

Empowering Youth through the Gig Economy: An Analysis of Opportunities, Challenges, and Pathways to Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

The gig economy has become a critical component of modern labour markets, offering young people unique opportunities for income generation and entrepreneurial skill development. This study investigates the gig economy's dual role as both a platform for youth empowerment and a source of financial and job insecurity. Utilizing secondary data from recent academic studies, industry reports, and policy analyses, this research examines the opportunities presented by gig work, such as flexibility, low entry barriers, and skill diversification, alongside the challenges of income instability, limited benefits, and career growth constraints. Findings highlight that while gig work can foster entrepreneurial mindsets by emphasising self-management and adaptability, structural limitations may inhibit long-term business sustainability for young gig workers. The study recommends targeted policy interventions, university institutional support, and enhanced platform features to mitigate the sector's challenges. This research contributes to understanding how the gig economy can be optimized to support sustainable youth entrepreneurship and inclusive economic growth.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, GIG economy, youth empowerment, financial stability

1. Introduction

In recent years, the gig economy has emerged as a transformative force, reshaping traditional employment paradigms and offering unprecedented opportunities for young individuals. Characterized by short-term contracts and freelance work, this economic landscape allows youth to leverage their skills and creativity in innovative ways, often circumventing the constraints of conventional job markets. The rise of digital platforms has not only facilitated access to a plethora of gig opportunities but has also encouraged the development of entrepreneurial mindsets among young workers (Hanafi, 2023). As these individuals navigate diverse fields from ride-sharing to graphic design, they encounter a spectrum of experiences that foster adaptability and resilience. However, while the gig economy presents significant prospects for personal and professional growth, it is essential to critically examine its inherent challenges, including job insecurity and lack of benefits. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to empowering youth in this evolving economy, ensuring they can maximize their potential while mitigating risks.

The gig economy, characterized by short-term, flexible work engagements and often mediated through digital platforms, has rapidly transformed labor markets worldwide. This economic model, supported by the rise of digital technology, is particularly appealing to younger demographics, offering them a dynamic entry into the workforce and a potential springboard toward entrepreneurship (Smith et al., 2021). As youth increasingly face challenges in securing traditional employment, the gig economy offers them alternative income opportunities and flexibility, elements crucial for those seeking to gain financial independence and develop entrepreneurial skills (Sundararajan, 2016).

However, the flexibility and autonomy associated with gig work also come with significant challenges. Income instability, lack of job security, and limited access to traditional employment benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans are just a few of the trade-offs. This dual nature of the gig economy poses unique implications for young people, who may find it both a source of empowerment and a potential source of financial vulnerability (Friedman, 2014). Existing research has largely examined gig work's economic impacts, but there is a need to explore its effects on youth as they navigate early career decisions and weigh the potential of gig work as a pathway to sustainable entrepreneurship.

In examining the gig economy's influence on youth, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent does the gig economy serve as a viable entrepreneurial pathway for young people? What opportunities and barriers do they encounter within this economic model? The study will further explore how the gig economy contributes to developing entrepreneurial skills and resilience among youth, especially in contexts with limited access to traditional employment pathways (Nor, Hanafi & Saidatul, 2023).

1.1 Overview of the Gig Economy and its Relevance to Youth Empowerment

Emerging as a transformative force in the labour market, the gig economy offers young individuals unprecedented access to flexible employment opportunities. This shift allows youth to engage in various roles ranging from freelance graphic design to app-based ridesharing, catering to their diverse skills and interests. By participating in the gig economy, young workers gain essential real-world experiences that build their professional networks and enhance their employability. Moreover, the digital platforms facilitating these gigs enable youth to monetize their talents in ways that traditional employment often does not allow, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit among millennials and Gen Z. However, this sector is not without its challenges; issues surrounding job security, income instability, and a lack of benefits can impede the very empowerment it promises. Ultimately, understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies that ensure the gig economy becomes a sustainable pathway for youth empowerment and entrepreneurship (Christabel Dadzie et al., 2020).

1.2 Research Aim

This study aims to examine the role of the gig economy in empowering youth by providing opportunities, addressing challenges, and fostering pathways to entrepreneurship. Specifically, it seeks to understand how the gig economy contributes to the entrepreneurial aspirations and skill development of young people.

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To analyse the opportunities the gig economy provides to youth for financial independence and skill development.
- ii. To identify the challenges young gig workers face, including income stability, job security, and access to traditional employment benefits.

