LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AMONG PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS: AWARENESS, PROFICIENCY, CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

As future educators play a pivotal role in shaping how technology is utilized by future generations, disparities in their access to technology and digital skills may exacerbate existing educational inequities. In order to address the growing disparities in future educators' technological proficiency, this study looks at how life skills education might help close the digital divide. The objective is to examine how life skills education can equip prospective teachers with the necessary tools to navigate the evolving educational landscape in the digital age. This study employed a normative survey approach, which is descriptive in nature, to gather data from 150 Bachelor of Education and Master of Education teacher-training students. The study examines the efficacy of life skills education programs, pinpoints obstacles encountered by aspiring teachers, and assesses their present degree of digital readiness using surveys and interviews. The findings reveal the critical need to equip prospective teachers with a comprehensive set of life skills that go beyond traditional academic training. Life skills education emerges as a key component in bridging the digital divide, enabling future educators to navigate the

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complex, technology-driven educational environment. Survey and interview results indicate significant gaps in digital readiness, with life skills having the potential to address these gaps by enhancing both technological competence and holistic preparedness in educators. In order to close the digital gap, this study adds to the expanding corpus of research by suggesting that life skills education be incorporated into teacher preparation programs..

1. Introduction

The ever-evolving sector of education now demands technology integration. However, there is still a significant digital divide among educators, which hinders their ability to effectively employ technology in the classroom. Life skills denote the capacity for positive and flexible conduct that enables individuals to effectively handle the challenges and requirements of everyday living(Kim, 2014). A broad definition of life skills is "a combination of behavior, knowledge, attitudes, and values" and refers to the ability to do a task or accomplish a goal. The ability to actively shape a peaceful future requires a variety of qualities, including critical thinking, creativity, organizational skills, social and communication abilities, adaptability, problem solving, and democratic cooperation(Understanding Life Skills - UNESCO Digital Library, n.d.).

The phrase" Digital Divide' first appeared in the latter half of the 20th century to distinguish between individuals who had cellphones and those who did not. In the modern era, it describes the distinction between people who have access to the internet and other digital communication channels and people who do not. People with and without access to digital technology differ greatly from one another. The term for this is the "digital divide(Kloza, 2022)Or, the term "Digital Divide" describes a notable disparity in the equity of technological experience and access depending on factors like location, poverty, gender, race, or education(Swain &

Pearson, 2001) . Other forms of digital divides exist outside of those between men and women, developed and developing nations, and populations living in rural and urban areas:

*The gap in access: This digital gap stands out the most. It makes reference to the differences in people's socioeconomic level and how those differences impact their ability to buy the devices needed to access the internet. In addition to having limited access to technology, many people in developing countries lack the skills necessary to use it effectively.

*The gap in usage: This is a reference to the variations in the skill levels that people possess. When it comes to the internet-using skills required, there is a generational divide. Individuals' educational experiences have an impact on it as well. More talents are often possessed by younger, more educated persons than by older, less educated people.

* Quality-of-use disparity: A little more work goes into this measure. It's about how various people utilize the internet and how certain individuals are far better than others at finding what they need to know.

Addressing the digital divide in teacher education is essential for equitable access to high-quality learning materials and chances for professional growth. A crucial role that teacher educators play in equipping upcoming educators to use digital tools efficiently is to watch how technology is incorporated into the educational landscape. For teacher educators to develop a workforce capable of navigating the digital world with ease, incorporating cutting-edge teaching strategies, and helping students develop digital literacy skills, they must bridge the digital divide. It enables teacher educators to practice best practices, build learners' confidence, and eventually help create a more technologically savvy and inclusive educational system by giving them access to digital materials and thorough training. By closing the digital divide in teacher education, we can make sure that all teachers have the resources and expertise needed

to get their pupils ready for the opportunities and challenges of the digital age.

