



GIG Work and Career Intention among University Students

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Abstract. The rapid rise of the gig economy driven by digital platforms and technological innovation has greatly altered traditional employment patterns. This study investigated the relationship between gig work and career intention among university students in Nigeria. The variables of interest are inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy. A cross-sectional survey design was employed with data collected from 355 students at the Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State and University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State who actively engaged in gig work. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses such as correlation and multivariate regression were used to analyse the data collected using SPSS 24 software. The findings revealed that inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy have a positive and significant impact on students' career intentions. Flexibility is the most significant predictor, followed by job autonomy and inclusiveness. The study recommends that policymakers and educational institutions should collaborate to enhance digital infrastructure and digital skills training for university students to promote a more equitable access to gig opportunities.

Keywords: Career intention, Flexibility, Gig economy, Inclusiveness, Job autonomy.

1. Introduction

The gig economy is characterised by flexible and temporary work arrangements which is facilitated primarily through digital platforms. It has emerged as a transformative force in contemporary labour markets globally. The rapid expansion of gig work has attracted considerable academic and policy interest

due to its potential to reshape traditional employment patterns and influence career trajectories. The growth of gig work in Nigeria is propelled by widespread smartphone adoption, improved internet accessibility, and a growing population of digitally literate youth (Ogundare & Omotosho, 2024). The flexibility, inclusiveness, and emphasis on job autonomy intrinsic to gig work provide distinctive opportunities and challenges for university students as they navigate their evolving career pathways.

University students represent a unique demographic that faces increasing economic pressures amid rising tuition fees and limited availability of conventional entry-level employment. In response, many Nigerian students are turning to gig work to supplement their income, acquire professional skills, and boost their employability prospects (Adewolu, 2024). Gig economy provides a platform for students to explore diverse career options and accumulate varied work experiences capable of shaping their career intentions. These intentions are influenced by several factors including the flexibility of work arrangements, inclusiveness in access to opportunities, and the degree of job autonomy experienced in gig roles (Mousa *et al.*, 2023).

Inclusiveness in gig work highlights the significance of ensuring equitable access to work opportunities, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. Gig platforms frequently promote diversity by enabling individuals to participate based on skills and qualifications rather than traditional employment prerequisites such as prior experience or physical presence (Mousa *et al.*,

2023). Inclusiveness aligns with the aspirations of many university students who seek employment opportunities that acknowledge and leverage their unique talents and potential.

Flexibility is a defining feature of gig work that permits individuals considerable control over their working hours, locations, and the projects they undertake. For university students, such flexibility is particularly advantageous as it allows them to effectively balance academic commitments alongside income-generating activities (Kamanzi & Neema-Abooki, 2018). Additionally, job autonomy plays a crucial role in shaping the gig work experience. High levels of job autonomy enable students to self-manage their engagements, choose assignments that align with their interests and skills, and foster a sense of ownership and motivation. Autonomy could contribute positively to students' work satisfaction as well as influence their inclination to pursue gig work as a viable career pathway.

Despite its advantages, gig work presents notable challenges. Some of these challenges include concerns surrounding job security, irregular income streams, and insufficient access to social protection schemes (Adewolu, 2024). Moreover, the influence of gig work on the career intentions of Nigerian university students remains insufficiently explored. While some research highlights the positive effects of gig work on skill acquisition and career preparedness (Hartman & Karriker, 2021), other studies caution that the precarious and informal nature of gig employment may deter students from considering it a sustainable long-term career option (McDonough, 2021; Sangeetha, 2025).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The rapid expansion of the gig economy in Nigeria, alongside the increasing participation of university students, calls for a comprehensive understanding of its implications on career intentions. Although gig work is often advocated for its flexibility and inclusiveness, the reality faced by many participants especially students is more complex. University students frequently encounter challenges such as unstable income, the absence of formal contracts and limited access to social security benefits within the gig economy. These challenges raise critical questions about the sustainability of gig work as a long-term career option (Opesade, 2024).

