



Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

The Role of Digital Literacy in Enhancing Academic Outcomes: A Study of University Students in Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the intricacies of writing effective abstracts and selecting appropriate keywords for academic articles. An abstract served as a concise summary, typically between 150 to 250 words, encapsulating the essence of the research, including its background, objectives, methods, results, and conclusions. The inclusion of 3–5 specific and relevant keywords is crucial, as they aid in indexing and improve the visibility of the article in academic databases. The article emphasizes the importance of clarity, conciseness, and coherence in abstract writing, aligning with the four C's: Complete, Concise, Clear, and Cohesive. Additionally, it discusses strategies for selecting keywords that accurately represent the study's main themes, avoiding overly broad terms, and considering the use of recognized keyword lists in specific disciplines. By adhering to these guidelines, researchers can enhance the discoverability and impact of their work in the academic community.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Abstract Writing, Keyword Selection, Research Visibility, Scholarly Communication

Introduction

In today's knowledge economy, higher education plays a crucial role, going beyond teaching to include research and innovation. This shift requires universities to focus on developing skills like critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability rather than simply delivering information. Students' perceptions of these changes are vital for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers, as they reveal how well academic programs align with global job market demands. These views are shaped by classroom experiences, research exposure, faculty interaction, and industry trends. Understanding student perceptions helps identify gaps between academic teaching and market needs,



Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

guiding necessary educational reforms. As economies shift from industrial to knowledge-based systems, there is a growing need for highly skilled professionals in innovation and technology. In developing countries like Pakistan, research on student perspectives especially M.Phil. Education students is limited. Exploring their views is essential to align education with the needs of the knowledge economy and ensure future professionals are well-prepared.

Objectives

To examine the role of educational institutions in preparing students for the knowledge economy

To assess the challenges M.Phil students face in adapting to a knowledge-driven world

Research Questions

What role do educational institutions play in preparing students for the knowledge economy?

What challenges do M.Phil. Students face in meeting the demands of a knowledge-driven world?

Review of Literature

Role of Education in Developing Knowledge-Based Skills

Altbach et al. (2009) emphasize the need to shift from traditional, rote-based education towards approaches that foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving—skills essential for the knowledge economy. They argue that education should train students to apply knowledge in real-world settings, enabling them to become adaptable and innovative professionals.

Institutional Readiness and Support

Castells (2010) highlights the responsibility of educational institutions to cultivate innovation-friendly environments. He suggests universities should go beyond traditional teaching roles to foster creativity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and partnerships with industry. By embedding innovation in academic culture, institutions can better prepare students for knowledge-intensive sectors and contribute to national economic development.

Future Career Expectations and Market Relevance

Zafar and Butt (2020) advocate for integrating academic learning with practical skill-building activities such as internships, certifications, and workshops. This dual exposure enhances employability and better prepares students for dynamic job markets. They recommend that institutions embed such opportunities into their curricula to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Challenges and Recommendations

Powell and Snellman (2004) identify a persistent gap in developing countries between knowledge generation and its application, largely due to weak infrastructure, limited funding, and poor academia-industry collaboration. They call for stronger links between universities and industries to better utilize academic knowledge for economic



Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

development. Ahmed and Farooq (2019) propose exposing students to innovation hubs and research centers to enhance practical learning. Such exposure would foster critical thinking and creativity through direct engagement with professionals and real-world projects. Mahmood and Rehman (2020) recommend integrating entrepreneurship training into university programs. They argue that entrepreneurial skills—such as opportunity recognition, innovation, and business development—are crucial for participating in the knowledge economy. They also stress the importance of mentorship, networking, and funding opportunities to support aspiring student entrepreneurs.

