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Digital Technology and Work Culture among Youth in the UAE: A Field Study

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Abstract

This research endeavors to explore the acceptance levels of digital work opportunities within a youth demographic, aiming to discern the underlying factors influencing their embrace or refusal of such opportunities from their own perspective. To accomplish these objectives, a purposive random sample comprising 177 unemployed individuals aged between 15 and 30, representing all seven emirates, was selected. The study employed a methodology rooted in "sample social survey" techniques. Results indicate a prevailing acceptance of digital work opportunities within the youth culture of the UAE. A key catalyst for this acceptance is identified as the acknowledgment that "digital technology has become the language of the current era," as expressed by 61.4% of the study sample. Conversely, reasons for rejecting digital work culture among certain participants' center around "difficulty and lack of training," cited by 50% of those who declined digital work opportunities. This study sheds light on the dynamic interplay between youth and evolving work landscapes in the context of development.

Keywords: *Digitization of Work, Sustainable Development, Value Change Theory, Practice Theory*

1- Introduction

Our current era is characterized by a knowledge explosion and rapid growth of information in all fields. Knowledge and information can now spread quickly, reaching anyone, anywhere, and at any time. The struggle in this era is to possess and organize accurate information and knowledge, which has become more important than the struggle for wealth and other resources. The possession of timely and accurate information equips individuals with the essential elements of power and control (Aljabr et al., 2020, p. 174). Referred to as "digital transformation," this phenomenon has evolved into the fundamental cornerstone from which all progress is initiated, representing the ultimate objective pursued by institutions worldwide, regardless of their developmental status. However, while most institutions in most countries around the world are moving towards this "digital transformation" influenced by the "digital technology" that has invaded and continues to invade the world, most of us ignore an important fact, which is that reinventing new work practices necessarily requires first re-shaping the prevailing "work culture," especially among new workers in the labor market. In other words, it must be ensured that the immigrant workforce has a work culture that accepts the immense technological development in the labor market today or possesses what can be called "digital work culture" (Enders et al., 2019, 4).

Therefore, the current study attempts to reveal the prevailing work culture among young

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people in Emirati society, as well as to identify the extent of acceptance of digital job opportunities among new entrants to the labor market, and the extent of the availability of a digital work culture. That can be compatible with the digital technology that has invaded the labor market, and its requirements. In an attempt to achieve the aspirations of the United Arab Emirates, as usual, and its endeavor to invest in strengthening its position in the field of "digital transformation", as well as investing in building a huge information infrastructure; to create an attractive environment for innovators and researchers in the field of advanced science, in terms of providing digital infrastructure and promoting the use of cloud computing; In order to achieve its ambitious development goals in the field of sustainable development, and considering that "digital technology" has become the language of present and future in the entire world not only at the level of the United Arab Emirates (Al-Dharas, 2022, 16).

2- Study's Problem & Questions

The problem of the study is determined in an attempt to answer the main question of the current study as follows:

To what extent do the youth sample in the UAE accept digital work culture?

Sub-questions emerging from this main question include:

1. Do the youth sample in the study accept digital work opportunities if available to them?
2. What are the reasons for accepting digital work opportunities from the perspective of the study participants?
3. What are the reasons for rejecting digital work opportunities from the perspective of the study participants?

3- Objectives

1. To identify the extent of acceptance of digital work opportunities among the youth sample if available to them.
2. To identify the reasons for accepting digital work opportunities from the perspective of the study participants.
3. To identify the reasons for rejecting digital work opportunities from the perspective of the study participants.
4. To provide practical recommendations that can benefit decision-makers in developing digital work culture among the youth, especially the new immigrant workforce in the UAE labor market.