- iii. To investigate how participation in the gig economy influences youth aspirations for entrepreneurship.
- iv. To provide recommendations on how the gig economy can be optimized to better support young entrepreneurs.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What opportunities does the gig economy offer youth, particularly in income generation, flexibility, and skill acquisition?
- ii. What are the main challenges faced by young people engaging in gig work, and how do these impact their career goals?
- iii. How does participation in the gig economy influence young people's aspirations and readiness for entrepreneurship?
- iv. What strategies or policy changes could enhance the gig economy's role in supporting young entrepreneurs?

2. Literature Review

The gig economy, comprising short-term, flexible work facilitated primarily through digital platforms, has emerged as a significant segment of the global labour market. This sector, encompassing a wide range of jobs from ride-sharing to freelance design, offers unique opportunities and challenges for young workers. As an increasingly vital pathway for financial independence and entrepreneurial development, especially for youth, the gig economy has garnered extensive scholarly interest (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). This literature review explores the gig economy's influence on youth, focusing on the opportunities it presents, the challenges it poses, and its potential as a pathway to entrepreneurship.

2.1 How Gig Work Supports Youth Aspirations

The gig economy offers young people flexible work arrangements and income opportunities often absent in traditional employment. Studies show that this flexibility is particularly appealing, allowing youth to balance work with their education, family commitments, and personal interests (Stewart & Stanford, 2017). Additionally, gig platforms enable them to develop a diverse skill set, including project management, time management, and digital literacy (De Stefano, 2015). These skills are vital for fostering autonomy and building competencies as they enter the workforce.

For many young individuals, especially those in economically constrained environments, the gig economy provides an accessible entry point into paid work (Pesole et al., 2018). Its low entry barriers mean that youth can earn income without requiring extensive credentials or experience, which are common hurdles in traditional jobs. This accessibility allows them to gain valuable work experience, laying the groundwork for future entrepreneurial endeavours (Friedman, 2014).

Young people's aspirations increasingly emphasize flexibility and autonomy, which the gig economy effectively supports. By allowing them to design their schedules and select projects, gig work facilitates personal growth and career exploration. It also reduces the pressures associated with conventional employment. Furthermore, engaging in gig work often leads to significant opportunities for skill acquisition and entrepreneurship. Research indicates that platform cooperatives can help mitigate some of the risks associated with gig work, providing a sustainable pathway to entrepreneurship and alleviating precarious conditions (Ric Kolenda, 2024). This evolving landscape is especially relevant in low- and middle-income countries,

where the digital labor market is expanding, enabling youth to leverage gig platforms for greater economic independence (Valentina Brailovskaya, 2023). Ultimately, this adaptability empowers young people to pursue their aspirations while navigating the complexities of the modern workforce.

2.2 Challenges Faced by Youth in the Gig Economy

Despite its appeal, the gig economy also poses significant challenges for young workers. One of the primary concerns is income instability. Unlike traditional jobs, where fixed wages and job security provide financial predictability, gig workers face highly variable income levels that fluctuate based on demand, platform policies, and individual performance (Berg, Furrer, Harmon, Rani, & Silberman, 2018). For young people without financial safety nets, this unpredictability can be a source of significant stress, affecting their long-term economic stability (Bajwa et al., 2018).

Additionally, the lack of access to benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and retirement savings is a notable disadvantage of gig work (Woodcock & Graham, 2020). Young people engaged in gig work are often excluded from traditional safety nets, leaving them financially vulnerable. This lack of support exacerbates the precarity of gig work and limits youth's ability to save, invest, and plan for their futures, impacting their potential transition to sustainable entrepreneurship (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020). Navigating the gig economy presents numerous hurdles for the youth, significantly impacting their potential for economic empowerment. A primary challenge involves the accessibility of resources; many young workers lack the financial means to invest in the necessary technology, such as smartphones and internet connectivity, that are essential for thriving in online platforms. As highlighted, some youths misused SM due to negative perceptions while others failed to afford to buy smartphones or pay for the internet (David J. Manyerere, 2021). Additionally, the volatility inherent in gig work exacerbates job insecurity, leaving many young gig workers without a steady income or benefits typically associated with traditional employment. The disparity in opportunities across different sectors, especially in the wake of disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, further complicates their quest for stability. Therefore, while the gig economy offers diverse opportunities, it also underscores the urgent need for supportive frameworks to address these challenges effectively.