In the modern era, the digital divide remains a significant global challenge, characterized by unequal access to and use of technology. Life skills education is increasingly recognized as a vital approach to bridging this gap. Figure 1.1 highlights the key competencies that contribute to reducing the digital divide, including digital literacy, communication, collaboration, adaptability, and critical thinking. These skills empower individuals to navigate and leverage digital tools effectively, fostering digital inclusion and addressing barriers such as limited access, inadequate skills, and unequal opportunities. By integrating these life skills into educational frameworks, societies can equip individuals to participate fully in the digital world, promoting equity and inclusivity.
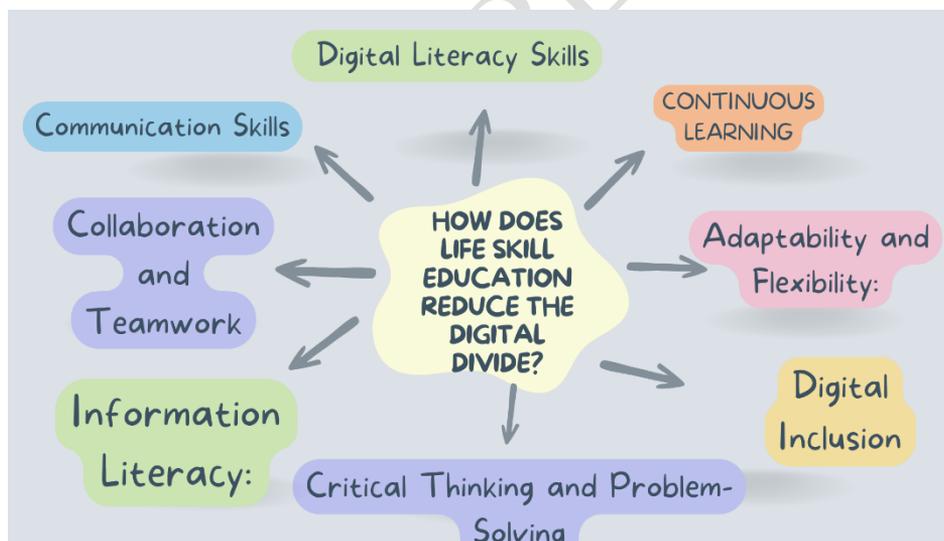

Figure 1.1: Key life skills contributing to reducing the digital divide through life skills education

By providing teacher educators with the fundamental skills required to

successfully navigate and utilize digital technology, life skill education plays an important role in closing the digital divide. Educators can embrace and incorporate technological changes into their teaching approaches by incorporating life skills like thinking critically, problem-solving, flexibility, and digital literacy into their teacher education programs. Using this method guarantees that educators can impart these skills to their students in addition to having the technical skills needed for a digitalized learning environment. Thus, life skill education equips teacher educators with the tools they need to close the digital divide by encouraging a mindset of constant learning and adaptation. This allows them to keep up with the latest developments in technology and, in turn, mentor upcoming educators as they navigate the digital disparity with competence and confidence. This study explores the relationship between life skills education and its impact on reducing the digital divide, focusing on its practical implications and outcomes.

2. Need and Significance

In light of educational fairness, this study is important because it equips aspiring teachers with the skills necessary to tackle the challenges of a rapidly digitizing classroom. Curriculum designers and teacher preparation programs can benefit from an understanding of the connection between technological proficiency and life skills education. This will help to ensure that teachers are prepared to teach students the abilities they need to succeed in the digital world. The current digital gap between aspiring teachers earning Master of Education (M.Ed.) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degrees is the subject of the study. This gap may be caused by things like socioeconomic inequality, digital literacy, and access to technology. It is vital to acknowledge and comprehend this disparity to formulate approaches to close it. The demand for educators to be knowledgeable about digital tools and pedagogies is increasing due to the

quick technology integration into education. The project intends to evaluate and address these differences in the context of the candidates' preparation, acknowledging that potential instructors may have differing degrees of exposure to digital capabilities and resources. In the twenty-first century, teachers must acquire a wider range of competencies in addition to subject-specific knowledge. These competencies include critical thinking, problem-solving, and flexibility. The goal of the study is to investigate how better preparing future teachers for the demands of contemporary classrooms might be achieved through the integration of life skills education.

