



Between Livelihood and Learning: A Study of Changing Academic Trends in the Age of the Gig Economy

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Abstract:

In the growing landscape gig economy, individuals are increasingly balancing academic development with the need for flexible income. This study explores how gig workers in India manage learning responsibilities while striving for economic stability, with a focus on key behavioral and cognitive factors such as adaptability, livelihood stability, learning engagement, work-learning balance and career outlook. Data were collected from fifty individual respondents, who are actively engaged in gig work alongside their academic or skilled development pursuits. Each variable was assessed through multiple statements using a five-point Likert scale. The analysis revealed a strong positive relationship among all major constructs. Notably, those who showed higher motivation to learn and better time management also reported more positive career outlook and a greater sense of financial stability. These findings suggest that behavioral adaptability and self-driven learning play a crucial role in navigating the uncertainties of gig-based employment. This study contributes original insights into how Indian gig workers perceive and manage the intersection of education and livelihood. The result emphasizes the need for supportive learning environments and policies that acknowledge the dual pressure of earning and studying. By highlighting the life experience of flexible workers, the study lays the groundwork for future research and policy framework focused on sustainable academic and career pathways in the gig economy.

Index Terms: Cognitive factors, Adaptability, Livelihood stability, Learning engagement, Work-learning balance.

Introduction:

The gig economy has transformed the nature of work worldwide, offering flexibility and new opportunities but also presenting challenges related to job security and income stability. In India, where a significant portion of the workforce engage in gig and freelance jobs, many individuals are balancing these unconventional work arrangements alongside their academics. The dual economic role requires them to adopt continuously, develop new skills and manage competing demands on their time and resources. As traditional employment models evolve, the academic trends with learners increasingly integrating education and skill acquisition into their livelihoods. The interaction between work and learning in the gig economy context is complex, influencing individuals' motivation, career expectations and financial well-being. However, research exploring this changing academic pattern among the Indian gig workers remains limited. This study investigates how gig workers in India navigate the connection of livelihood and learning by examining key factors such as adaptability, livelihood stability, learning engagement, work- learning balance, and career outlook. Using quantitative data collected from the respondents, the research aims to highlight how these individuals manage the challenge of sustaining income pursuing education and skill development. By understanding these dynamics, the study seeks to inform educational practices and policy development that can better support gig workers in achieving sustainable academic and economic success in an evolving labor market.

Scope of the Study:

This research examines how individuals engaged in the gig economy in India manage the balances between their work commitments and academic learning. It focuses on five key areas: adaptability to changing work demands, the stability of livelihood through gig work, engagement with learning activities, the ability to balance work and study and career expectations within the gig economic context. This study is based on data collected from several respondents, who are simultaneously involved in gig work and academic commitment. It reflects their personal experiences and perceptions, primarily from urban and semi-urban areas, where gig employment is common. The research does not differentiate between specific types of gig jobs or educational disciplines. While the findings provide valuable insights into the challenges and strategies of gig workers balancing education and livelihood, the limited sample size and geographic focus restrict the generalizability of results to the broader population.

Literature review:

(Singh & Awasti, 2025) analyzed the status of unorganized worker in India's digital platform, highlighted opportunities such as flexible working hours and skill development. However, challenges like income volatility and lack of Social Security what significant concerns.

(Singh & Singh, 2024) discussed how gig economy has revolutionized business practices and labour markets in India focusing on the implications for labor rights and Social Security. The study emphasized the need for regulatory frameworks to address these issues.

(Dwivedi, Bharti, & Sharma, 2025) examined the barriers to digital adoption among women in India's tourism gig economy, including low levels of digital literacy unlimited access to technology, which hindered their participation on the digital economy.

(Faras, Datta, & Mehata, 2025) explore the measurement of platform-based gig work in India's labor statistics, highlighted the challenges inaccurately capturing the extent and nature of gig work in official labor surveys.

(Arora, 2025) investigated the impact of gig economy on the traditional employment practices, focusing on aspects like flexibility, job security and income stability. The study found that gig work offers significant advantages, such as enhanced work-life balance and greater economy.

(Sharma, 2025) analyse the rise of gig economy and its implications for labor market structures, wage stability and employment benefits, proposing policy frameworks to balance innovation.