3. Methodology

Study Area

This study was conducted in **Faisalabad**, a major industrial, cultural, and educational hub in Punjab, Pakistan. Known for its textile industry and economic significance, Faisalabad is home to several reputable higher education institutions, most notably the **University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF)**, which plays a key role in academic and research excellence in the region (Government of Punjab, 2024). The city's development has been driven by a combination of strong industrial growth, a rich cultural heritage, and an active agricultural sector (Khan, 2020). The literacy rate in District Faisalabad stands at **69.8%**, while in **Tehsil Faisalabad City**, it is around **65%**, reflecting the percentage of the population aged 10 and above who can read and write in any language.

Research Design

A **descriptive survey design** was adopted for this study. This design allows for systematic data collection to describe the characteristics of a population based on a selected sample. It was chosen to effectively capture students' perceptions and experiences in a structured and quantifiable manner.

Target Population and Sampling

The total number of students enrolled in the **M.Phil. Education program** at UAF was **218**. Using the sample size calculator at www.surveysystem.com, a sample of **140 students** was determined, with a **5% margin of error** and a **95% confidence level**. A **convenience sampling technique** was used to select respondents. Data was collected using a **structured questionnaire**, and the responses were analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)**.

Disciplines	Total Students	Sample Students
Postgraduate Students	218	140

Sampling Technique

The study employed **purposeful selection** to target postgraduate students at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad. The sample was drawn using a **proportionate sampling technique**, ensuring representation across relevant subgroups. Respondents were then selected through **simple random sampling** to minimize bias and enhance the representativeness of the sample.



Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

Sample Size

The **sample size** refers to the number of participants chosen from the larger population for data collection and analysis. It is crucial that the sample represents the population well to allow for generalization of the findings. Selecting an appropriate sample size is essential to ensure the validity and reliability of the research outcomes.

Research Instruments

The study collected **quantitative data** through a carefully constructed questionnaire. Each variable in the questionnaire was clearly defined with specific objectives in mind. Designing the questionnaire was a challenging process, as it contained sensitive questions aligned with the study's goals. The sequence and variety of questions were designed to maintain respondents' focus and ensure meaningful responses.

Pre-Testing

Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was **pre-tested** to assess its suitability and completeness. This process helped identify irrelevant questions and highlighted missing items essential to the study's objectives. Pre-testing was conducted with a small group of students, allowing for refinement of the instrument to improve clarity and relevance.

Validation of Research Tool

The questionnaire was developed systematically, in collaboration with the study supervisor and other academic experts to ensure **content validity**. The supervisor reviewed and suggested improvements, which were incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

A pre-test was conducted with 10 respondents to identify any ambiguities. The questionnaire demonstrated high reliability, with a **Cronbach's alpha of 0.843**, indicating strong internal consistency. Data analysis for reliability was performed using SPSS software.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected directly from respondents using the questionnaire. Before administration, respondents were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the study and data collection procedures. The researcher personally met participants to explain the questions and ensure accurate responses.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **SPSS**. Various statistical techniques, including frequencies, averages, variances, and percentages, were applied. Descriptive statistics helped identify patterns and trends, allowing for clear and meaningful conclusions.



Findings

Skills and Competencies for Success in the Knowledge-Based Job Market

Success in a knowledge-driven job market requires more than academic knowledge. Essential skills include **critical thinking, digital literacy, communication, adaptability, and problem-solving**, which drive innovation and ensure employability. Additionally, **entrepreneurial thinking** and the ability to collaborate across disciplines and cultures are increasingly important. Educational institutions must therefore adjust teaching methods and curricula to develop these competencies in students (Carnoy, 2014).

Perceived Role of Education in Women's Autonomy

Education plays a vital role in enhancing women's autonomy by enabling informed decision-making, labor market participation, and rights advocacy. Advanced education fosters professional growth, independence, and self-confidence among female M.Phil students. It empowers women to challenge cultural gender norms and engage more fully in economic and social life. In transitioning economies, empowering women through education is crucial to harnessing their full human capital potential (Easton and Van Laar, 2018).