The study's significance stems from its ability to improve programs for preparing teachers, close the digital gap, and advance social fairness in education. The research is in line with the overarching objective of advancing social fairness in education by addressing differences in digital access and proficiency among aspiring educators. It acknowledges that socioeconomic circumstances shouldn't restrict technology access and pertinent skills and seeks to empower all aspiring educators, regardless of their upbringing. For education to be more equitable, it is imperative that the digital divide between M.Ed. and B.Ed. students be addressed. It is hoped that by concentrating on closing this gap, the study would help guarantee that all aspiring educators possess the digital literacy abilities required to successfully incorporate technology into their lesson plans.

The study's recognition of how the educational landscape is evolving is timely. In order to keep teacher preparation programs in line with present and future educational trends, it is becoming strategically important to integrate life skills education as 21st-century skills and digital tools grow more and more prevalent in education.

Curricula and policy development in education may be influenced by the study's conclusions. When teacher education programs are improved and

focused interventions are implemented, it may be determined what digital and life skills M. Ed and B. Ed students need.

3. Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine how life skills education can help close the digital divide and address the growing disparities in technology among aspiring teachers and hence the study is entitled as "Life Skills Education and the Digital Divide among Prospective Teachers: Awareness, Proficiency, Challenges, and Strategies".

4. Operational Definition of Key Terms

Life Skill Education: A behavior modification or behavior development strategy called "life skills education" aims to balance four key areas: knowledge, attitude, values, and skills. It is the process of acquiring the necessary abilities to deal with the problems and difficulties of daily life is known as life skills education(Pal, 2025).

Digital Divide: The term "digital divide" refers to the unequal distribution of ICTs (information and communication technologies) across society (Schweitzer &Johanna,2023).

Prospective Teacher: Prospective teachers, also referred to as "would-be teachers," "pupil teachers," "student teachers," and "future teachers," are individuals pursuing B.Ed. and M. Ed programs intending to become teachers. After completing their training, students become fully qualified instructors and enter the coveted teaching profession.

Awareness: The capacity to see, feel, or be aware of things, events, or sensory patterns is known as awareness(Gafoor, 2012).It refers to the degree to which aspiring educators comprehend the idea, significance, and function of digital technologies and life skills education in improving teaching-learning procedures and closing the digital divide.

Proficiencies: It is the level of expertise or proficiency that a person or group possesses in a specific field. Here the term 'proficiency' means the degree of expertise and assurance that aspiring educators exhibit when utilising digital tools, platforms, and technology for both professional and educational objectives is referred to as proficiency.

Challenges: The term "challenges" refers to the obstacles and limitations that aspiring educators must overcome in order to acquire, access, and apply digital technology and life skills training in their educational and training settings.

Strategies: Strategies denote the intended methods, teaching techniques, and organizational actions suggested or implemented to incorporate life skills training into teacher education programs to improve digital proficiency and close the digital gap.

5. Objectives of the Study

1) To study the prospective teacher's awareness of life skill education.

2) 2. To study the level of proficiency of prospective teachers in using digital technologies.

3) 3. To find out the challenges faced by prospective teachers in utilizing technology for educational purposes.

4) 4. To find out the obstacles that hinder access to digital resources.

5) To find out the strategies for integrating life skill education into the teacher preparation program.

6) To find suitable recommendations for policymakers to address the digital divide among prospective teachers.

6. Hypothesis of the Study

1) The Prospective Teachers have low awareness of the concept of life skill education.

2) The prospective teachers have less proficiency in using digital technologies.