Inclusiveness is a fundamental but contested feature of the gig economy. While gig platforms ostensibly provide equal access to opportunities, persistent

inequalities continue to affect students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Issues such as discriminatory recruitment practices, insufficient support systems for female gig workers, and the digital divide exacerbate these disparities (Rani *et al.*, 2022). A thorough understanding of how inclusiveness is perceived and experienced by university students is essential for evaluating the broader influence of gig work on their career aspirations. Also, flexibility in gig work is frequently highlighted as a key advantage that enables students to balance academic and personal responsibilities alongside income-generating activities. However, the unpredictable nature of gig work characterised by fluctuating demand and irregular remuneration erodes the financial stability necessary for effective career planning. Moreover, the lack of clearly defined career progression pathways within the gig economy may discourage students from considering gig work as a viable long-term career pursuit (Myhill *et al.*, 2023).

Job autonomy also plays a critical role in shaping the gig work experience and the career intentions of university students. The degree of control students have over their work such as their ability to select tasks, set schedules, and determine workload, influences their engagement and satisfaction with gig work. However, limited autonomy caused by platform restrictions, client demands, or algorithmic management can diminish the attractiveness of gig work as a career choice. For many students, the extent to which they can exercise job autonomy affects their immediate work satisfaction and their willingness to pursue gig work in the future (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2023).

The dynamic interaction between inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy has far-reaching implications for the career intentions of university students engaged in the gig economy. Although existing studies underscore the potential benefits of gig work in terms of skill development and financial independence (Pichault & McKeown, 2019), there remains a paucity of empirical evidence concerning how these benefits translate into enduring career intentions among Nigerian students. This gap necessitates focused research to explore the factors influencing students' perceptions of gig work and their subsequent career aspirations. Filling this gap is salient in the Nigerian context where youth unemployment persists as a critical socio-economic challenge, and the gig economy is increasingly regarded as a promising avenue for employment (Ogundare & Omotosho, 2024). Empirical evidence into how inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy affect career intentions can guide in making policy

interventions designed to optimise the gig economy's role in youth employment and career development. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between gig work and career intention among university students in Nigeria by focusing on three key dimensions: inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy.

2. Theoretical Framework and Review of Extant Literature

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), originally proposed by Davis (1989), serves as a foundational theoretical framework for understanding individuals' acceptance and utilisation of technology. The theory is rooted in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), TAM posits that two primary perceptions—Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)—determine users' attitudes towards technology, which in turn influence their behavioural intentions and actual usage (Adekunle, et al., 2025). In the context of the gig economy, TAM provides a valuable lens for examining how digital platforms shape students' engagement and future career intentions.

Over time, TAM has evolved to better capture the complexities of technology adoption. TAM2 incorporates social influences and voluntariness which suggests that external factors like peer recommendations and mentorship affect perceptions of usefulness and ease of use. TAM3 further integrates constructs such as trust, perceived risk, and self-efficacy. These factors particularly pertinent in gig work environments where data security and payment reliability are paramount. A more comprehensive framework introduced by Alowayr (2022) called the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) adds dimensions such as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. These extensions are especially relevant in the Nigerian context, where access to digital infrastructure and cultural norms significantly affect technology adoption.

With regard to career intention, TAM is relevant in providing understanding on how university students view gig work in the context of their long-term professional aspirations. Students who find gig platforms useful for acquiring skills and accessing career opportunities are more likely to consider gig work either as a stepping stone or as a sustainable career path. Conversely, students may abandon platforms perceived as difficult to use or inaccessible. External influences also shape career decisions. In societies like Nigeria, where traditional career paths

are often culturally prioritised, support from peers and mentors can validate students' engagement in gig work. Therefore, the extended versions of TAM highlight the importance of social and contextual factors in forming career intentions.

2.1 Career Intention in the Gig Economy

Gig work or economy refers to a type of employment arrangement where individuals, often referred to as gig workers or freelancers, perform specific tasks, projects, or services for various clients or employers on a temporary or per-task basis (Stopforth, 2023). Career intention can be described as an individual's aspirations and planned actions to pursue a specific career path. In the gig economy, career intention among university students is influenced by their perception of gig work as a stepping stone towards traditional employment or as a viable long-term career option. Research indicates that gig work enhances employability by allowing individuals to build practical skills, expand professional networks, and gain exposure to diverse industries (Kost et al., 2020). For Nigerian university students, gig work provides a unique platform to demonstrate competence, establish credibility, and build portfolios in competitive fields such as graphic design, content writing, and software development. Furthermore, students who engage in gig work often develop entrepreneurial mindsets which prepare them for both formal employment and self-employment.