Table.4.14: Perceived Role of Education in Women's Autonomy

Statements	Weighted Score	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
I am satisfied with my current job overall	533	4.64	0.98	1
I have autonomy and control.	417	3.68	1.01	2
I am satisfied with the balance between my work and personal life.	414	3.65	1.00	3
I enjoy supportive work environment.	408	3.63	1.11	4
I am satisfied with physical working conditions of my job.	400	3.53	1.11	5
We have effective leadership.	336	2.22	1.20	6
I have opportunities for career advancement.	330	2.17	1.18	7

Scale: 1= Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree

Table 4.14 presents the perceived role of education in women's autonomy based on several statements rated by the respondents. The highest-ranked statement, "I am satisfied with my current job overall," received a weighted score of 533 and a mean of 4.64 (SD = 0.98), indicating that most respondents strongly agree with their overall job



Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

satisfaction. This suggests that education plays a significant role in enabling women to find fulfilling employment. The second and third highest-ranked items, "I have autonomy and control" (M = 3.68, SD = 1.01) and "I am satisfied with the balance between my work and personal life" (M = 3.65, SD = 1.00), indicate moderate agreement, highlighting that education contributes to a reasonable degree of autonomy and work-life balance among female respondents. Statements related to the work environment, such as "I enjoy a supportive work environment" (M = 3.63, SD = 1.11) and "I am satisfied with the physical working conditions of my job" (M = 3.53, SD = 1.11), also show moderate agreement, reflecting a generally positive perception of workplace conditions. Conversely, items concerning leadership effectiveness ("We have effective leadership," M = 2.22, SD = 1.20) and career advancement opportunities ("I have opportunities for career advancement," M = 2.17, SD = 1.18) received the lowest means, indicating disagreement or neutrality among respondents. This suggests potential areas where education alone may not fully empower women, pointing to organizational or systemic challenges in leadership and career growth.

Table.4.15: The role of overall education institutions in preparing students for the knowledge economy

Statements	Weighted Score	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Teamwork and collaboration are vital in modern, knowledge-driven workplaces.	626	4.47	0.651	1
Digital literacy (e.g., ability to use computers, internet, and software) is a must-have skill.	624	4.46	0.713	2
Communication skills (written and verbal) are key to career advancement in knowledge-based fields.	617	4.41	0.645	3
Time management and self-discipline are important for working in knowledge-intensive jobs.	617	4.41	0.710	4
The ability to learn and adapt to new technologies is crucial for job success.	609	4.35	0.758	5
Critical thinking is essential for success in a knowledge-based economy.	599	4.28	0.635	6
Problem-solving skills are more important than memorization in today's job market.	593	4.27	0.776	7



Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

Global awareness and intercultural competence are important in today's interconnected economy.	596	4.26	0.716	8
Entrepreneurial thinking is increasingly necessary in a rapidly evolving job market.	595	4.25	0.781	9
Employers in the knowledge economy value creativity and innovation.	575	4.11	0.765	10

Scale: 1= Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree

Table 4.15 highlights students' perceptions of the role educational institutions play in preparing them for the knowledge economy. The top-rated statement, "Teamwork and collaboration are essential in today's knowledge-based workplaces," received a weighted score of 626 and a mean of 4.47, showing strong agreement among respondents. Close behind was "Digital literacy (e.g., ability to use computers, internet, and software) is a must-have skill," with a weighted score of 624 and a mean of 4.46. "Communication skills (written and verbal) are essential to advancing a career in knowledge-based fields" and "Time management and self-discipline are critical for knowledge-based employment" both scored a weighted 617 with means of 4.41. Other highly ranked skills included adaptability to new technologies (weighted score = 609, mean = 4.35), critical thinking (weighted score = 599, mean = 4.28), and problem-solving (weighted score = 593, mean = 4.27). Statements related to global awareness and intercultural competence (weighted score = 596, mean = 4.26), entrepreneurial thinking (weighted score = 595, mean = 4.25), and creativity and innovation (weighted score = 575, mean = 4.11) also received agreement. Overall, these results demonstrate strong recognition of key skills and competencies that educational institutions should develop to effectively prepare students for the demands of the knowledge economy. The findings emphasize the importance of teamwork, digital literacy, communication, adaptability, critical thinking, and creativity, supporting the need for a comprehensive educational approach aligned with modern workplace challenges.