7. Delimitations of the Research

The study has certain limitations, even though every reasonable precaution was taken to obtain useful and trustworthy results. The few B. Ed. and M. Ed. colleges are the only ones covered by the current study.

8. Scope of the Study

"Life Skills Education and the Digital Divide among Prospective Teachers: Awareness, Proficiency, Challenges, and Strategies" is a study that is highly significant because it covers a number of crucial areas in the education sector. The study acknowledges this digital divide and seeks to close it between aspiring teachers. This is important because the technical landscape is changing quickly and the need for access to digital skills and resources is growing. Regardless of background or resource availability, the study aims to guarantee that all aspiring educators possess the requisite digital literacy abilities by incorporating life skills instruction. The emphasis on including life skills education takes into account the evolving needs of the workforce in the twenty-first century. Aspiring educators need to possess life skills including flexibility, problem-solving, and critical thinking in addition to conventional teaching abilities. To succeed

in both your personal and professional life, you need these abilities. The study advances educational equity by concentrating on overcoming the digital gap. The statement underscores the significance of guaranteeing that aspiring educators, irrespective of their financial status, have the abilities and materials required for proficient instruction in an increasingly technologically advanced global community. This work is important because it has the potential to change the way that teacher education is delivered, improve the skills that aspiring teachers will need, and help create an inclusive, technologically advanced school system.

9. Method Used in the Present Study

A topic's information is found, chosen, processed, and analyzed using particular steps or techniques known as the research methodology**.** To carry out the study, the normative survey and interview methods were used.

9.1 Sample

The researcher used a stratified random sample approach for sampling. The sample consists of 150 B.Ed. and M.Ed. students studying in B.Ed. and M.Ed. colleges, selected randomly from various colleges.

9.2 Tool Used

The investigator decided to use the following instruments for the current inquiry after taking into account the various goals of the study.

1) Personal Data Sheet.

2) Digital Divide Assessment Questionnaire

3) Structured Interview

9.3 Statistical Techniques Used

The Collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques such as Mean, Standard Deviation, and Percentage Analysis.

10. Result and Discussions

The most important aspect of every research project is data analysis. Compiling data is done through data analysis. It entails the analysis of acquired data in order to identify patterns, correlations, or trends using logical and analytical reasoning. The study's goal was to see how life skills education can help close the digital divide and address the growing disparities in technology among aspiring teachers. A structured interview and a questionnaire were used to gather the data. The collected data were merged, looked over, and evaluated to meet the objectives of the study. The Prospective Teacher's awareness of the concept of life skills education for the total sample and subsamples based on relevant demographic variables discussed here.

10.1 Prospective Teacher's awareness of the concept of life skills education for the total sample.

The prospective teacher's awareness of the concept of life skill education was found by using percentage analysis. The details are given in Table 10.1,

Table 10.1.

Categorization of Prospective Teachers based on their awareness of the concept of life skills education

Category	Yes	No	Yes %	No%
Sample Size	133	17	89	11

From the table, it is clear that among 150 prospective teachers, 133 marked options Yes (they have awareness of the concept of life skill education), and 17 said that they lack awareness of the concept of life skill education. From the percentage analysis, the table reveals that 89% of the prospective teachers have awareness of the concept of life skill education, whereas 11% show a lack of awareness of the concept of life skill education.