Research Gap:

Although existing literature on the gig economy in India has explored various aspects such as income stability, labor market challenges and gender disparities, there remains a significant gap regarding the intersection of gig work and academic learning. Most of the studies have focused on the economic dimensions of gig employment. What happened is limited attention to how individuals engaged in gig work adopt their learning strategies to remain relevant in a rapidly changing job market. Additionally, there is a lack of empirical research examining how gig workers manage the balance between their work commitments and academics. The influence of this balance on their livelihood stability and career prospect is underexplored. Furthermore, while studies have identified challenges related to digital access and skill development, comprehensive examination into how these factors affect the evolving academic trends among gig workers in India are rare. This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring the relationship between adaptability, learning engagement, work learning balance and career outlook in the context of livelihood stability. By focusing on the dynamic relationship between work and learning, the research provides new insights into how gig workers navigate academic trends among the uncertainties of the gig economy.

Objective of the study:

The study aims to develop the understanding of how geek workers in India navigate their interaction between their livelihoods and academic learning in the context of the evolving gig economy. The specific objectives are:

1. To analyze the adaptability of gig workers in modified their learning strategies to align with the dynamic demands of gig work. This includes investigating how individuals pursue new skills, adjust their educational approaches and remain relevant in an unpredictable job market characterized by diverse and shifting work opportunities.
2. To assess the stability and reliability of income generated through gig work and its impact on individuals' financial confidence and livelihood security. The objective explores the extent to which gig employment can provide consistent earnings, manage financial responsibilities and support ongoing academic areas.
3. To examine the balance maintained by gig workers between their work commitments and academy goals, including the challenges they face in time management, motivation and effective learning engagement. This involves understanding how they prioritise tasks, utilize learning platforms and plan their career development within the constraints of gig work.

Research methodology:

This study employed a quantitative research design aimed at understanding the changing academic trends among gig workers in the Indian context. The focus was to explore the relationship between adaptability, livelihood stability, learning engagement, work-learning balance and carrier outlook in the age of gig economy. A structured survey method was adopted to collect data systematically from the participants actively engaged in gig work.

Research design: the research followed a descriptive correlational design. The design was chosen to describe the characteristics of gig workers related to their learning behaviors and livelihood experiences, to examine the relationship between key variables without employing any factors. The design allowed for understanding patterns, trends and association within the collected data.

Population and sample: the target population for this study comprised individuals aged between 23 to 40 years who were involved in gig work and academic learning in India. A convenient sampling technique was used due

to accessibility and time constraints, focusing on gig workers who were also pursuing academic activities such as formal education, online courses or skill development programs. The sample size was consistent of fifty respondents who voluntarily participated by completing an online questionnaire. While relatively undefined, this sample was sufficient for preliminary analysis and reliability testing, providing valuable insights into the experiences and expectations of gig workers balancing work and learning.

Sampling procedure: the study employed convenient sampling to select participants who are actively engaged in gig work and academic learning. A total of fifty respondents were collected in this study. The sample size was choosing to balance practical constraints and the exploratory nature of research. While a larger sample could improve generalizability, the selected number allowed for detailed examination of the specific group's experiences. Moreover, the strong reliability of these survey instruments supports the validity of findings despite the sample size. This approach aligns with similar studies conducted within niche populations in the gig economic context.

Data collection instrument: data were collected by using self-administered questionnaire designed via Google forms comprising several sections:

1. Consent and introduction: informing participants about the purpose of study, confidentiality and voluntary in nature.
2. Demographic information: including age, highest education completed, occupation and currently involved in the gig work economy.
3. Measurement key variables: using Likert scale items (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) to measure five major constructs.

The five major constructs are:

- ✓ **Adaptability:** the variable assists the ability of participants to adjust learning strategies to meet changing gig work demands, their comfort with taking on different gig jobs and their proactive efforts to seek new skills.
- ✓ **Livelihood stability:** the variable measured perception of income stability, financial management confidence and the consistency of livelihood provided by gig work economy.
- ✓ **Learning engagement:** it focused on motivations to learn alongside gig work, effectiveness of online learning platforms and goal setting for acquiring new skills.
- ✓ **Work-learning balance:** this examined participants' ability to balance gig work responsibilities with academic learning, the extent of work interference in learning and time management skills.
- ✓ **Career outlook:** this assists optimism about career growth, the perceived usefulness of academic skills in gig work and believe that combining learning and gig work enhances career prospects.

Variables operationalization:

- ✓ Independent variable: adaptability, learning engagement, work-learning balance and career outlook.
- ✓ Dependent variable: livelihood stability.

Each variable was operationalized through carefully expressed statements rated on a five-point Likert scale to capture the degree of agreement or experience.

Reliability and validity: the questionnaire was pilot-tested for internal consistency, yielding high reliability scores for all variables indicating that the items consistently measured the intended constructs. Content validity was ensured through literature review and feedback during questionnaire development.