However, gig work also has limitations. The absence of job security, benefits, and career progression opportunities may deter students from considering it as a long-term option (Iyobhebhe *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, cultural expectations in Nigeria, where traditional employment is often viewed as more prestigious, can influence students' career intentions. To address these challenges, institutions and gig platforms must provide structured mentorship programmes and skill development initiatives to guide students in navigating the gig economy strategically.

2.2 Inclusiveness in Gig Work

Inclusiveness is broadly defined as the extent to which gig work environments accommodate diverse individual backgrounds and foster equitable opportunities (Sannon & Cosley, 2022). It has been linked to enhanced perceptions of belonging and motivation among young gig workers. Studies have shown that when students perceive gig platforms as inclusive—where discrimination, harassment, and bias are minimised—they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward gig work and consider it a

viable career pathway (Mousa et al., 2023; Sannon & Cosley, 2022).

For instance, empirical investigations by Mousa et al. (2023) demonstrate that inclusiveness in gig work significantly enhances students' career intention by creating a supportive atmosphere that respects uniqueness and qualifications. This inclusivity often translates into increased skill acquisition, confidence, and networking opportunities, which collectively enhance career development aspirations. Furthermore, gig platforms that emphasise fairness in recruitment and treatment tend to encourage sustained participation among university students, thus fostering career continuity in the gig economy.

Despite these positive associations, some scholars have critically noted that inclusiveness in gig work is frequently challenged by structural and socio-cultural barriers. Khatun (2024) argues that, although digital platforms purport inclusivity, underlying issues such as algorithmic biases, unclear evaluation metrics, and socio-economic disparities may inadvertently marginalise certain groups. Such systemic exclusions can deter students from committing to gig careers, thereby weakening the presumed relationship between inclusiveness and career intention. Moreover, contextual factors unique to developing countries such as limited digital literacy and infrastructural deficits constrain equitable access to gig opportunities and disproportionately affect students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Based on this discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H₀₁: Inclusiveness in gig work does not significantly influence career intention among university students in Nigeria.

2.3 Flexibility in the Gig Economy

Several empirical investigations have shown that flexibility is a salient motivator for engaging in gig work. For instance, researchers such as Khatun (2024) highlights that the ability to control work hours and balance academic commitments with gig assignments significantly influences participants' willingness to continue participating in gig activities. This flexibility enables students to pursue multiple interests simultaneously and reduce the perceived opportunity cost associated with traditional full-time employment. Additionally, flexibility is often associated with autonomy in task selection and scheduling, factors that are positively linked with students' career intentions towards gig work (Lehdonvirta, 2018).

However, while the positive association between flexibility and career intention is well-documented. Some studies emphasise that flexibility in gig work may sometimes translate into precarious labour conditions such as inconsistent income, lack of social

security, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life (Lehdonvirta, 2018). These challenges can weaken the long-term attractiveness of gig work as a career choice despite its flexible nature. Based on this discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H₀₂: Flexibility in gig work does not significantly influence career intention among university students in Nigeria.

2.4 Job Autonomy in the Gig Economy

Job autonomy is defined as the degree of control individuals have over their work tasks and schedules (Kim et al., 2024). It is widely regarded as a critical motivator influencing career-related decisions. Several studies (e.g., Ito et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024) suggest that increased autonomy inherent in gig work appeals to youths by promoting a sense of independence and self-efficacy, which in turn positively shapes their intention to pursue gig-based careers. These findings align with broader career development theories that emphasise autonomy as a core driver of job satisfaction and professional commitment.

However, some scholars highlight limitations and contradictions in this relationship. For instance, Pathirana (2024) caution that while autonomy can enhance career intention, the precarious nature of gig work—characterised by income instability and lack of social protection—may undermine long-term career commitment despite high autonomy. Furthermore, the extent to which participants perceive autonomy varies depending on the technological platforms and institutional support available. Based on this discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H₀₃: Job autonomy in gig work does not significantly influence career intention among university students in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between gig work and career intention among university students in Nigeria. This design is appropriate as it allowed the researchers to gather data at a single point in time to provide insights into the dynamics of inclusiveness, flexibility, job autonomy, and career intention in the context of gig work. Cross-sectional design was also adopted to provide a robust foundation for data analysis and interpretation.