4- Scientific and Practical Significance of the Study

a) Scientific Significance

The current study focuses on several new concepts, such as "digital work" and "digital work culture," which have been rarely used in Arab research literature, enriching theoretical knowledge in this field.

b) Practical significance

1. Identifying the digital shortcomings of the youth sample, if any, may help policymakers determine digital needs, including specific digital training programs that ensure the youth's contributions to the UAE's development process and achieving sustainable development.
2. The success of the current study in identifying the extent of acceptance of basic digital work skills may guide decision-makers to focus on youth who lack the appropriate skills for future digital work opportunities, increasing their integration and social participation and avoiding their social exclusion.
3. Identifying obstacles to digital work culture development among the youth in the UAE can contribute to enhancing the country's position in the field of "digital transformation," which, in turn, drives the utilization of digital work opportunities, helping achieve developmental goals and the ambitious vision of the "United Arab Emirates" in terms of strategies for the fourth industrial revolution, including artificial intelligence strategies.

5- The Theoretical and Research Basis of the Study

Concepts

a) Digital Technology

The term "digital technology" includes "all electronic tools, technological equipment, and resources that produce, process, or store information" (Anand, 2022).

Others have referred to "digital technology" as "relying on technology to reduce specific information related to a particular thing, such as images, sound, or text, into binary codes consisting of a string of zeros and ones" (Bolodani, 2015, 178).

We can find many examples of "digital technology" that directly or indirectly penetrate our daily interactions, including the uses of smartphones, e-books, digital currency, block chain, artificial intelligence, geographic websites, watches, music, and digital cameras (Johnson, 2021), (Goodman, 2022).

b) Work Culture

One of the simplest and clearest definitions of "culture" is provided by one of the modern sociologists "Robert Persatad," who appeared in the early 1960s, specifically in 1963, where he defines it as "that complex whole which includes everything we think, do, or possess as members of society" (Thompson et al., 1997, 9). Others indicate that "culture" is "all the social heritage of knowledge and behavior shared by a group of people in society" (Birukou et al., 2009, 3).

The concept of "work culture" refers to "a mixture of attitudes, relationships, habits, and other behavioral patterns acquired that direct individual towards achieving the primary goal of work" (Bhaduiy, 1991, 34), (Rusanen et al., 2012, 407-415), (Wearing, 2011, 534-540). "Work culture" also refers to "behaviors that support individuals' ideas and attitudes towards the principle of work" (Sinha, 2010, 50), (Williams, 2007, 572-593).

Theoretical Frameworks of the Study

Given the researcher's interest in benefiting from the ideas of those theories, he preferred to present the appropriate theoretical frameworks in the following table,

Table 1: Theoretical Frameworks.

Theory	Pioneers	Important Terms	The most important sayings or hypotheses related to the subject of the study
Value Change Theory	Ronald Engelhart	The hypothesis of "scarcity"	This hypothesis suggests that individuals' value priorities reflect prevailing socio-economic conditions (Allam, Etemad Muhammad, et al., 2007, 69-72).
		The hypothesis of "upbringing"	This hypothesis suggests that the more economically secure the subsequent generations during the years of upbringing, the more educated they become, and then they acquire the values of creativity, innovation and self-expression, and satisfy ambition and seriousness in working in their orientations, which Englehart called "post-material values", and over time the generational replacement process will lead to an increase in the number of adopters of these values globally (Allam, Etemad Muhammad, et al., 2007, 69-72).
Rational Choice Theory	Michelle Hechter	Rational behavior	Individuals are rational (adult) and adopt rational behaviors that are linked to the choices and preferences available to them that suit the conditions of the society around them (Elster, John, 2012, 313).
Practice Theory	Pierre Bourdieu	Habitus (sociocultural character),	This concept refers to all that the individual consists of preparations, behaviors, and lifestyle as a result of his social location and his influence on the social space surrounding him, and this concept, as it is clear, confirms the extent to which the individual is affected by the societal context in which he lives, and the extent to which this context affects the individual's acquisition of behaviors, lifestyles, and way of thinking.
		Field	It means "the social site in which the individual performs his job, and within which all forms of attitudes and interactions are organized", and therefore each "field" has its own structure determined by the movement of actors, and their relations within it is a concept of the individual's habits that he practices in his daily life, and allows him to act and think as a result of being affected by the structure of the "field".
		"Inclusion" or "social normalization"	For the habits of the individual that he practices in his daily life, and allows him to act, and think as a result of being affected by the structure of the "field", and also comes the concept of "reflexivity", which refers to the reflection of the qualities of the "field" on the behaviors and culture of individuals.
			(Allam, Etemad Muhammad, et al., 2007, 69-78), (Farid, 2006, 35-36), (El-Shazly, et al., 2005, 108)

