

Reskilling for the Gig Economy: Future-ready Competencies for a Changing Workforce

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of the gig economy has fundamentally transformed traditional employment relationships, workforce structures, and skill requirements across industries. Unlike conventional employment models characterized by long-term job security and organizational loyalty, the gig economy emphasizes short-term, project-based engagements facilitated through digital platforms. Technological advancements such as artificial intelligence, automation, and platform-based ecosystems have accelerated this shift, enabling organizations to access talent on demand while simultaneously requiring workers to operate in highly dynamic and competitive environments. As a result, the nature of work has transitioned from stability and predictability to flexibility, autonomy, and skills-based participation.

This conceptual paper proposes an integrative framework that links gig economy drivers with reskilling strategies and the development of future-ready competencies to enhance workforce adaptability and employability. Drawing on human capital theory, boundaryless career theory, digital labour market literature, and lifelong learning frameworks, the study conceptualizes how key forces technological disruption, platformization, and workforce flexibility act as catalysts for continuous reskilling. These forces not only redefine job roles but also shift the responsibility for skill development from organizations to individuals, necessitating a proactive and self-directed approach to learning.

The framework further identifies five critical future-ready competencies digital literacy, cognitive adaptability, entrepreneurial mindset, socio-emotional skills, and self-management as essential mediating capabilities that influence employability and career sustainability in gig-based environments. These competencies enable individuals to effectively navigate digital platforms, adapt to evolving job demands, foster innovation, build professional relationships, and manage independent work structures.

The paper argues that continuous reskilling is no longer a reactive response to labour market disruptions but a strategic imperative for both individuals and organizations. Workers who actively invest in skill development are better positioned to maintain relevance, enhance income opportunities, and achieve long-term career resilience. Similarly, organizations and digital platforms benefit from a highly skilled and adaptable workforce that drives innovation and service quality.

By reframing reskilling as a foundational component of workforce development, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on the future of work and highlights its critical role in enabling sustainable participation in the gig economy.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Reskilling, Future of Work, Employability, Digital Skills, Workforce Transformation and Lifelong Learning.

1. Introduction

The global labour market is undergoing a profound transformation driven by rapid technological advancement, digitalization, and evolving organizational structures. One of the most significant manifestations of this transformation is the rise of the gig economy, which has redefined traditional employment relationships and workforce configurations. The gig economy refers to a labour market characterized by short-term, flexible, and task-based work arrangements, often facilitated through digital platforms that connect service providers with consumers (De Stefano, 2016). Unlike conventional employment systems that emphasize long-term job security, fixed organizational roles, and hierarchical career progression, gig work is decentralized, dynamic, and increasingly skill-driven.

Technological innovation has been a primary driver of this shift. Advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), automation, big data analytics, and platform-based technologies have enabled organizations to restructure work processes and access talent on demand (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). Digital platforms such as freelance marketplaces, ride-sharing services, and online labour exchanges have created new opportunities for individuals to engage in independent work while simultaneously intensifying global competition for skills. As routine and repetitive tasks become increasingly automated, demand is shifting toward higher-order cognitive, digital, and interpersonal skills (Autor, 2015). This transition underscores the need for continuous skill development to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving labour market.

The concept of reskilling has therefore emerged as a critical strategic response to these changes. Reskilling refers to the process through which individuals acquire new competencies to adapt to changing job requirements or transition into different roles (World Economic Forum, 2023). In the context of the gig economy, reskilling is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing process of lifelong learning. Workers must continuously update their skills to align with emerging technologies, shifting market demands, and evolving platform requirements. This is particularly important given that gig workers often lack access to formal organizational training and must take primary responsibility for their own professional development.