2.3 Job Insecurity and Lack of Benefits: Navigating the Risks of Gig Work

As the gig economy continues to expand, job insecurity and the absence of benefits have emerged as critical concerns for many young workers navigating this landscape. Unlike traditional employment, gig work often lacks the safety nets typically associated with full-time jobs, such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave. This precarious nature is particularly pronounced among low-capital, location-based digital gig workers in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), where the absence of a social safety net amplifies vulnerability to financial instability and health risks (Valentina Brailovskaya, 2023). Furthermore, in the UK, gig couriers experience a significant degree of uncertainty regarding their employment status, which complicates their access to essential rights and protections (Jack Warner, 2023). This environment fosters a constant balancing act between the flexibility that gig work offers and the looming spectre of insecurity, underscoring the need for systemic reforms that can empower gig workers while mitigating risks.

2.4 Pathways to Entrepreneurship through Gig Work

The gig economy presents a dual-edged sword, offering distinct pathways to entrepreneurship while simultaneously exposing young workers to precarious conditions. As highlighted in current research, platform cooperatives can mitigate the inherent risks of gig work by fostering

collaborative environments that empower individuals to retain a greater share of profits and decision-making power (Ric Kolenda, 2024). This approach not only reduces the financial uncertainties often associated with self-employment but also cultivates a sense of community, which can enhance motivation and skill development among youth. Moreover, as the workforce landscape evolves, effective policies must be implemented to bridge the gap between gig work and sustainable career advancement. The evidence suggests that supporting programs designed for youth engagement in the workforce will not only address immediate economic challenges but also lay a strong foundation for long-term economic mobility and resilience (Shayne Spaulding et al., 2024). Thus, navigating these complexities is essential for empowering young entrepreneurs. The potential of the gig economy to foster entrepreneurship among youth is widely debated. Scholars argue that the gig economy, by its nature, cultivates a set of entrepreneurial skills among young workers, such as adaptability, risk-taking, and resilience (Sundararajan, 2016). Engagement in gig work requires individuals to manage their schedules, secure clients, and deliver consistent results—skills closely aligned with entrepreneurial competencies (Ticona, Mateescu, & Rosenblat, 2018). For youth interested in business ownership, the gig economy serves as a form of “self-employment lite,” offering them a taste of entrepreneurship without the full commitment of launching a standalone business (Doe, 2021).

However, research also suggests that while gig work may help develop entrepreneurial skills, it does not necessarily translate to sustainable entrepreneurship. Some studies highlight that gig work, due to its financial volatility and lack of growth opportunities, can trap young people in a cycle of low-paid, unskilled work rather than leading them to scalable business opportunities (Hanafi & Ahmad, 2021). This dichotomy indicates that while gig work can spark an entrepreneurial mindset, its structural limitations may inhibit young people from advancing to self-sustaining entrepreneurial ventures.

2.5 Policy Implications and Future Directions

Policy frameworks surrounding the gig economy remain a topic of significant interest in academic and governmental circles. Some countries have enacted policies aimed at protecting gig workers' rights, such as income minimums and worker classification laws, which aim to reduce the vulnerabilities faced by gig workers (Collier, Dubal, & Carter, 2019). Such regulations are crucial in safeguarding young gig workers, who are often new to the workforce and may lack knowledge about their rights and available protections. Research also suggests that tailored policies can enhance the gig economy's role in youth entrepreneurship by offering subsidies, training programs, and tax incentives that encourage young gig workers to transition into business owners (Pesole et al., 2018). Recognizing the gig economy as a legitimate, valuable sector for youth employment could contribute to a more resilient labour market and foster entrepreneurial growth among young people.

The gig economy presents a complex, dual-sided role for youth. While it offers flexibility and a pathway to financial independence, it also exposes young workers to income volatility and limited support structures. The literature underscores that the gig economy holds significant potential to empower youth as budding entrepreneurs, but achieving this potential may require strategic support from both policymakers and platform operators. As the gig economy continues to evolve, further research is needed to explore how targeted policies and industry innovations can mitigate gig work's challenges and enhance its role in supporting young entrepreneurs.

3. Research Methodology

This section details the methodological framework employed to investigate entrepreneurship among students in private universities in northern Malaysia. The research employs a quantitative approach, focusing on statistically measurable factors that influence student entrepreneurship.

3.1 Research Approach

This research piece aims to understand the financial lives of workers in the on-demand gig economy, specifically how they fare on certain financial health metrics, the financial behaviors they demonstrate, and the financial products they use (or not use). The research also looks into the employment preferences and concerns of workers in the gig economy and how that relates to their financial health. These workers are typically temporary workers without any long-term contracts with organizations.