Data analysis procedure: data were analyzed using statistical software (i.e. SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum value were computed to summaries the demographic profile and responses for each variable. Reliability analysis was conducted to confirm the internal consistency of the skills. Furthermore, Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to explore the relationship between the variables, highlighting the strength and significance of associations among adaptability, livelihood stability, learning engagement, work-learning balance and career outlook. The analysis focused not only on numerical descriptions but also on interpreting how this relationship reflects the experiences of gig workers balancing livelihood and learning in the gig economy.

Data Analysis:

(a) Reliability analysis:

Table 1 showing Reliability Statistics for Adaptability, Stability, Learning, Work–Learning Balance, and Career Orientation Constructs					
Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Inter-Item Correlation Range	Highest Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted (Range)
Adaptability	3	0.974	0.909 – 0.954	0.966	0.950 – 0.976
Stability	3	0.958	0.821 – 0.963	0.963	0.901 – 0.980
Learning	3	0.975	0.909 – 0.965	0.965	0.950 – 0.979
Work–Learning Balance	3	0.92	0.691 – 0.917	0.918	0.817 – 0.957
Career Orientation	3	0.981	0.919 – 1.000	0.979	0.957 – 1.000

Data Source: Author's Calculation and Compilation

Interpretation: the reliability of the measurement scale used in the study was assisted using internal consistency matrices. For each construct that is adaptability, livelihood stability, learning engagement, work-learning balance and career prospects, Cronbach's alpha values were computed to ensure the reliability of the skills. The adaptability scale, consisting of three items measuring participants' flexibility in learning and work, demonstrated excellent reliability with Cronbach's alpha of 0.974. The strong inter-item correlations ranging from 0.909 to 0.954 indicated consistent responses across the items. Similarly, the livelihood stability skill shortens high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.958. The items measuring perceptions of income stability and financial confidence in gig work coordinated strongly, supporting the skills consistency. The learning engagement construct, assist through motivation, effectiveness of online learning and goal setting, exhibited upon Cronbach's alpha of 0.975, confirming excellent internal consistency. Inter-item correlation exceeds 0.90, reflecting highly coordinated responses. The work-learning balance skill, evaluating the ability to manage gig work alongside academic goals, yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.920, indicating strong reliability. Although one item showed a slightly lower correlation, the overall scale consistency remains robust. Finally, the career prospect scale, which measured optimism about career growth and the utility of academic skills in the gig world, had the highest reliability with Cronbach's alpha 0.981. Perfect inter-item correlations for two items suggested very high agreement among the respondents.

(b) Descriptive Statistic Analysis:

Table 2 showing Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age of the respondent	50	23	40	30.5	5.29247
Gender	50	1	3	1.6	0.67006
Highest education completed	50	2	5	3.7	1.11117
Currently involved in gig work	50	1	2	1.2	0.40406
Adjust learning strategies to work demands	50	2	5	3.7	1.11117
Comfortable taking different gig jobs	50	2	5	4	1.01015
Actively seek new skills	50	2	5	3.9	0.95298
Gig work provides stable income	50	2	5	3.7	1.11117
Confident managing finances with gig income	50	2	5	3.6	1.03016
Gig economy allows consistent livelihood	50	2	5	3.8	0.98974
Motivated to learn alongside gig work	50	2	5	3.8	0.98974
Online platforms are effective for learning	50	2	5	3.7	1.11117
Set goals for learning new skills	50	2	5	4	1.01015
Can balance gig work with academic learning	50	2	5	3.7	1.11117
Work interferes with learning	50	2	5	3.5	1.12938
Manage time for both work and learning	50	2	5	3.7	1.11117
Combining learning and gig work helps career prospects	50	2	5	3.8	0.98974
Academic skills useful in gig work	50	2	5	3.8	0.98974
Optimistic about career growth in gig economy	50	2	5	4	1.01015
Valid N (listwise)	50				

Data Source: Author's Calculation and Compilation

Interpretation: The data collected from fifty respondents reveals insightful trends regarding the relationship between gig work and academic engagement. The average age of the participant was 30.5 years indicating a predominantly demographic actively navigating the geek economy. The distribution of education level suggests most respondents have completed education between diploma and master's level, reflecting a relatively well-educated sample. A majority reported current involvement in gig work, with responses indicating moderate to strong adaptability to change in work demands, as shown by average score near 3.7 to 4.0 on related items. Respondents expressed confidence in managing finances and maintaining livelihood stability through gig work,

with mean values consistently above 3.6. Motivation for continued learning alongside gig responsibilities was similarly positive, reflecting an awareness of the need to acquire new skills in a dynamic job market. However, balancing work and academic commitments presented some challenges, as indicated by slightly lower agreement on maintaining interferences from work to learning. Overall, the findings suggest that while gig workers are proactive in adopting and upskilling, they face many difficulties in harmonizing their roles of livelihood and learning.