6- Review of the Literature

Among the previous studies directly related to the study topic is the study conducted through the "World Government Summit," in partnership with "McKinsey & Company" (Enders et al., 2019), which found that digital transformation and automation will lead to a significant need for creating a supportive work culture for new entrants to the labor market who possess new technological skills.

Also, the study by (Oshan and Belkacem, 2019), which aimed to investigate the forms of young people's use of digital technology and the social impacts of these uses, including thinking about job opportunities, found that the transformations created by these technologies are not only scientific and technical but also social and anthropological.

Moreover, the study conducted by the "Cours-Ham Institute for Intellectual Leadership" in England (Clement, 2017), which concluded that there are types of skills necessary for scientific life and job opportunities, including digital technology skills, and the participants acknowledged a lack of technical knowledge related to programming, coding, analysis, or what is called "digital navigation skills."

Furthermore, the RAND Europe study (Dufour et al., 2017) found that digital technology may lead to social exclusion and recommended the need to step back, think about future challenges, and the opportunities offered by digital education to prepare the current society for the future, not only to meet the needs of the labor market but also to shape it.

The study of the British company "Ofcom" (Ofcom, 2014), which found that the increasing use of technology will ruin the current labor market and will continue to do so in the future under the name of the phenomenon of "digitization of work", which calls for preparing the younger generations to accept and prepare for digital job opportunities.

Additionally, the study by "Gartner Research" (Willis et al., 2014) predicted that one in three jobs would be transformed into software, automated systems, and smart machines by 2025, which requires upgrading the skills of the current and incoming workforce to adapt to an increasingly digital world and reduce the risk of creating a new phenomenon of "social exclusion."

General Comment on Previous Studies

Overall, the researcher benefited from previous studies in the procedural stage, including defining the procedural definition of "digital technology" and "work culture," and determining the appropriate data collection tools.

The researcher also used the previous studies to guide the methodological approach to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions.

The final benefit of the previous studies will be to compare their findings with the current study results.

7- Methodology:

1. Operational Definitions

a) Digital Technology

"digital technology" is operationally defined as the "familiarity and proficiency in essential digital skills required by individuals actively seeking digital job opportunities. This includes the practical utilization of scientific advancements embedded in smart devices and equipment." This operational definition aims to provide a clear and tangible framework for assessing and

measuring the level of competency and expertise related to digital technology among the participants in our study

b) Work Culture

c) "work culture" is operationally defined as "the social and cultural inclinations or priorities linked to work that young individuals typically gravitate towards when exploring various job opportunities." This procedural definition aims to elucidate the specific aspects of social and cultural factors influencing the preferences of young people in their pursuit of diverse employment options, offering a clear and practical framework for investigation and analysis within our study.

d) Youth

The researchers are operationally defined "youth" based on the "age" criterion as an accurate and tangible measure. Thus, the study adopted the definition of "Federal Youth Authority" in the United Arab Emirates, which was established in 2018 by the "Federal Cabinet." Specifically, the National Youth Strategy in the UAE defined "youth" as individuals aged between 15 and 35 years old (Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2022).

2. Methodology and Tools

a) Methodology

Given the descriptive nature of the study, it relied on the " sample social survey " method.

b) Tools

The field study primarily relied on a quantitative data collected by "The Electronic Questionnaire" after ensuring its reliability and validity.