The team conducted a desk review of publications and government documents relevant to platform, sharing, and gig economies worldwide and relevant to Malaysia. Data collection involved structured surveys distributed to participants via email and WhatsApp, with follow-up reminders to ensure a high response rate. The survey instrument consisted of closed-ended questions designed to assess students' entrepreneurial motivations, perceived barriers, access to resources, and levels of engagement with institutional support systems. In addition to surveys, select interviews and focus groups were conducted to gather in-depth insights, supplementing the quantitative data with qualitative perspectives that reveal students' personal experiences and challenges in entrepreneurship.

The team undertook non-probability sampling, specifically voluntary sampling owing to partner preference and COVID-19 imposed constraints. Some selection bias is, therefore, inevitable. We caution also against extrapolating these findings to gig workers on other platforms or outside of Malaysia and China. That being said, the convergence of findings across these platforms presents interesting observations that could underlie gig work in general.

4. Results and Discussion

Research on Malaysia's gig economy highlights both its rapid growth and unique challenges. Around 26% of Malaysia's workforce, roughly four million people, participate in gig roles, including freelancers, ride-hailing drivers, and delivery personnel. The sector has seen especially strong growth since COVID-19, as flexible work models appeal to various demographics, such as students and parents. Yet, financial stability and access to worker protections remain major concerns for gig workers, as these roles often lack social security and consistent income.

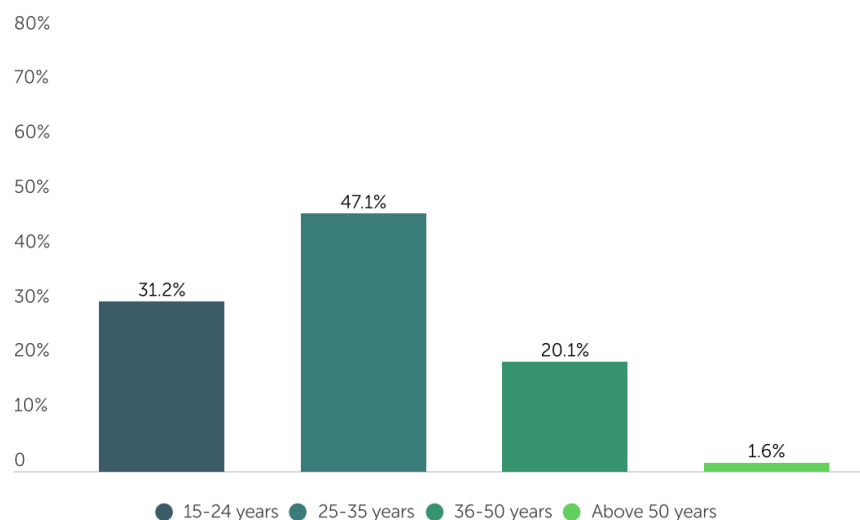
Studies, such as those by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), reveal that gig workers in Malaysia often experience financial challenges due to the irregularity of gig income. Platforms like GoGet and FastJobs have emerged to connect workers with employers, helping gig workers find more stable opportunities while enabling more flexible work schedules. FastJobs' platform "FastGig," for instance, supports this flexibility with verified job postings and scheduling tools to assist gig workers in maintaining multiple short-term assignments. However, these roles still lack substantial worker protections, and efforts to regulate the sector are being discussed under Malaysia's 12th Malaysia Plan, focusing on policies to enhance the welfare of gig workers.

4.1 The Allure Of The Gig Economy

The gig economy boomed within the past decade, largely because of the ubiquitous usage of smartphones, a surging demand for on-demand services, and the billions of dollars of venture capital money invested in companies within this industry. The question the gig economy faces in the coming years isn't whether it will grow, but by how much it will grow as the world rebounds from COVID-19. The gig economy, at least in its modern 21st-century iteration, exists because of technology both in Asia and around the world. There are countless advantages to a tech-powered gig economy. It drives market efficiencies in record time, allowing gig workers to make an income while enjoying the flexibility of hours and increased autonomy. Gig workers are also able to take on gigs from different platforms depending on where gigs might be available and which ones offer a compelling mix of compensation and work experience.

Furthermore, many gig workers have jobs or businesses elsewhere and can supplement their primary source of income through gig work. The gig economy is also inherently inclusive, allowing the participation of groups that traditional economies might leave out such as women, youth, and the elderly. For all its perks, the nature of labour and income in the gig economy poses trade-offs for gig workers. While the whole world is reeling under the force of the pandemic, with many of them losing their jobs and seeing their savings erode, gig workers could face unique challenges. This would require tailored and innovative solutions that may not currently exist to improve gig workers' financial health and overall financial goals.

