Z employees entering the field. To better comprehend participants' lives, a basic qualitative study design was used with an inductive approach. The interview protocol was based on Eshet-Alklai (2012) and Ng (2012)'s Gen Z digital literacy research. The survey found that Gen Z employees need digital literacy abilities to reskill using virtual HRD tools like virtual training and development. This study filled a vacuum in HRD research on Gen Z employees in the workplace and examined pre- and post-COVID Gen Z characteristics. Thematic analysis revealed five key themes from the interviews: daily digital literacy, preferred technology, workplace communication, Gen Z skills gap, and future virtual training issues.

RESEARCH GAP

There is insufficient research on the efficacy of online learning platforms in facilitating skill development for Generation Z in rapidly evolving occupational contexts. This study will investigate how online learning platforms can bridge the skills gap for Generation Z, notwithstanding prior discussions by Hernandez et al. (2016), Fang et al. (2024), and Wilson et al. (2024) regarding their digital literacy, employment preferences, and educational

technology. These choices are recognized for their adaptability and availability; yet, their impact on the acquisition of hard and soft skills and graduates' preparedness for the contemporary workforce remains ambiguous. Crucially, there is a lack of study about the enhancement of these websites to fulfil the needs and learning preferences of Gen Z students, particularly in developing transferable skills sought by employers. This study examines how online learning platforms assist Gen Z graduates in acquiring the skills necessary for success in a competitive, technology-driven job market.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the relationship between the factors involved in skills and employability of Gen Z students.
- To evaluate the antecedents influencing the skills and employability of Gen Z students.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- Online access, content quality, learning personalization, tech support are positively correlated among each other.
- Online access, content quality, learning personalization, tech support are the antecedents of skills and employability of Gen. Z students

Table 1 : METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

S. No	Dimensions	Research Source
1.	Research Design	Exploratory Research
2.	Data Source	Primary Data
3.	Data Instrument	Questionnaire

4.	Sample Respondents Nature	Gen Z Students
5.	Sample respondents	243
6.	Sampling Way	Convenience Sampling
7.	Sampling Methodology	Google Docs Link via What's app, Instagram, Facebook
8.	Research Period	June 2024 to Nov 2024
9.	Statistical Tools Used	Correlation & Multiple Regression Analysis

RESULTS

Table 2 : DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	130	53.5
	Female	113	46.5
Age	< 18	45	71.2
	18 - 27	198	28.8
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	138	56.7
	Master's Degree	80	32.9
	Diploma	25	10.4
Occupation	Student	140	57.6
	Employed	85	35.0
	Unemployed	18	7.4
Region	North	65	26.7
	South	72	29.6
	East	55	22.6
	West	51	21

Table 2 presents the demographic distribution of the study participants. The gender breakdown shows a slight male dominance, with 53.5% male participants compared to 46.5% female participants. The majority of respondents (71.2%) are under 18 years old, suggesting that a significant portion of the sample consists of younger individuals, possibly still in early education or high school. Regarding educational background, most participants hold a Bachelor's degree (56.7%), followed by those with a Master's degree (32.9%), and fewer participants having a diploma (10.4%). The occupation data shows that the majority are

students (57.6%), with a smaller proportion employed (35%) and a few unemployed (7.4%). Geographically, the sample is spread across different regions, with the South having the highest representation (29.6%), followed by the North (26.7%), East (22.6%), and West (21%)

Table 3 : CORRELATION ANALYSIS

	Online Access	Content Quality	Learning Personalization	Tech Support
Online Access	1	.636**	.228*	.837*
Content Quality	.636**	1	.281*	.474*
Learning Personalization	.228*	.281*	1	.482*
Tech Support	.837*	.474*.	.482*	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.008	
N	243	243	243	

Table 3 displays the correlation coefficients among the key variables: Online Access, Content Quality, Learning Personalization, and Tech Support. The correlation values suggest significant relationships between these variables. The strongest correlation is between **Online Access** and **Tech Support** (0.837), indicating that better access to online learning platforms is strongly associated with enhanced technical support. **Content Quality** and **Online Access** also have a strong positive correlation (0.636), highlighting the relationship between effective content delivery and availability of learning resources. The correlations with **Learning Personalization** are weaker but still significant, with values of 0.228* and 0.281*, respectively. The results suggest that while online access and content quality are strongly related to tech support, personalization of learning experiences has a moderate association with other factors.

Table 4 : MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Variables	Coefficients (B)	Standard Error	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Constant	-0.1382	0.0768	-1.7989	.0733
Online Access	0.406	0.0126	32.2011	.000
Content Quality	0.3155	0.0122	25.7996	.000
Learning Personalization	.293	0.0256	32.6580	.000
Tech Support	0.2207	0.0122	18.0238	.000

Dependent Variable : Skills & Employability

Table 4 provides results from a multiple linear regression analysis that examines how various factors (Online Access, Content Quality, Learning Personalization, and Tech Support) impact the dependent variable, **Skills & Employability**. All four independent variables show significant positive contributions, with **Online Access** (B = 0.406), **Content Quality** (B = 0.3155), **Learning Personalization** (B = 0.293), and **Tech Support** (B = 0.2207) all having p-values less than 0.001, indicating their significant role in enhancing skills and employability. **Online Access** has the highest coefficient, suggesting it has the most substantial impact on employability, followed by content quality and learning personalization. The negative constant (B = -0.1382) and non-significant p-value (0.0733) indicate that, in the absence of the

independent variables, there is a small, not statistically significant negative effect on skills and employability. These results confirm that access to online learning platforms, quality of content, personalized learning experiences, and technical support are key factors in improving skills and employability for Generation Z graduates.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research are crucial in highlighting the importance of online learning platforms for bridging the skills gap of Generation Z graduates. Table 2 presents the sample's demographic distribution, revealing a younger cohort of respondents with most of them being below 18 years and majorly students. The percentage of participants holding a Bachelor's degree indicates the academic background of the respondents. Table 3 reports high correlations between online access, quality of content, personalization of learning, and support in technology as all of these factors help shape skills acquisition. Particularly, the correlation between online access and tech support are the strongest, indicating mutual impacts. Table 4's multiple linear regression analysis further supports this, revealing that online access, content quality, learning personalization, and tech support all positively contribute to skills and employability. The analysis indicates that among these, online access has the most substantial impact, followed by content quality and learning personalization. This underscores the importance of making online learning platforms more accessible and tailored to meet the needs of Gen Z learners.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

While the study provides valuable insights, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample is primarily younger students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to older or more experienced Gen Z graduates. In addition, the study relies on self-reported data, which may introduce biases in how participants perceive the effectiveness of online learning platforms. The research doesn't go into detail on what types of online courses or platforms may be beneficial for a better understanding of the contribution of different types of platforms toward skill building. However, the study verifies that online learning platforms are instrumental in filling the skills gap of Gen Z graduates. These platforms, thereby providing personalized learning experiences and high-quality content and strong technical support, help individuals develop the skills they will need to succeed in that rapidly changing job market. Future research should involve more diverse samples and consider testing the effects of particular sites and courses on skill acquisition and employability.

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