Study Sample, Type, and Key Characteristics:

3. Sample

The "job-seeking youth" (the unemployed or new entrants to the labor market) aged between 15 and 35 years old, were identified as the primary unit of the current study. A purposive random sample of 177 individuals, representing the Emirati youth community, was selected, taking into consideration gender, age, place of residence, and educational level to represent all youth categories in the UAE society.

Study Sample Characteristics

The total study sample was 177 individuals from Emirati youth in all seven Emirates, representing all youth categories in the UAE society. The study used a quantitative approach by applying various statistical methods to analyze the field data collected through "the electronic questionnaire" and entered into SPSS statistical software. The data analysis plan included the following statistical analyses:

- Simple frequency tables for all questionnaire items.
- Using the Chi-Square Test to clarify the significance of differences between study sample responses.
- The distribution of the study sample according to the basic data and its key characteristics can be illustrated in Table (2).

Table 2: The Distribution of the Study Sample.

Sr No.	Sample Characteristics	Responses	Qty	%	Total	
					Qty	%
1	Gender	Male	119	67	177	100
		Female	58	33		
2	Age	Less than 20 years old	11	7	177	100
		From 20 to 29 years	68	38		
		From 30 to 35 years	97	55		
3	Place of Residence	Abu Dhabi	13	7	177	100
		Dubai	24	14		
		Sharjah	41	23		
		Ajman	36	20		
		Umm Al Quwain	25	14		
		Ras Al Khaimah	36	20		
		Fujairah	2	1		
4	Education Level	Illiterate	2	1	177	100
		Less than intermediate education	2	1		
		Intermediate or upper-intermediate education	55	31		
		Academic	118	67		

Regarding "gender", data from Table (2) reveals that the percentage of male youth in the study sample was high, reaching 67% of the total sample, while the percentage of female youth in the sample was 33% of the total sample.

These ratios are consistent with the male-to-female ratios in the UAE society, according to the results of the "Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center", which confirmed that the number of males exceeds the number of females in the UAE society, with the male population reaching 6,468,460 compared to 2,813,950 females according to the latest census of 2020 (Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2022). Fig (1) illustrates the distribution of the study sample by gender.

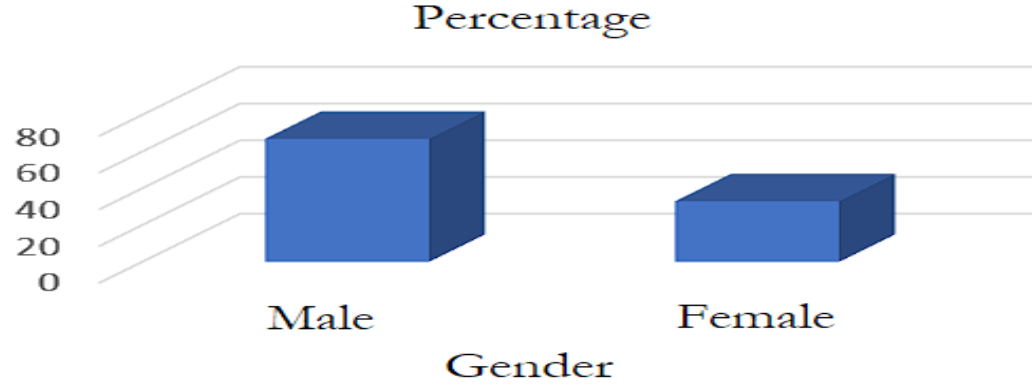

Fig (1): Shows the Distribution of the Study Sample by Gender.

Regarding "age," data from Table (2) reveals that more than half of the study sample falls within the age group of (30-35 years), which had the highest representation at a rate of (55%) of the total study sample. This was followed by the age group of (20-29 years) at a rate of (38%), and then the age group of (under 20 years), which had the lowest representation at a rate of (7%) of the total study sample.