Figure 1: Profile of Respondents



Source: United Nations Capital Development Fund. (2022, April 4). *The gig economy and financial health: A snapshot of Malaysia and China*. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.unctd.org>

The bar chart in Figure 1 above illustrates the distribution of gig economy participants across various age groups, highlighting the demographic trends within this sector. The largest proportion of gig workers falls within the 25–35 age range, accounting for 47.1% of participants. This statistic suggests that the gig economy holds a particular appeal for young adults, likely due to its flexibility, accessible entry points, and the opportunity it provides to explore diverse work experiences. Many individuals in this age group are likely seeking alternatives to traditional employment, perhaps to maintain a better work-life balance, supplement income, or develop entrepreneurial skills.

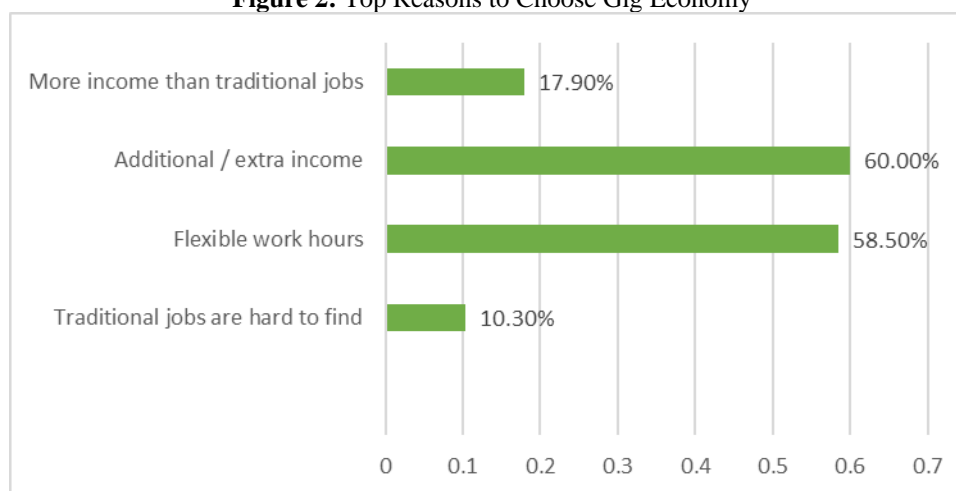
The second-largest group, comprising 31.2% of participants, is the 15–24 age bracket. This substantial representation indicates that a significant number of young people, including recent school leavers and university students, are involved in gig work. For this age group, gig employment may offer a practical means to gain work experience, achieve financial independence, or support studies, especially as they may face limited opportunities in more conventional job markets. The 36–50 age range represents 20.1% of gig economy workers. Although smaller in comparison to younger groups, this proportion still shows a notable engagement among middle-aged adults. Many in this demographic may pursue gig work as a means of supplementary income or to attain greater autonomy over their schedules, aligning with family or personal responsibilities.

Finally, only 1.6% of gig workers are over 50 years old, the smallest demographic represented. This low participation rate among older individuals could be attributed to a range of factors, including a preference for the stability and familiarity of traditional employment, or potentially, lower digital literacy, which might limit their access to the predominantly digital gig economy. Overall, the data highlights a strong skew towards younger demographics within the gig economy, with engagement decreasing substantially among older age groups. This trend underscores the gig economy's appeal to younger individuals while raising questions about barriers or preferences that may influence participation among older workers.

4.2 Reasons to Choose Gig Economy

The study conducted on the gig economy reveals a range of pivotal factors that significantly influence individuals' decisions to engage with this alternative labour market. These determinants are multifaceted, encompassing both economic and social dimensions that reflect the changing landscape of work in contemporary society. Understanding these factors is critical for stakeholders aiming to navigate and harness the potential of the gig economy effectively.