Theoretical perspectives such as human capital theory and boundaryless career theory provide a useful lens for understanding this shift. Human capital theory emphasizes that investment in education and skills enhances productivity and employability (Becker, 1993). In contrast, boundaryless career theory highlights the decline of traditional organizational careers and the rise of self-directed, flexible career paths that span multiple employers and industries (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Together, these perspectives suggest that individuals must adopt a proactive approach to skill development and career management in order to succeed in the gig economy.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the adoption of gig and remote work models, further reinforcing the importance of adaptability and digital readiness. Organizations increasingly rely on contingent and freelance workers to maintain operational flexibility, while individuals seek diversified income sources through platform-based work (Kniffin et al., 2021). This shift has amplified the need for a workforce equipped with future-ready competencies that extend beyond technical expertise to include adaptability, resilience, and self-management.

Despite the growing importance of the gig economy, existing literature often examines gig work, reskilling, and employability as separate domains. There is limited conceptual integration explaining how gig economy dynamics necessitate reskilling and how such reskilling translates into sustainable employability. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive framework that connects these dimensions.

In response, this conceptual paper proposes an integrative framework linking gig economy drivers with reskilling strategies and future-ready competencies. It identifies key competencies digital literacy, cognitive adaptability, entrepreneurial mindset, socio-emotional skills, and self-management as critical mediators that enhance employability and career sustainability. By doing so, the study reframes reskilling as a strategic imperative rather than a reactive response to labour market disruptions.

The central argument of this paper is that in an era defined by technological disruption and flexible work arrangements, continuous reskilling and competency development are essential for navigating the gig economy. Individuals and organizations that proactively invest in future-ready skills are better positioned to achieve long-term adaptability, resilience, and success in an increasingly uncertain and competitive workforce landscape.

2. Literature Review

The evolving literature on the gig economy reflects a significant shift from understanding its structural emergence to critically examining its implications for skills, employability, and workforce sustainability. Early foundational work established that technological advancement, particularly automation, is not merely

displacing jobs but transforming skill demands by reducing routine tasks and increasing the need for higher-order cognitive capabilities. This technological restructuring laid the groundwork for the expansion of gig-based work, where tasks are modularized and distributed through digital platforms. Building on this, Ashford et al. (2018) provided a micro-level perspective, demonstrating that gig workers operate in highly uncertain environments that require proactive career management, self-regulation, and continuous adaptation. Their work marked an important transition from macro-level labour shifts to individual-level capability requirements.

More recent global reports, particularly the World Economic Forum (2023), have reinforced the urgency of reskilling, estimating that a substantial proportion of the global workforce will require new skills due to rapid technological disruption. This aligns with Wu (2023), who argues that the post-pandemic acceleration of digital work has expanded gig opportunities while simultaneously intensifying employment precarity. Such findings highlight a critical paradox: while the gig economy enhances flexibility and access to work, it also transfers risk and responsibility from organizations to individuals. This duality is further examined by Fiers (2024), who identifies digital literacy as a foundational competence for participation in platform-based work, suggesting that access to opportunities is increasingly mediated by technological proficiency. However, this perspective may underestimate structural inequalities, as not all workers possess equal access to digital resources or learning opportunities.

The complexity of gig work is further elaborated by Pilatti, Pinheiro, and Montini (2024), who emphasize the role of algorithmic management and power asymmetries within digital platforms. Their findings challenge the often-romanticized view of gig work as purely autonomous by revealing how platform governance can constrain worker agency. Similarly, Omar and Jamil (2025) and Ruhail and Linxin (2025) highlight the tension between flexibility and insecurity, arguing that while gig work enables income diversification, it lacks stability and long-term career pathways. These studies collectively suggest that employability in the gig economy is contingent not only on skill acquisition but also on the ability to navigate structural uncertainties.