The Graphical representation of prospective teachers based on their level of awareness of the concept of life skill education is given in Figure 10.1.
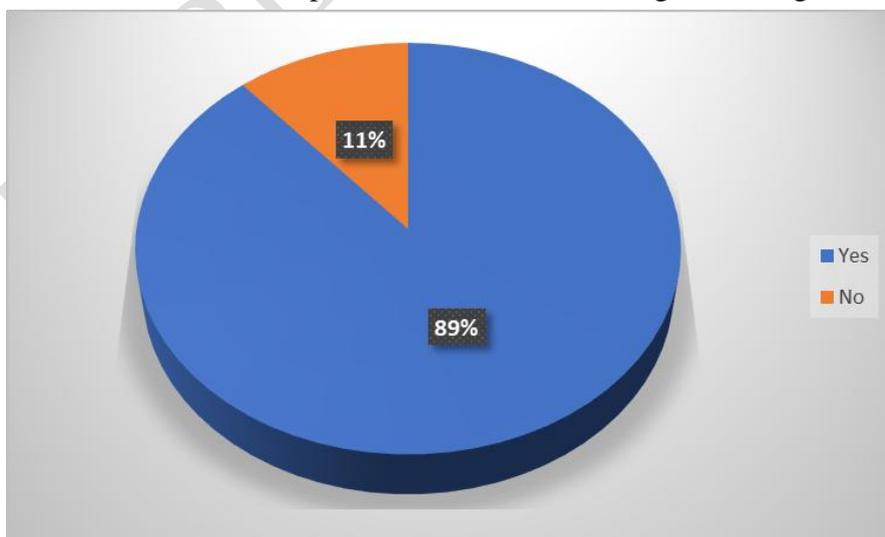
Figure 10.1: Graphical representation of the percentage analysis of prospective teachers based on their level of awareness of the concept of life skill education.

Tenability Of Hypothesis 1

Based on the statistical analysis of data performed for examining the tenability of hypothesis 1, it is evident that Hypothesis 1, which states that- "The Prospective Teachers have low awareness of the concept of life skill education", stands invalid and hence rejected.

10.2 Prospective teachers' level of proficiency in using digital technologies for the total sample.

Table 10.2

Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation of scores of levels of proficiency in using digital technologies for the total sample.

Variable	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation
Proficiency in using digital technologies	150	1.16	0.38

From Table 10.2, it is clear that the A.M. of scores for the level of proficiency in using digital technologies for the total sample of 150 prospective teachers who participated in the study was 1.16, and the S.D. of their scores was 0.38.

The prospective teachers were categorized into three groups having high,

average, and low levels of proficiency in using digital technologies. For this purpose, M+SD and M-SD were calculated. Those who scored M+SD were considered to have high awareness; those who scored below M-SD were considered to have low awareness and those who scored in between were considered as average. The details are given in Table 10.3

Table 10.3

Categorization of prospective teachers based on their level of proficiency in using digital technologies

Category	High	Average	Low	Total
Sample Size	24	125	1	150
Percentage	16	83	1	100

From the percentage analysis, table 10.3 reveals that 16% of the prospective teachers have high proficiency in using digital technologies, whereas 83% is average and 1% show a low level of proficiency in using digital technologies. The Graphical representation of prospective teachers based on their level of proficiency in using digital technologies is given in Figure 10.2.
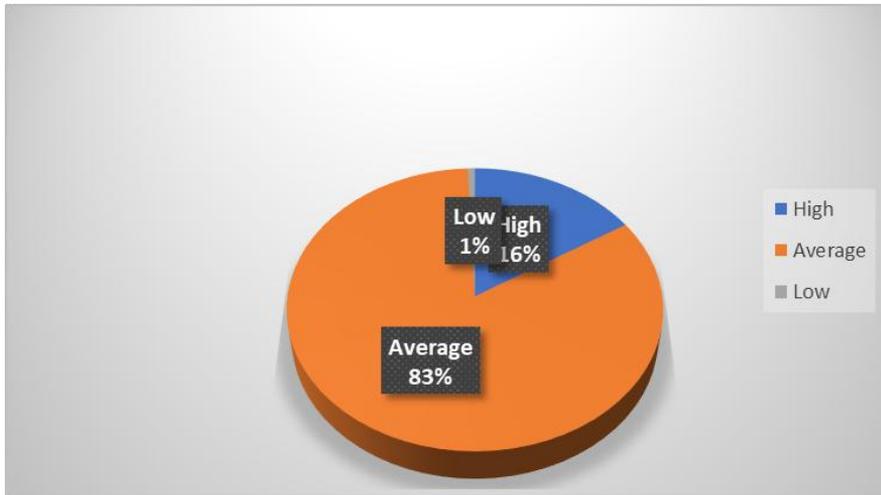
Figure 10.2: Graphical representation of the categorization of prospective teachers based on their level of proficiency in using digital technologies.