Figure 2: Top Reasons to Choose Gig Economy



Source: United Nations Capital Development Fund. (2022, April 4). *The gig economy and financial health: A snapshot of Malaysia and China*. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.uncdf.org>

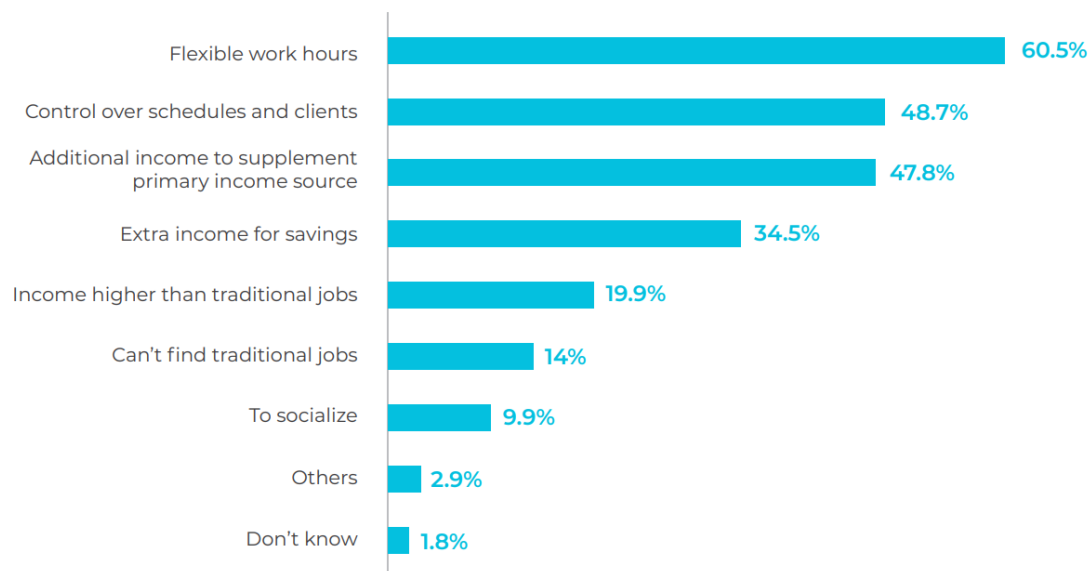
Figure 2 above illustrates the primary motivations driving individuals to engage in Malaysia's gig economy, based on a recent survey of gig workers. This data provides valuable insights

into the factors that attract workers to gig roles and the implications for both workers and policymakers.

Flexible Work Hours stand out as the most prominent motivator for gig work, with 60.5% of respondents identifying flexibility as their primary reason for participation. This flexibility empowers workers to customize their schedules to accommodate personal commitments, such as education, childcare, or additional employment. For many, the opportunity to decide when and how much to work provides a significant advantage over traditional 9-to-5 jobs, ultimately offering a better work-life balance and the ability to juggle multiple responsibilities concurrently. Following closely is Control over Schedules and Clients, noted by 48.7% of gig workers. This autonomy allows individuals to choose projects or clients that resonate with their skills and interests, resulting in greater job satisfaction and engagement. The ability to manage one's workload and select assignments fosters a sense of ownership and professional fulfillment, which is often absent in conventional employment environments.

Supplementary income is a major motivator for gig workers, with 47.8% using it to boost their primary earnings and enhance financial stability without taking on a second full-time job. This additional income helps with living expenses, debt repayment, and future savings, making it a key element of long-term financial planning. Furthermore, 34.5% of respondents view gig work as a way to save for the future. Other motivations include 19.9% aiming for higher earnings than traditional jobs and 14% working out of necessity due to unemployment. Additionally, 9.9% appreciate the social interaction that gig work provides, aiding in job satisfaction and reducing feelings of isolation.

Figure 3: Reasons gig workers choose the gig economy in the ride-hailing/food-delivery industry in Malaysia



Source: United Nations Capital Development Fund. (2022, April 4). *The gig economy and financial health: A snapshot of Malaysia and China*. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.uncdf.org>

The figure underscores that the gig economy in Malaysia is primarily driven by the desire for flexible work arrangements and greater control over one's professional life. While gig work offers substantial benefits such as flexibility, supplementary income, and financial security, it also highlights the need for policies that support gig workers' financial stability and access to

traditional employment benefits. Understanding these motivations is essential for policymakers and businesses to create a balanced and supportive gig economy that meets the needs of modern workers while ensuring their economic well-being.

In Figure 2 above, the gig economy has emerged as a critical component of modern labor markets, reshaping how people view employment and income generation. Gig work encompasses a variety of short-term, freelance, or contract-based jobs, often facilitated through digital platforms like ride-hailing apps, food delivery services, and freelance marketplaces. In Malaysia, the gig economy has rapidly grown, attracting diverse demographics who seek alternative forms of work. A survey of gig workers reveals a range of motivations for engaging in this kind of employment, with flexibility and supplementary income being the most prominent. This essay explores these motivations and the implications for gig workers and policymakers.

