HBL P@SHA
Pakistan IT Industry Association

Digital Economy
SKILLS
Action Plan
Whitepaper

Skills Policy Roundtable
ITCN 2024

Pakistan stands at a pivotal juncture in its economic trajectory, with digitalization emerging as a critical driver of growth and innovation. However, to achieve the full potential of the digital economy a skilled workforce equipped with the necessary competencies is required. To address these concerns P@SHA organized The Digital Economy Skills Action Plan Roundtable.

The key topics for the Digital Economy Skills Action Plan roundtable were as follows:

◆ Address pipeline problems in the IT sector
◆ Foster the development of a high-performing digital education and training ecosystem
◆ Implement a Digital Economy Skills Action Plan mainly in skilling, upskilling, and reskilling to equip Pakistan's workforce for the digital era.

Recent data indicates a notable surge in demand for basic IT skills in Pakistan, reaching **72.1%**.[1] However, challenges persist in meeting this demand, particularly with **46%** of the population still lacking internet access, posing a significant obstacle to leveraging digital opportunities.[2] According to the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, the IT industry is expected to contribute **13% to the GDP by 2025.**[3]

[1] https://impact.economist.com/perspectives/talent-education/bridging-skills-gap-fuelling-careers-and-economy-pakistan#_ftn15
[2] https://pubs.payoneer.com/docs/2020-gig-economy-index.pdf
[3] https://www.brecorder.com/news/40197381#:~:text=ISLAMABAD%3A%20The%20Ministry%20of%20Information,in%20the%20next%20five%20years.

Challenges

One of the major challenges faced by the IT industry is the lack of adequate opportunities for hands-on experience and practical learning. Many individuals struggle to gain real-world exposure to industry best practices, hindering their ability to develop essential skills. Additionally, the absence of a robust learning ecosystem exacerbates this issue, as aspiring professionals often lack access to industry-tailored resources and an enabling environment.

Moreover, the concept of self-learning is often overlooked, with students lacking awareness of how to effectively utilize available tools such as online courses, e-books, and educational videos, hindering their ability to cultivate independent learning habits. Without the autonomy to explore and learn beyond traditional educational settings, individuals may struggle to keep pace with the rapid advancements in technology within the IT field. Consequently, companies in the IT industry face challenges in finding competent and well-trained professionals.

Action Plan

The Digital Economy Skills Action Plan encompasses a multi-faceted approach to skills development, emphasizing course-based learning, earn-while-you-learn initiatives, student-industry experiences, and faculty training through bootcamps. By integrating industry-relevant curricula, facilitating hands-on learning experiences, and empowering educators with up-to-date knowledge, the plan aims to bridge the skills gap and foster a digitally proficient workforce.

Policy Recommendations

To support the implementation of the action plan, several policy recommendations have been proposed

Establishment of a Train the Trainer Model

Focused Boot Camps should be developed in partnership with industry stakeholders, these boot camps must offer hands-on training in high-demand technologies, emphasizing practical application and concluding with proficiency assessments. This will ensure relevance and efficacy by meeting industry needs and providing skills directly applicable to employable resources.

Certification for Train the Trainer Programs Completion

This requirement ensures that participants meet specific standards (as determined by P@SHA), thereby enhancing the quality and credibility of skilling programs. Certification serves as tangible proof of competency, validating participants' acquisition of necessary skills. To obtain certification, participants need to pass an assessment or examination administered by an accredited organization or institution upon completion of the skills program.

Introduction of Annual and Quarterly Refresher Courses for Trainers

To keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies and practices, one of the outcomes discussed was that trainers should require regular updates and refresher courses on relevant topics. Annual and quarterly refresher courses offer opportunities for continuous learning and professional development. Institutions should provide short-duration courses and workshops focusing on emerging technologies, teaching methodologies, or industry trends, which can be conducted online or in-person based on trainers' convenience and accessibility.

Adoption of Demand-Driven, Outcome-Based Bootcamps

Focused Boot Camps should be developed in partnership with industry stakeholders, these boot camps must offer hands-on training in high-demand technologies, emphasizing practical application and concluding with proficiency assessments. This will ensure relevance and efficacy by meeting industry needs and providing skills directly applicable to employable resources.

Scaling Up Initiatives like Techlift

Scaling up Techlift involves replicating such models and leveraging resources for wider reach. Techlift aimed to address the shortage of competent resources and develop a curriculum focused on the most in-demand courses in the IT industry. Programs like Techlift can expand to new regions through partnerships, offering more training opportunities. Collaborating with local and international stakeholders amplifies successful initiatives, extending their reach and impact.

Integration of Employment as a Key Indicator for Evaluating Training Program Success

Training programs should be evaluated through employment outcomes ensuring their effectiveness in preparing individuals for the workforce. Employment serves as a tangible measure of skill acquisition and readiness for real-world challenges. Graduates' job placements should also be tracked to provide insights into program impact, with higher employment rates indicating effective skill acquisition.

Promotion of Industry-Academia Partnerships

Industry-academia collaboration needs to be promoted as it will enhance curriculum relevance, promote skill transfer, and foster innovation by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, resources, and expertise to align education and training with industry needs. This collaboration should include establishing joint research projects, internship programs, and industry advisory boards, where industry experts will provide input on curriculum development and offer practical insights into current industry practices.

Incorporation of Industry Feedback Throughout Skills Initiatives

For better outcomes regular feedback of industry stakeholder needs to be collected as it will ensure precise alignment of skills initiatives with industry demands, enabling swift adjustments to maintain relevance. Utilizing methods like surveys and focus groups, program organizers will gather targeted insights on effectiveness and emerging skill needs. This feedback will drive tailored enhancements, ensuring sustained industry alignment and effectiveness.

The government's introduction of the Digital Pakistan plan in 2018 marked a pivotal moment, emphasizing policies aimed at upskilling and reskilling the workforce.[4] Additionally, initiatives such as E-rozgaar have played a crucial role in providing online training sessions, catering to individuals keen on digital freelancing and enhancing their skill sets.[5] Notably, the digital freelance industry in Pakistan witnessed a remarkable surge of 69% in 2020, encompassing both women and men, thereby fostering inclusivity and economic empowerment. [6]

[4]https://impact.economist.com/perspectives/talent-education/bridging-skills-gap-fuelling-careers-and-economy-pakistan#_ftn15
[5]https://erozgar.pitb.gov.pk/
[6]https://pubs.payoneer.com/docs/2020-gig-economy-index.pdf

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