Recent studies further deepen this discourse by emphasizing resilience and adaptability as central outcomes. For instance, industry-focused research on gig work in emerging economies indicates that platform dependency and skill mismatches are growing concerns, particularly in rapidly digitizing labour markets. Hussain-Khan et al. (2026) extend this argument by demonstrating that gig workers experience both empowerment and precarity, reinforcing the need for continuous skill development as a coping mechanism. Niu et al. (2026), through bibliometric analysis, reveal a clear shift in research focus toward worker well-being, job quality, and skill sustainability, indicating a maturation of the field. Additionally, recent studies on reskilling interventions highlight that structured learning systems within platforms can significantly enhance worker productivity and reduce skill gaps, although such initiatives remain unevenly implemented.

Critically, the literature reveals a gap in integrating these insights into a unified framework. While earlier studies emphasize technological disruption and labour market restructuring, and more recent work focuses on worker adaptability and resilience, there is limited conceptual linkage between gig economy drivers, reskilling processes, and competency development. Most studies treat reskilling as a reactive necessity rather than a proactive, strategic capability. Furthermore, insufficient attention is given to how specific competencies such as digital literacy, cognitive adaptability, and self-management mediate the relationship between gig work participation and long-term employability.

Thus, the literature underscores that the gig economy is not merely an alternative employment model but a transformative force reshaping the nature of work itself. However, its sustainability depends largely on the ability of workers to continuously reskill and develop future-ready competencies. This highlights the need for a comprehensive conceptual framework that positions reskilling as a central mechanism linking gig economy dynamics with employability and career resilience an objective that the present study seeks to address.

3. Conceptual Framework

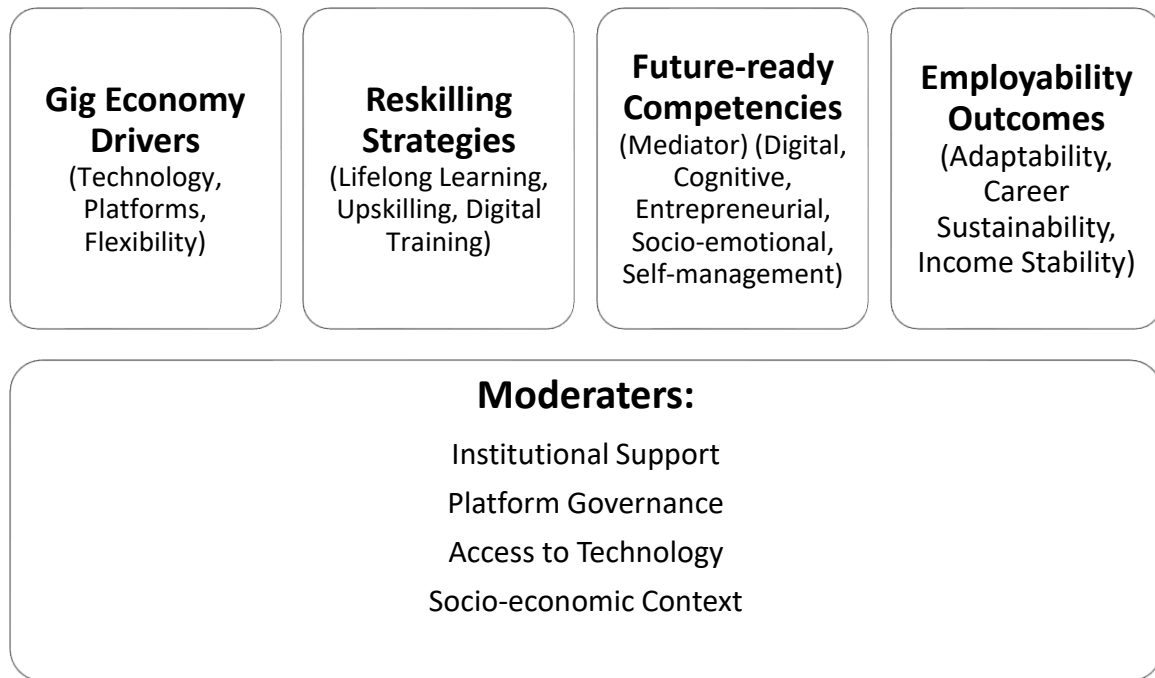


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how the evolving dynamics of the gig economy shape workforce outcomes through a structured pathway of reskilling and competency development. At its core, the framework follows a sequential logic beginning with gig economy drivers, progressing through reskilling strategies, leading to the development of future-ready competencies, and ultimately resulting in enhanced employability outcomes. This progression reflects the transformation of contemporary labour markets, where external technological and structural forces significantly influence how individuals build and sustain their careers.