A significant motivation for gig workers in Malaysia is the flexibility offered by such jobs, with approximately 60.5% of respondents indicating that flexible work hours are the main reason they choose gig work. Unlike traditional nine-to-five roles, gig work allows individuals to set their own schedules, making it an attractive option for those with other responsibilities. For example, students, parents, or caregivers may find it challenging to commit to full-time positions but can benefit from the flexibility of gig work, which allows them to balance employment with other life demands. This flexibility also appeals to those who prioritize personal autonomy and prefer to avoid the structured environment of traditional employment. In this regard, the gig economy enables a work-life balance that is difficult to achieve in conventional roles, which often come with rigid schedules and long hours.

Another key factor driving participation in the gig economy is the control over schedules and clients, cited by 48.7% of survey respondents. Gig workers can choose which projects or clients to take on, giving them a degree of autonomy not usually available in traditional jobs. This control allows workers to tailor their work to their personal skills, interests, and preferences, which can enhance job satisfaction. For instance, freelancers in creative fields, like graphic design or content writing, often have the freedom to choose projects that align with their skills and passion. This autonomy appeals to those who value self-direction and find fulfillment in being able to dictate their professional paths.

The gig economy is also a popular choice for people seeking additional income to supplement their primary earnings, with 47.8% of respondents indicating this as a major motivator. Many individuals view gig work as a way to boost their financial security without committing to a second full-time job. This supplemental income can be crucial for individuals trying to meet rising living costs or save for future expenses. For example, a person with a stable but low-paying full-time job may rely on gig work to afford a better quality of life or make ends meet. In this way, the gig economy serves as a financial buffer, offering people more flexibility to manage economic uncertainties.

For a considerable portion of gig workers (34.5%), the income generated from gig work is used for savings. This suggests that many people engage in gig work not just for immediate financial needs but as part of a long-term financial strategy. Savings are essential for individuals to manage unforeseen expenses, plan for retirement, or achieve financial independence. The gig economy thus supports the financial health of workers by providing a means to accumulate savings without relying solely on traditional employment.

Interestingly, a smaller percentage of workers (19.9%) cited income that is higher than traditional jobs as a motivation. This reveals that while some gig workers may earn a substantial income, this is not the norm. Certain high-demand skills, such as specialized technical expertise or creative abilities, can allow some workers to command higher rates. However, for the majority, gig work is not associated with high earnings compared to traditional employment, which generally provides a stable and often higher salary along with benefits like health insurance and retirement contributions. Thus, while the gig economy can be lucrative for those with niche skills, it is not typically a high-income alternative to conventional jobs.

For some, the gig economy is a necessity, with 14% of respondents indicating they engage in gig work due to the inability to find traditional jobs. This group often includes individuals facing barriers to full-time employment. While the gig economy offers opportunities for those marginalized in the job market, reliance on it can lead to financial instability, as gig jobs typically lack benefits and job security.

A small portion of gig workers (9.9%) engage in these jobs for social interaction. While this is not a primary motivator, it suggests that for some individuals, gig work offers an opportunity to connect with others. This may be more relevant in gig roles that involve direct interaction, such as ride-sharing or delivery services, where workers can have brief social interactions with customers. Such roles may help reduce feelings of isolation, especially for those who work independently or from home. The survey also included minor categories, with 2.9% selecting "Others" and 1.8% stating "Don't know" as their motivation for gig work. These responses highlight that while the main motivations for gig work are clear, some workers may have unique or less-defined reasons for participating in the gig economy.

The gig economy in Malaysia is driven by flexibility, autonomy, and supplemental income. While it offers advantages like schedule control, it also presents challenges in financial stability and lack of traditional benefits. Policymakers should implement protections similar to traditional employment, ensuring access to social security and healthcare. Balancing flexibility with necessary safeguards is crucial as the gig economy grows.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The gig economy has emerged as a significant driver of youth employment and skill acquisition, offering young people a flexible platform for income generation and entrepreneurial exploration. This study examined the gig economy's dual role as both an opportunity and a challenge for youth, highlighting its potential to empower young individuals while also exposing them to income volatility, limited benefits, and constrained growth opportunities. Despite these challenges, gig work enables young people to develop essential entrepreneurial skills such as time management, self-discipline, and client negotiation that are valuable in launching and sustaining entrepreneurial ventures.