The target population comprised students of Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State and University of Benin that are actively engaged in gig work. This group was selected as they represent a growing

demographic of gig workers influenced by technological advancements, economic pressures and career aspirations (Watson et al., 2021). The study focused on students across various disciplines to capture a diverse range of perspectives. A total of 400 respondents (students from the two universities) were selected for data collection. However, 355 valid responses were received and used for data analyses. A convenience sampling approach was used to select students actively engaged in gig work.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed based on existing literature and validated scales. The questionnaire comprised two main sections. The first section contains demographic profile such as respondents' gender, age, educational level, and gig work experience. The second section contained items on the different constructs used in the study. They include inclusiveness (to assess aspects of diversity, respect, and equal opportunities in gig work), flexibility (to measure autonomy in scheduling and balancing work-life demands), job autonomy (to measure the degree of control individuals have over their work tasks and schedules), and career intention (to examine respondents' long-term aspirations and alignment with gig work). The second section employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to capture respondents' perceptions and experiences.

To ensure the instrument's validity, the questionnaire was subjected to content and construct validity checks by academic experts in human resource management and data analytics. Pilot testing was conducted with 40 respondents to assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the items. Based on feedback, minor modifications were made to improve item phrasing and structure. The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient which yielded the following results: Inclusiveness (0.82), Flexibility (0.85), Technology Infrastructure (0.87), and Career Intention (0.83). These values indicate high internal

consistency as they exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Taber, 2018).

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period using a combination of online and face-to-face distribution methods. The online survey link was sent via WhatsApp to the target respondents while the face-to-face data collection was done with the aid of trained research assistants who distributed and retrieved questionnaires on campuses. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest and accurate responses. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage were used to summarise the demographic characteristics and responses to questionnaire items. For inferential analysis, correlation and multivariate regression analysis were employed to examine the relationships between the independent variables (inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy) and the dependent variable (career intention). This method was selected due to its ability to estimate the predictive power of multiple factors simultaneously. The analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.

4. Results and Discussions

Out of the 400 copies of questionnaire administered and retrieved from target respondents (undergraduate and postgraduate students from the two universities), 355 copies of the questionnaire were found to be valid which were used for data analyses. The overall response rate is 88.8%.

Description of Respondents Demographic Information

The demographic information of the respondents which include gender, age, years of experience on gig work and hours worked per week on gig-related tasks are presented and discussed in Table 1:

Table 1: Description of respondents' demographic profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	185	52.1
	Female	170	47.9
Age	24 years & below	142	40.0
	25 – 29	118	33.2
	30 – 35	57	16.1
	36 – 40	25	7.0
	Above 40 years	13	3.7
Years of Experience on Gig Work	Less than 5 years	236	66.5
	5 – 10 years	95	26.8
	Above 10 years	24	6.8
Hours Worked Per Week on Gig-related Tasks	Less than 10	99	27.9
	10 – 20	137	38.6
	21 – 30	74	20.8
	Above 30	45	12.7

Table 1 shows that a fairly balanced gender representation with 52.1% male and 47.9% female participants. The age profile reveals that the majority (40.0%) are aged 24 years and below, followed by those aged 25–29 (33.2%). A smaller proportion falls within the age ranges of 30–35 (16.1%), 36–40 (7.0%), and above 40 years (3.7%). This shows that most gig workers among the university students are relatively young. In terms of gig work experience, the majority of respondents (66.5%) reported having less than five years of experience, while 26.8% have between five and ten years, and only 6.8% have more than ten years of experience. This indicates a predominantly early-stage engagement in gig work. Regarding time commitment, 38.6% of respondents work between 10 and 20 hours per week on gig-related tasks, followed by 27.9% who work less than 10 hours. A smaller proportion work 21–30 hours (20.8%) and above 30 hours weekly (12.7%).