Gig economy drivers such as technological advancement, digital platformization, automation, and increased workforce flexibility are conceptualized as exogenous forces that disrupt traditional employment models. These drivers create both opportunities and uncertainties, compelling individuals to continuously update their skill sets to remain relevant. Unlike conventional employment systems where organizations primarily managed employee development, the gig economy shifts this responsibility toward individuals, thereby intensifying the need for proactive and continuous learning.

Reskilling strategies function as the central mechanism within the framework, translating external disruptions into actionable learning processes. These strategies encompass lifelong learning, digital upskilling, micro-credentialing, and platform-based training, which enable individuals to respond effectively to changing job requirements. Rather than being a one-time intervention, reskilling is conceptualized as an ongoing, iterative process that supports career mobility and adaptability in a fluid labour market.

The framework further identifies future-ready competencies as a critical mediating layer that bridges reskilling efforts and employability outcomes. Competencies such as digital literacy, cognitive adaptability, entrepreneurial orientation, socio-emotional intelligence, and self-management are essential for navigating gig work environments characterized by autonomy, uncertainty, and competition. These competencies not only enhance task performance but also empower individuals to manage their careers independently, build networks, and seize emerging opportunities.

Finally, employability outcomes defined in terms of adaptability, career sustainability, and income stability represent the ultimate impact of this process. The framework emphasizes that employability in the gig

economy is not merely about securing work but about sustaining long-term relevance and resilience. Overall, the model integrates theoretical perspectives from human capital theory, boundaryless career theory, and lifelong learning to position reskilling as a strategic pathway that enables individuals to convert external labour market disruptions into sustainable career advantages.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design based on an integrative literature review to examine the relationship between the gig economy, reskilling, and employability. Instead of primary data collection, the study relies on secondary sources to develop a theoretically grounded framework. The integrative approach enables the synthesis of diverse perspectives and the identification of key patterns across interdisciplinary fields.

Relevant literature was collected from major academic databases, The selection focused on peer-reviewed journal articles and recent studies, along with key theoretical contributions. Sources were included based on their relevance to gig economy dynamics, skill development, and workforce adaptability. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify core constructs and relationships. The study organizes the literature around four key dimensions: gig economy drivers, reskilling strategies, future-ready competencies, and employability outcomes.

The research emphasizes theoretical integration rather than empirical validation, aiming to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework. This framework provides a foundation for future empirical research and contributes to understanding how reskilling supports workforce adaptability in the evolving gig economy.

5. Discussion

The findings of this conceptual study highlight that the gig economy is not merely a structural shift in employment but a transformative force that redefines how skills are developed, deployed, and sustained over time. The proposed framework demonstrates that gig economy drivers particularly technological disruption, digital platforms, and flexible work arrangements act as powerful external pressures that compel individuals to continuously adapt. Unlike traditional employment systems where organizations assumed primary responsibility for employee development, the gig economy redistributes this responsibility toward individuals, thereby intensifying the importance of self-directed learning and career ownership. This shift reflects a broader transition toward boundaryless careers, where stability is replaced by mobility, and employability depends on the ability to remain relevant across multiple work contexts.

A key insight emerging from the framework is the central role of reskilling as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than a one-time corrective measure. In the gig economy, reskilling is not simply about acquiring new technical skills but about developing the capacity to learn, unlearn, and relearn in response to rapidly changing demands. This reinforces the argument that lifelong learning is no longer optional but essential for career sustainability. However, the discussion also reveals a critical tension: while the gig economy creates opportunities for flexible work and income generation, it simultaneously exposes workers to skill obsolescence and income instability if reskilling efforts are insufficient or misaligned with market needs.