Challenges Faced by M.Phil Students in Adapting to a Knowledge-Driven World

M.Phil students face difficulties applying their studies to real-world situations due to rapid global changes. Challenges include outdated course materials, limited practical or online experience, weak industry connections, and poor career preparation. The pressure to publish in top journals without proper guidance adds to their stress. There is a gap between academic learning and workplace needs, making it hard for students to enter the job market (Halai, 2018).

Academic and Curriculum-Related Challenges

Many M.Phil students struggle with academic and program demands, hindering their success in today's knowledge economy. Programs often focus on theory rather than practical skills or modern tools. Course content doesn't align well with current workforce



needs. Additionally, limited opportunities for research, innovation, and skill development make it harder for students to compete globally (Ahmed & Farooq, 2019).

Table.4.16: Academic and Curriculum-Related Challenges

Statements	Weighted Score	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
I find it difficult to balance my academic workload with the development of skills like digital literacy and technology.	577	4.12	0.782	1
The focus on theoretical knowledge in my M.Phil. program leaves little room for developing practical and entrepreneurial skills.	568	4.06	0.789	2
The pressure to publish research in high-impact journals affects my academic performance.	546	3.90	0.954	3
M.Phil. students are not adequately trained in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios.	531	3.79	1.009	4
The curriculum in my M.Phil. program is not aligned with the skills required in the knowledge-driven job market.	521	3.72	1.025	5

Scale: 1= Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree

The findings presented in Table 4.16 highlight key academic and curriculum-related challenges faced by M.Phil students. The most significant challenge is balancing academic work with developing essential technology and digital skills, reflecting a struggle to meet both traditional and modern educational demands. This is consistent with Johnson and Lee (2022), who emphasize the growing gap between university academic requirements and the practical skills needed for employment. The second major concern is that M.Phil programs prioritize theoretical knowledge while neglecting practical and entrepreneurial skills, which limits students' readiness for real-world challenges. The pressure to publish in prestigious journals also affects students' academic focus negatively, adding stress without necessarily improving practical competence.



Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

Furthermore, students report difficulty applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations and feel that their current skill set does not match job market demands. These results underscore the urgent need to revise curricula to include more practical, interactive learning experiences and better prepare students for workforce challenges.

Major Findings

Most respondents were female (65%) and aged 18–21 (37.1%).

Around 56% had graduate-level education, and most studied in public and urban institutions.

All students used the internet for learning, highlighting the role of digital access.

Awareness of the “knowledge economy” is moderate, with many students lacking full understanding.

Curricula increasingly include digital literacy and entrepreneurship, but inconsistently.

Financial challenges like expensive materials and tuition significantly affect students’ education and risk of dropout.

Students want academic programs linked to high-paying careers and better government financial support.

Women generally report job satisfaction but face limited career advancement opportunities.

Essential skills for success include teamwork, digital literacy, communication, flexibility, and critical thinking.

Students struggle with too much theory, pressure to publish, lack of practical training, and poor alignment with job market needs.

Mentorship, industry networking, and practical experiences are lacking, impacting readiness for the workforce.

Respondents recommend more funding, scholarships, career support, and updated curricula with practical skills.

Conclusion

M.Phil. students face academic and financial challenges that hinder their preparation for today’s knowledge economy. While digital skills and key competencies are recognized, gaps remain in curriculum relevance and practical experience. Increased funding, better university-industry

Recommendations

Provide more financial aid to reduce student dropouts.

Integrate practical, digital, and entrepreneurial skills into academic programs.

Enhance career guidance and networking opportunities.

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Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

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Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

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Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

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Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

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Vol. 3 No. 10 (October) (2025)

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