Table 2: Description of Research Variables

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
Inclusiveness ($\bar{X} = 3.56$; $SD = 0.97$)			
INC1	Gig work promotes equal opportunities for individuals regardless of their differences or background	3.84	0.92
INC2	The uniqueness of employees is respected in gig work	3.76	0.88
INC3	Gig workers are recruited and developed based on qualification	3.65	0.95
INC4	Discrimination and harassment are minimal or prohibited in gig work	3.49	1.01
INC5	Gig workers receive the same treatment as in-house employees	3.20	1.07
Flexibility ($\bar{X} = 4.03$; $SD = 0.79$)			
FLX1	Gig workers have control over when to work	4.11	0.75
FLX2	Gig work allows me to balance my work and personal life effectively	3.94	0.84
FLX3	I have the freedom to set my own work schedule in my gig work	4.05	0.79
FLX4	Gig work allows me to pursue other interests or responsibilities outside of work	4.00	0.81
FLX5	I can choose the gigs or projects I want to work on	4.07	0.77
Job Autonomy ($\bar{X} = 3.68$; $SD = 0.90$)			
JBA1	Gig workers have the freedom to choose working	3.90	0.82
JBA2	Gig workers can choose the tasks I want to take on.	3.52	0.96
JBA3	I have control over how I complete my tasks in my gig work	3.44	0.98
JBA4	Gig work allows me to make independent decisions about my work	3.70	0.85
JBA5	I can choose my work location freely in my gig job	3.83	0.87
Career Intention ($\bar{X} = 3.74$; $SD = 0.89$)			
CAI1	I see gig work as a stepping stone to a traditional, full-time career	3.71	0.90
CAI2	I am actively working on building my skills and reputation as a gig worker	3.95	0.83
CAI3	I plan to actively seek out gig work opportunities that align with my long-term career goals	3.88	0.85
CAI4	I actively network within the gig economy to enhance my career prospects	3.62	0.91
CAI5	I intend to pursue a long-term career as a gig worker	3.55	1.00

Table 2 reveals that respondents generally perceive gig work positively across the dimensions of inclusiveness, flexibility, job autonomy, and career intention. Flexibility recorded the highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 4.03$, $SD = 0.79$) which indicates strong agreement among respondents that gig work offers considerable control over work schedules and the ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities. Items such as control over working hours ($\bar{X} = 4.11$) and the freedom to select gigs ($M = 4.07$) particularly stood out. Inclusiveness was rated moderately high ($\bar{X} = 3.56$, $SD = 0.97$) which suggests that respondents believe gig work largely promotes equal opportunities and respects individual differences. However, perceptions were slightly lower regarding equitable treatment with in-house employees ($M = 3.20$), which may indicate concerns about parity in benefits or recognition.

Job autonomy also showed a moderately high mean ($\bar{X} = 3.68$, $SD = 0.90$) with respondents agreeing that gig work allows for task choice and independent decision-making. Notably, freedom in choosing work location ($\bar{X} = 3.83$) and working hours ($\bar{X} = 3.90$) were rated more positively than control over task execution ($\bar{X} = 3.44$), suggesting that while spatial and temporal autonomy are strong, procedural autonomy may be more constrained. Career intention received a favourable mean score ($\bar{X} = 3.74$, $SD = 0.89$) which suggests that many respondents view gig work as a viable career path. Items such as skill-building for future opportunities ($\bar{X} = 3.95$) and aligning gig work with long-term goals ($\bar{X} = 3.88$) were particularly endorsed. However, intention to pursue gig work long-term ($\bar{X} = 3.55$) was comparatively lower, indicating some uncertainty regarding full-time career commitment in the gig economy.

Model Estimation and Interpretation

The research model was estimated to establish the relationships between the different variables using Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis.

Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficients among research variables

Variables	CAI	INC	FLX	JBA
Career Intention (CAI)	1	.512**	.604**	.558**
Inclusiveness (INC)	.512**	1	.486**	.471**
Flexibility (FLX)	.604**	.486**	1	.591**
Job Autonomy (JBA)	.558**	.471**	.591**	1

The results in Table 3 showed that none of the correlation coefficients is up to 0.80 which rules out the presence of serial correlation in the dataset. The results further show that Career Intention (CAI) is positively and significantly related to INC ($r = 0.512, p < 0.05$), FLX ($r = 0.604, p < 0.05$), and JBA ($r = 0.558, p < 0.05$).