These data indicate that the age group of (30-35 years), which had the highest representation, will enrich the study with its opinions, given the mental maturity and sound judgment that individuals in this age group possess. Fig (2) illustrates the distribution of the study sample according to "age."

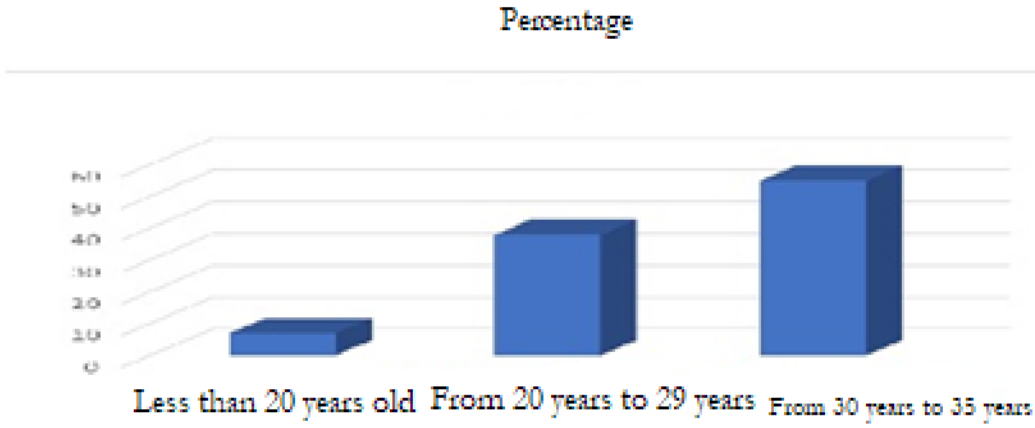

Fig (2): Shows the Distribution of the Study Sample by Age.

Regarding "educational level," data from Table (2) reveals a high percentage of individuals with "university qualifications" at a dominant rate of (67%) of the total study sample. This was followed by the percentage of young people with "intermediate or high school qualifications" at a rate of (31%) of the total study sample. The percentage of young people who "cannot read or write" and those with "less than average qualifications" had equal rates, both at (1%) of the total study sample. These data indicate an important fact, which is the high rates of job seekers who have university qualifications, as shown in Figure (3).

The data also showed that the lowest percentage was among those who "cannot read or write" and those with "less than average qualifications"; meaning that the rates of unemployment and job seekers are more prevalent among the educated population.

Regarding "place of residence," data from Table (2) reveals that the highest percentage of individuals in the study sample resided in the Emirate of "Sharjah" at a rate of (23%) of the total study sample. This was followed by the percentage of individuals residing in the Emirates of "Ajman" and "Ras Al Khaimah" with equal rates, both at (20%) of the total study sample. The percentage of individuals residing in the Emirates of "Dubai" and "Umm Al Quwain" had equal rates, both at (14%) of the total study sample. This was followed by the percentage of individuals residing in the Emirate of "Abu Dhabi" at a rate of (7%). Finally, the percentage of individuals residing in the Emirate of "Fujairah" was at a rate of (1%) of the total study sample. Thus, the study succeeded in representing the youth sample from the seven different Emirates, enriching the study with diverse opinions and results. Fig (4) illustrates the distribution of the study sample according to place of residence.