The mediating role of future-ready competencies further deepens the understanding of employability in this context. Competencies such as digital literacy, cognitive adaptability, entrepreneurial mindset, socio-emotional intelligence, and self-management emerge as crucial enablers that translate reskilling efforts into tangible outcomes. These competencies allow individuals to navigate platform-based work environments, manage uncertainty, and sustain productivity without traditional organizational support. Importantly, the framework suggests that employability is no longer defined solely by job acquisition but by long-term career resilience, adaptability, and the ability to generate continuous work opportunities.

At the same time, the inclusion of moderating factors such as institutional support, platform governance, access to technology, and socio-economic context introduces a critical layer of complexity. These factors influence the extent to which individuals can effectively engage in reskilling and benefit from the gig

economy. For instance, unequal access to digital infrastructure or learning resources can exacerbate existing inequalities, limiting the participation of certain groups. Similarly, platform governance mechanisms, including algorithmic control and rating systems, may constrain worker autonomy despite the perceived flexibility of gig work. This highlights that reskilling alone is not sufficient; supportive ecosystems and fair institutional frameworks are equally necessary to ensure inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

Overall, the discussion underscores that the gig economy presents both opportunities and challenges, and its long-term viability depends on how effectively individuals, organizations, and policymakers respond to evolving skill demands. By positioning reskilling as a strategic and continuous process, the study emphasizes the need for a proactive approach to workforce development one that integrates skill acquisition with competency building and is supported by enabling institutional structures.

5.2 Implications

The proposed framework carries significant implications for individuals, organizations, policymakers, and educational institutions by reframing reskilling as a strategic necessity in the evolving gig economy. For individuals, the study underscores the importance of adopting a proactive, self-directed approach to career development. In a labour market characterized by uncertainty and short-term engagements, workers can no longer rely on organizational career paths; instead, they must continuously invest in building future-ready competencies such as digital literacy, adaptability, and self-management. This implies a shift in mindset from job security to skill security, where long-term employability depends on the ability to learn, unlearn, and realign skills with market demands.

For organizations, the findings suggest a need to rethink traditional human resource strategies and extend their focus beyond permanent employees to include gig and contract workers. As firms increasingly rely on platform-based and contingent labour, investing in reskilling initiatives, digital training programs, and inclusive talent development systems becomes essential for maintaining productivity and innovation. Organizations that support skill development even for non-traditional workers can build a more agile and resilient workforce, while also enhancing their employer brand in a competitive talent ecosystem. Moreover, integrating learning platforms and micro-credentialing systems into organizational practices can help bridge skill gaps and ensure alignment with evolving technological requirements.

From a policy perspective, the framework highlights the urgent need for supportive institutional mechanisms that facilitate equitable access to reskilling opportunities. Governments and regulatory bodies must play a critical role in designing policies that promote lifelong learning, digital inclusion, and workforce protection in the gig economy. This includes investing in digital infrastructure, subsidizing skill development programs, and establishing fair platform governance to address issues such as job insecurity and income volatility. Without such interventions, the benefits of the gig economy may remain unevenly distributed, potentially widening socio-economic disparities.

Educational institutions also face a crucial mandate to redesign curricula and learning systems to align with the demands of the gig economy. Traditional education models that emphasize static knowledge must evolve toward competency-based, flexible, and lifelong learning frameworks. Incorporating interdisciplinary skills, experiential learning, and digital competencies into academic programs can better prepare students for dynamic and non-linear career paths. Furthermore, collaboration between academia, industry, and technology platforms can foster more relevant and responsive skill development ecosystems.