Table 4: Estimated relationship between gig work and career intention

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Decision
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	0.812	0.127	-	6.390	0.000	-
Inclusiveness (INC)	0.208	0.053	0.246	3.920	0.000	Reject H ₀₁
Flexibility (FLX)	0.315	0.058	0.324	5.430	0.000	Reject H ₀₂
Job Autonomy (JBA)	0.266	0.049	0.301	5.430	0.000	Reject H ₀₃
Model Summary Statistics & ANOVA Results						
R = 0.689; R ² = 0.475; Adj R ² = 0.470; F-Statistic = 107.86; F-Statistic (Prob) = 0.000; Number of Observation = 355; Dependent Variable: Career Intention (CAI)						

Table 4 shows the results of the influence of Inclusiveness (INC), Flexibility (FLX), and Job Autonomy (JBA) on Career Intention (CAI) among 355 university students. Inclusiveness ($\beta = 0.246, p < .001$), Flexibility ($\beta = 0.324, p < .001$), and Job Autonomy ($\beta = 0.301, p < .001$) each had positive and significant effects on career intention. Flexibility exhibited the strongest influence, followed by Job Autonomy and Inclusiveness. Based on these results, the null hypotheses (H₀₁, H₀₂, H₀₃) were rejected. This implies that inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy significantly predict students' intentions to pursue careers in the gig economy. The model was statistically significant [$F(3,351)=107.86, p<.001$] and explained 47.5% of the variance in career intention ($R^2 = 0.475$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.470$). All three independent variables were significant predictors of career intention.

5. Discussion of Findings

This study found that inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy have a positive and significant relationship with career intention in gig work among university students. Empirical evidence such as that presented by Mousa et al. (2023), demonstrates that when students perceive gig platforms as inclusive (that is, minimising discrimination and valuing unique qualifications), they are more inclined to view gig work as a viable career pathway. This supportive environment

encourages skill development, confidence, and professional networking, all of which reinforce career aspirations. Nonetheless, scholars like Khatun (2024) highlight structural and socio-cultural barriers—such as algorithmic biases and socio-economic inequalities that may challenge true inclusiveness, potentially marginalising some students and complicating this positive association.

Flexibility is similarly emphasised as a crucial motivator for students engaged in gig work. The capacity to control work hours and balance academic responsibilities with gig tasks allows students to manage competing demands effectively, thereby increasing their willingness to sustain gig work participation (Khatun, 2024). This flexibility often includes autonomy over task selection and scheduling, factors strongly linked to positive career intentions (Lehdonvirta, 2018). However, the literature also cautions against uncritical enthusiasm for flexibility. Concerns about precarious labour conditions, such as unstable income and lack of social security, may diminish gig work's appeal over time. Moreover, infrastructural challenges and limited digital literacy prevalent in developing countries like Nigeria can reduce the practical benefits of flexibility, moderating its influence on career intention (Adegbite, 2024).

The study found that job autonomy has a positive and significant impact on career intention among

university students. Job autonomy is widely recognised as a key driver of career-related decisions. The outcome of this study is supported by the findings of previous studies by Ito et al. (2024) and Kim et al. (2024) who found that autonomy enhances sense of independence and self-efficacy, which positively affects their intention to pursue gig work as a career. Yet, Pathirana (2024) note that despite the appeal of autonomy, the inherent precarity of gig work, including income instability and lack of social protections, may undermine sustained career commitment.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrated that inclusiveness, flexibility, and job autonomy each exert a positive and significant influence on career intention towards gig work among university students. The findings suggest that when students perceive gig platforms as equitable and supportive environments, where they can balance academic and personal commitments with meaningful control over their work, they are more likely to view gig work as a viable and attractive career option. These factors collectively contribute to shaping students' aspirations and decisions in navigating the evolving labour market landscape. In conclusion, while gig work presents promising opportunities for university students in Nigeria, a multifaceted approach involving infrastructure development, policy reform, and targeted support is essential to maximise its potential as a sustainable career pathway.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed:

First, policymakers and educational institutions should collaborate to enhance digital infrastructure and digital skills training for university students to promote a more equitable access to gig opportunities. Second, gig platforms should prioritise transparent and fair recruitment practices by actively addressing algorithmic biases and promoting genuinely inclusive environments that respect diversity and reduce discrimination. Third, to sustain student engagement and career development in the gig economy, efforts should be made to improve job security and social protection mechanisms such as creating supportive regulatory frameworks tailored to gig workers.

Furthermore, university career services could incorporate guidance on navigating gig work, helping students leverage its flexibility and autonomy while managing associated risks. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of gig work on career trajectories, with particular attention to how evolving

technological and socio-economic factors shape inclusiveness, flexibility, and autonomy.

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