The gig economy has undeniably established itself as a transformative force within the labor market, providing unique opportunities for youth to engage in flexible work that facilitates both income generation and skill acquisition. This study explored the multifaceted impact of the gig economy on young people, particularly its potential to foster entrepreneurial ambition while also exposing youth to notable challenges. While the gig economy offers an accessible route to financial independence and skill development, the inherent volatility, absence of benefits, and limited career progression within gig work present substantial obstacles for those seeking

sustainable entrepreneurship. Addressing these issues and enhancing the gig economy's role as a pathway to entrepreneurship requires deliberate interventions by educational institutions, industry leaders, and policymakers.

5.1 Policy and Institutional Implications

Private universities have a significant role to play in shaping the entrepreneurial potential of youth who engage in gig work. A more structured approach to supporting these students can bridge the gap between short-term gig work and sustainable entrepreneurship. One key recommendation is the establishment of dedicated funding resources within universities, such as micro-grants and scholarships, to support student-led entrepreneurial initiatives. These funds could help youth who are engaged in gig work to transition into formalized entrepreneurial ventures by offering the initial financial support necessary to develop and test business ideas.

In addition to financial support, private universities should consider enhancing their curriculum to integrate practical, entrepreneurship-oriented training specifically tailored to the unique experiences of gig workers. By incorporating modules on business planning, digital marketing, client relations, and financial management into existing entrepreneurship programs, universities can better prepare students for the realities of running a business. These practical skills are essential for gig workers who aspire to turn their freelance experience into viable business ventures.

Moreover, improved access to markets and mentorship opportunities would greatly benefit young gig workers aiming for entrepreneurial growth. Universities could facilitate this by forming strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders, creating pathways for students to engage with potential clients, mentors, and business networks. These collaborations would enable student entrepreneurs to gain real-world experience, build a professional network, and acquire a broader understanding of market dynamics, thus making the transition from gig work to business ownership more feasible.

5.1 Platform and Policy Recommendations

Beyond institutional support, gig economy platforms themselves can play a proactive role in promoting youth empowerment and entrepreneurship. Platform providers are well-positioned to implement features that contribute to skill development and financial security among gig workers. For instance, offering voluntary training modules on business management, project organization, and professional development could empower gig workers to refine their skills. By incorporating these elements, platforms can contribute to building a more skilled and capable workforce prepared for entrepreneurial success.

Further, the absence of financial security and basic benefits in gig work is a substantial barrier to entrepreneurial aspirations. Gig platforms might address this by establishing income stabilization or emergency relief funds to support workers during periods of low demand. These resources could offer a financial buffer, helping young workers save or invest in future entrepreneurial projects. Additionally, creating opportunities for networking within the platform—such as virtual forums, events, or mentorship programs—could enhance gig workers' access to advice and partnerships, fostering a collaborative and supportive community that promotes entrepreneurial development.

From a policy perspective, government intervention is critical to ensure that young gig workers receive adequate protection and opportunities for long-term growth. Policymakers could consider establishing or encouraging shared social security funds for gig workers, which would offer essential benefits such as healthcare, retirement savings, and insurance. Such a fund would provide financial security, enabling young workers to engage in gig work with a safety net, thus empowering them to explore entrepreneurship without undue risk.

Additionally, tax incentives or grants targeted at gig workers who transition to formalized business ventures could encourage the growth of small enterprises founded by youth. These incentives would reduce the financial barriers associated with starting a business, making entrepreneurship a more attainable goal for gig workers. Recognizing gig work as a valuable part of the economy and supporting young people's entrepreneurial aspirations would contribute to more inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

5.2 Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, further research is necessary to deepen our understanding of the gig economy's long-term effects on youth career trajectories. Longitudinal studies could track gig workers over time, examining how their early experiences in the gig economy influence their professional development, financial stability, and entrepreneurial success. Such research would be instrumental in assessing the gig economy's role as a sustainable career pathway.

Another promising area for future investigation is sector-specific research on youth entrepreneurship within the gig economy. Analyzing different sectors, such as creative arts, technology, and service industries, could reveal distinct challenges and opportunities unique to each field, offering a nuanced understanding of how gig work supports or hinders entrepreneurship across various domains.

Research on institutional support programs, such as funding, mentorship, and practical training, is essential for helping universities and organizations assist gig-working youth with entrepreneurial aspirations. By evaluating the impact of these programs on students' outcomes, stakeholders can improve educational strategies and policies, fostering a more supportive environment for young entrepreneurs. While the gig economy provides flexibility for young people, maximizing its potential as a pathway to entrepreneurship requires targeted support and reforms. Strengthening institutional backing, enhancing platform features, and developing informed policies can empower youth in the gig economy to pursue sustainable and impactful entrepreneurial ventures.

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