(c) Correlation Analysis:

Table 3 showing Pearson Correlation Matrix Among Key Study Constructs Variables					
Variables	1. Adaptability	2. Stability	3. Learning	4. Balance	5. Career
1. Adaptability	1	0.907	0.973	0.869	0.966
2. Stability		1	0.942	0.97	0.928
3. Learning			1	0.912	0.995
4. Balance				1	0.901
5. Career					1
All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 50 for all variables.					

Data Source: Author's Calculation and Compilation

Interpretation: the correlation analysis reveals strong positive relationships among all key variables measured in the study. Adaptability, stability, learning management, work-learning balance and career prospects were all significantly and positively correlated with each other at 0.01 significance level, indicating that higher adaptability scores were closely associated with greater stability, enhanced learning engagement, better balance between work and learning and more optimistic career expectations. Notably, the correlation between learning engagement and career prospects was exceptionally high ($r = 0.995$), suggesting that motivation and active role of new skills strongly influence positive career outlooks in the gig economy. Similarly, the relationship between stability and balance that is ($r = 0.970$), highlighted the interdependence of financial security and effective management of their roles. Overall, these findings suggest that the dimension of adaptability, stability, learning balance and career growth are deeply interconnected, which may emphasise the multi-layered nature of how gig workers navigate their academic and livelihood challenges.

In this research paper our first objective is to understand the relationship between adaptability, learning engagement and career growth. The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between adaptability and learning engagement that is ($r = 0.973$), indicating that individuals who exhibit higher adaptability are more likely to engage actively in learning activities. The engagement entered is strongly associated with career growth that is ($r = 0.995$), suggesting that continuous learning plays an important role in enhancing career prospects. These findings highlight the importance of fostering adaptability and learning engagement to facilitate career advancement, aligning with the studies objective to explore how these factors contribute to career growth. Our second objective is to examine the impact of stability and balance on academic and work-life integration, the analysis demonstrated a significant positive correlation between stability and balance that is ($r = 0.970$), highlighting that individuals who perceive greater stability in their work environment are better able to balance academic responsibilities with work commitments. This balance is crucial for maintaining well-being and academic performance, supporting the study's objective to investigate how stability and balance influence the integration of academic and work life rules. The strong interrelationship between these variables emphasizes the need for strategies that promote stability to enhance balance and overall integration. Another objective was to assess the interconnectedness of adaptability, stability, learning engagement, balance

and career growth. The correlation matrix illustrated that all five key variables are positively correlated with each other, correlation coefficient ranging from 0.869 to 0.995. Notably, the highest correlation exists between learning engagement and career growth that is ($r = 0.995$) indicated that active participation in learning activities was closely tied to career advancement. The interconnection suggested that the variables collectively contribute to a complete understanding of how individuals navigate their academic and professional life, aligning with the objective of the study to assess the interconnectedness of these factors.

Conclusions:

The study examined the inter-relationship between adaptability, stability, learning engagement, work-learning balance and career growth within the gig economy. The findings underscored the interconnectedness of these factors, highlighting that individuals who exhibit higher adaptability are more likely to engage continuous learning, which in turn positively influences their career prospects. Furthermore, the study reveals that perceived stability in gig work contributes to a better balance between work and academic responsibilities, enhancing overall well-being and performance. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how gig workers navigate their dual roles and the factors that influence their career development.

Future recommendations:

Educational institutions and employers should collaborate to design programs that enhance adaptability and continuous learning among gig workers. This could include offering flexible learning modules and skill development workshops custom-made to the needs of gig workers. Platforms and policymakers should work towards providing more stable income opportunities and support systems for gig workers. This might involve implementing policies and offering financial security, access to healthcare and retirement benefits, thereby reducing the stress associated with income instability.

Limitations of the study:

This study was conducted with the sample size of fifty participants, which while sufficient for preliminary analysis may limit the generalizability of the results to the broader population of gig workers. A larger and more diverse sample could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between adaptability, stability, learning engagement, work learning balance and career growth. The research employed a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point of time. While established skills were used to access the key variables, the instruments may not fully capture the complexity of concepts like adaptability and work-learning balance. Future research could develop and validate more measurement tools to better capture this construct.

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