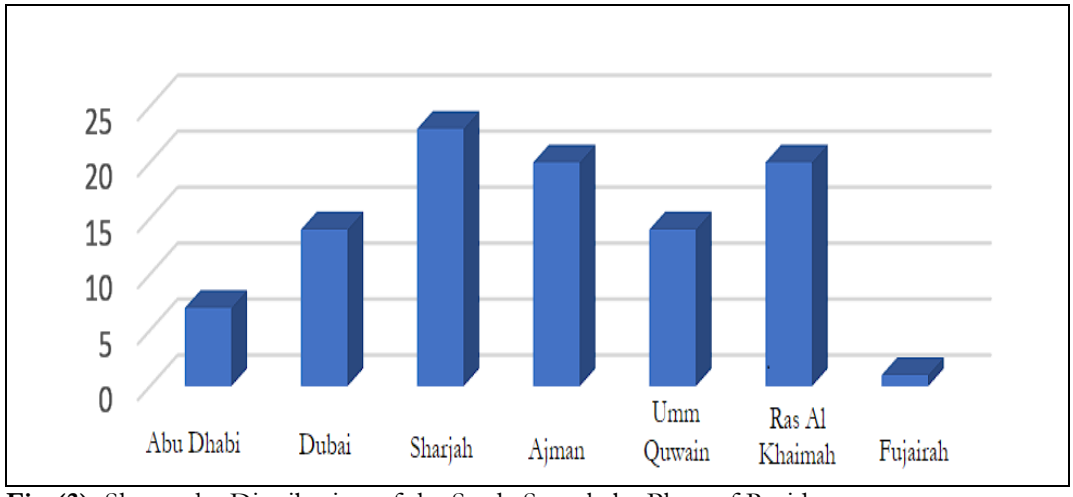

Fig (3): Shows the Distribution of the Study Sample by Place of Residence.

8- Study Results and Discussion

A. The Extent of Acceptance of Digital Job Opportunities

Table 3: Distribution of the Study Sample Individuals According to the Extent of Acceptance of Digital Job Opportunities.

If you have a job opportunity that requires some digital and technological skills (such as the skill of using modern technologies, smartphones....), do you accept it?				**Qty**	**Percentage**
Acceptable				117	96.61
Unacceptable				6	3.39
χ^2 153.814	Freedom Degree = 1	Significance Level = 0,000	Significance Type = Statistically Significant		

The data in Table (3) reflect highly important results that bring great optimism for a bright future for this noble country, which is a source of pride for all Arab countries. The results showed that the vast majority of the study sample's youth have no objections to accepting job opportunities that require some digital and technological skills, such as the ability to use computer screens, which are essential tools for digital job opportunities. The percentage of those who accept such opportunities reached (96.6%) compared to only (3.4%) who do not accept digital job opportunities.

Regarding the interpretation of these results, they are strongly evident on multiple levels through the theoretical frameworks adopted by the current study. One of these frameworks is the "value change theory" by "Inglehart", in which he talks about the "development hypothesis," confirming that the more generations feel economic security, the more they tend to choose job opportunities that satisfy their ambitions and achieve goals related to seriousness, commitment, creativity, and innovation. These values are referred to by "Inglehart" as "post-material values" or "post-modern values," which are of interest to individuals in advanced societies (Aalam et al., 2007, pp. 69-72).

These findings can be illuminated through the lens of Michel Foucault's "rational choice theory," which underscores that rational individuals adopt behaviors congruent with the prevailing conditions of their societal context. Notably, the UAE has swiftly established a distinguished higher education system, attracting numerous international universities. Furthermore, the emergence of specialized scientific institutions, exemplified by the "Mohammed Bin Zayed University for Artificial Intelligence," achieving the 127th global rank in computer science research institutions, showcases the country's commitment to technological advancement.

The UAE has strategically implemented an "Artificial Intelligence Strategy" and instituted an independent ministry dedicated to it. Collaborative initiatives with esteemed institutions like Oxford University aim to disseminate artificial intelligence knowledge across various societal segments. Additionally, the government has taken steps to enhance expertise by providing specialized training courses in data science, artificial intelligence, and programming for its employees. These efforts collectively contribute to shaping a technologically adept environment and align with rational choices made by individuals seeking opportunities in the digital realm.

All of this is clear evidence of the state's determination to enhance its position in the digital transformation field and spread the culture of digital technology in society, which is reflected in the youth of the Emirati society who are seeking job opportunities. This point is confirmed by one of the most important concepts in Bourdieu's "practice theory" when he talks about "habitus" and how individuals are influenced in their behaviors and ways of thinking by the social space and the general societal context in which they live. This is what he calls "incorporation" or "social normalization," resulting from the near-total digital transformation that relies on internet services, high-speed communications, access to government services, shopping, entertainment, the technological development of virtual reality, and metaverse, which has become the traditional lifestyle for most members of the Emirati society.