Overall, the implications of this study emphasize that successfully navigating the gig economy requires a coordinated effort across multiple stakeholders. By aligning individual capabilities, organizational practices, policy frameworks, and educational systems, it is possible to create a more inclusive, adaptive, and future-ready workforce.

6. Conclusion

This conceptual paper underscores that the rise of the gig economy represents a fundamental transformation in the nature of work, requiring a reorientation of how employability and career sustainability are understood. By integrating perspectives from human capital theory, boundaryless career theory, and lifelong learning, the study develops a comprehensive framework that links gig economy drivers with reskilling strategies, future-ready competencies, and employability outcomes. The analysis highlights that technological disruption, platformization, and flexible work arrangements are not only reshaping job structures but also redefining the skills required to participate effectively in the labour market.

A central conclusion of the study is that reskilling must be viewed as a continuous, strategic process rather than a reactive response to job displacement. In the gig economy, where work is fragmented and dynamic, individuals must actively engage in lifelong learning to remain competitive and resilient. The identification of future-ready competencies such as digital literacy, cognitive adaptability, entrepreneurial mindset, socio-emotional skills, and self-management demonstrates that employability extends beyond technical expertise to encompass broader capabilities that enable individuals to navigate uncertainty and manage their own career trajectories.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes that employability in the gig economy is multidimensional, encompassing not only access to work but also long-term adaptability, income stability, and career sustainability. However, the effectiveness of reskilling efforts is influenced by moderating factors such as institutional support, access to technology, and platform governance, which can either enable or constrain workforce outcomes. This highlights the need for a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem to ensure that the benefits of the gig economy are widely shared.

In conclusion, the paper contributes to the evolving discourse on the future of work by positioning reskilling as a critical pathway linking labour market disruptions to sustainable career outcomes. It provides a foundation for future empirical research and offers valuable insights for policymakers, organizations, and educators seeking to build a resilient and future-ready workforce in an increasingly dynamic and uncertain employment landscape.

7. Future Research Directions

To advance the understanding of reskilling in the gig economy, future research should move beyond conceptual exploration toward empirical validation and deeper contextual analysis. The following directions provide a structured agenda for scholars:

7.1 Empirical Validation of the Conceptual Framework

Future studies should test the proposed relationships using quantitative methods such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) or regression analysis. Empirical validation will help establish the strength and significance of linkages between gig economy drivers, reskilling strategies, competencies, and employability outcomes.

7.2 Longitudinal Studies on Skill Development

There is a need for longitudinal research to examine how reskilling and competency development evolve over time. Such studies can provide insights into whether continuous learning leads to sustained employability and career stability in the gig economy.

7.3 Role of Platform Governance and Algorithmic Management

Future research should explore how platform policies, rating systems, and algorithmic controls influence worker autonomy, motivation, and access to opportunities. This can help in understanding the structural constraints within gig work environments.

7.4 Cross-Cultural and Contextual Comparisons

Comparative studies across developed and developing economies can reveal how socio-economic factors, digital infrastructure, and policy frameworks shape reskilling opportunities and gig work experiences.

7.5 Impact of Emerging Technologies

With the rise of artificial intelligence, automation, and blockchain, future research should investigate how these technologies further transform skill requirements and create new forms of gig work.

7.6 Inclusion and Equity in Reskilling Opportunities

Scholars should examine issues related to digital divide, gender disparities, and access to education to understand whether reskilling initiatives are inclusive or reinforce existing inequalities.

7.7 Psychological and Behavioural Dimensions

Future studies can explore the role of motivation, resilience, career identity, and self-efficacy in shaping individuals' ability to engage in continuous reskilling and succeed in gig work.

7.8 Effectiveness of Learning Models and Interventions

Research is needed to evaluate different reskilling approaches, such as online learning platforms, micro-credentials, and employer-supported training programs, to identify best practices for skill development. Overall, future research should adopt interdisciplinary and multi-method approaches to build a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how reskilling can support sustainable employability in the rapidly evolving gig economy.

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