This can also be explained in light of Bourdieu's concept of "field," which refers to the social position that determines the agency of individuals and their relationship with the surrounding society in light of the social interactions between its members.

By calculating the value of ($\chi 2$) for the data in Table (3), significant statistical differences were found at a significance level of (0.001) and a degree of freedom of (153.814), indicating that the youth in the UAE society accept digital job opportunities.

B. Reasons for Accepting Digital Job Opportunities

The interpretation of the previous results is confirmed by the study sample in Table (4) related to "Reasons for accepting digital job opportunities," where the vast majority of the study sample, accounting for (61.4%) of the total study sample, confirmed that the most important reason for accepting digital job opportunities is that "digital technology has become the language of the current era." This is in addition to other reasons explained in Figure (5), such as "the preference and love of some students for practicing this type of work," accounting for (18.1%) of the total study sample, and "the proficiency of the study sample in such technologies," accounting for (17.5%) of the total study sample. All of these reasons confirm the results of the previous Table (3) and also confirm their interpretation.

Table 4: Distribution of Study Sample by Reasons for Accepting Digital Job Opportunities.

Why accept digital job opportunities?		Qty	Percentage
Technology has become the language of the current era		105	61.4
I'm good at such techniques.		30	17.54
I like to practice these works to deepen my experience in them		31	18.13
Because it is suitable for my academic qualification		5	2.924
Other		0	0
Total		171	100
χ^2 131.012	Freedom Degree = 3	Significance Level = 0,000	Significance Type = Statistically Significant

By calculating the value of (χ2) for the data of Table (4), it was found that there were statistically significant differences at the level of significance (0.0001) and the degree of freedom (3), which confirms the diversity of reasons for accepting digital job opportunities statistically.

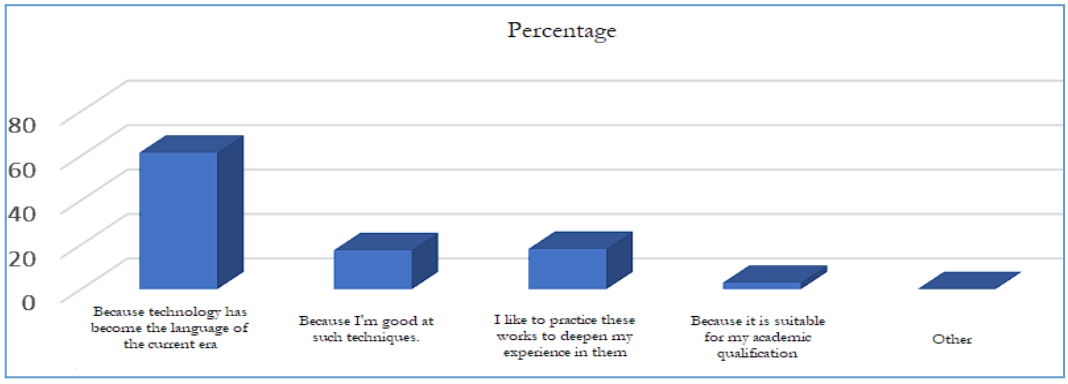

Figure (4): Shows the Distribution of the Study Sample According to the Reasons for Accepting Digital Job Opportunities.

Reasons for Rejecting Digital Job Opportunities

Regarding the reasons for rejecting digital job opportunities among a portion of the study sample, although they were a very small percentage (3.4%) of the total study sample, specifically six individuals out of a total of 177 individuals, we should not overlook their opinions. We must take them into account to identify the obstacles and difficulties that hinder the digital development of some youth groups in the UAE society towards digital work. The main reasons for rejection were "difficulty and lack of training," as shown in the following Table (5).

Table 5: Distribution of Study Sample Members by Reasons for Rejecting Digital Job Opportunities.

Why are digital job opportunities rejected?			**Qty**	**Percentage**
It's hard and complicated.			3	50
I don't like such works.			1	16.67
Need more experience and training			2	33.33
It is not suitable for my academic qualification			0	0
Others			0	0
Total			6	100
χ^2 1	Freedom Degree = 2	Significance Level = 0,607	Significance Type = Not Statistically Significant	

Where the sample of the study indicated that the most important reasons are:

- "The difficulty and complexity of such opportunities", with a percentage of (50%) of the total study sample who did not accept digital job opportunities.
- "This type of job opportunity needs more experience and training," with a percentage of (33.3%) of the total sample of the study who did not accept digital job opportunities.
- "Lack of inclination and love for this type of digital job opportunities", with a percentage of (16.8%) of the total sample of the study who did not accept digital job opportunities.

In reality, all of these reasons place a great responsibility and a greater burden on "educational institutions" on the one hand, and on the other hand, a great responsibility falls on "training providers" in the UAE, whether they are government or private entities.

Regarding the responsibility that falls on educational institutions at all stages of education, concepts and educational materials for technological skills should be introduced in schools and universities according to the future demand for technological skills, in order to contribute to the development of digital thinking among youth. It is important to create enthusiasm among young people to think critically about content and digital services.

We have many successful international experiences from which we can learn lessons. For example, schools and universities in China are already designing educational lessons according to demand with technological skills for the future society, and many educational institutions there are obtaining educational materials for technological skills such as the book "Foundations of Artificial Intelligence." This book is currently being introduced to teach Chinese students multiple skills for specializations in the field of artificial intelligence (Enders et al., 2019, 11).

Furthermore, it is necessary to introduce principles of multi-disciplinary education in schools and universities by committing educational institutions to imparting students with greater technological skills, digital citizenship, introducing them to collaborative work, and enhancing their problem-solving skills, similar to the "Finnish experience" (Enders et al., 2019, 13).

"Future Skills Research Centers" can also be established to ensure the promotion of research on future skills, understand the effects of digital transaction technology on companies and administrations, and serve as a knowledge exchange platform for decision-makers, start-up entrepreneurs, technology, and industry experts. In this regard, the experience of the "Frankfurt School of Finance and Management" which established the "Frankfurt School Center for Digital Transactions" in 2017 is a good example of a successful experiment (Enders et al., 2019, 13).

Regarding the responsibility that falls on "training providers," whether they are government or private entities, they must provide the necessary training to impart some future skills. These training programs should be in collaboration with government institutions, as well as employers and business companies to understand the trends in the job market and the types of skills needed in the workplace. The results of this collaboration should reflect on the performance of educational institutions and create a real ground for innovation and growth (Clement, 2017, 15).

Calculating the value of ($\chi 2$) for the data in Table (7) shows that there are no statistically significant differences. This means that these reasons are not statistically significant. However, this does not prevent us from taking them into consideration to understand the digital development of current and future generations.

9- Conclusion and Recommendations

This study puts forth practical recommendations aimed at establishing mechanisms to develop the capabilities of young individuals in the realm of digital job opportunities. The key recommendations include:

Introduction of technological skills concepts and educational materials in schools and universities, aligning with the anticipated future demand for technological skills. This initiative aims to contribute to the development of digital thinking among the youth and foster critical thinking about content and digital services.

Establishment of "Future Skills Research Centers" to facilitate research on upcoming skills, comprehend the impact of digital transaction technology on businesses and administrations, and serve as a knowledge exchange platform for decision-makers, startup entrepreneurs, and technology and industry experts.

Provision of essential training to young individuals at various educational stages to impart future skills. Collaborative programs with government institutions, employers, and businesses are essential to understand job market trends and the required workplace skills. The outcomes of this collaboration should reflect on the performance of educational institutions, fostering a conducive environment for innovation and growth.

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