Tenability Of Hypothesis 2

Based on the statistical analysis of data performed for examining the tenability of Hypothesis 2, it is evident that Hypothesis 2, which states that- "The prospective teachers have less proficiency in using digital technologies", stands invalid and hence rejected.

10.3 Additional Insights: Key Findings from the Study

- **Key Challenges Faced by Prospective Teachers in Integrating Technology into Education**

When asked about the challenges of using technology for educational

purposes, 30% of prospective teachers stated that maintaining student engagement in virtual settings was difficult. The second challenge is the limited availability of tools to accommodate students with disabilities, which 26% of prospective teachers identified as the greatest obstacle to using technology for educational purposes. 25% of the prospective teachers interviewed stated that there was insufficient infrastructure in certain regions.13% of prospective teachers mentioned having limited awareness of online resources 5% of prospective teachers identified a lack of adequate digital skills among students and data privacy issues as challenges. The remaining 1% of teachers viewed unauthorized access to educational platforms as a significant concern.

- **Barriers to Accessing Digital Resources in Education**

When asked about specific obstacles to accessing digital resources, 49% of prospective teachers cited limited or unreliable internet access as the main challenge. Another 20% identified the high costs of purchasing or upgrading devices and paying for internet services as a significant barrier. Additionally, 15% mentioned difficulty navigating online platforms as an obstacle.

Other challenges included inadequate technology infrastructure (7%), lack of technical support (5%), and geographical or institutional restrictions (3%). Lastly, 1% of prospective teachers expressed concerns about data privacy and cybersecurity as barriers to accessing digital resources.

- **Best Practices for Integrating Life Skills Education into Teacher Training Programs**

When asked about effective strategies for integrating life skills education into teacher preparation programs, 42% of prospective teachers emphasized the importance of providing ongoing professional development opportunities to enhance teachers' understanding of life skills.

Additionally, 21% suggested embedding life skills education into the existing teacher preparation curriculum, while 13% highlighted using educational technology to provide resources and tools. Another 11% believed that giving student teachers opportunities to apply life skills education in real classrooms is an effective approach.

Furthermore, 7% advocated for incorporating experiential learning opportunities into teacher preparation programs, 4% emphasized the importance of collaboration with expert educators, and 2% recommended integrating reflective practices. These strategies are considered effective ways to ensure that future teachers are well-equipped to incorporate life skills education into their teaching practices.

- **Recommendations for Policymakers to Bridge the Digital Divide Among Prospective Teachers**

To address the digital divide among prospective teachers, 45% recommended implementing initiatives to provide affordable devices to prospective teachers. Additionally, 13% suggested allocating funds for professional development programs to enhance digital literacy, while 12% emphasized the need to provide adequate funding for technology training.

Another 10% recommended that the government facilitate public-private partnerships and adopt global best practices to tackle the digital divide effectively. An equal proportion (10%) highlighted the importance of investing in research to evaluate current initiatives and identify key areas requiring further attention.

Furthermore, 7% of prospective teachers believed that assessing existing initiatives and identifying gaps is crucial for improvement. Lastly, 3% proposed fostering collaboration with the technology industry to ensure prospective teachers have access to necessary devices and software.

These recommendations aim to equip future educators with the resources and skills needed to overcome digital barriers and enhance their teaching capabilities.

10.4 Key Suggestions for Advancing Digital Education and Life Skills for Future Teachers

The responses to the fifth question of the study, "Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the digital divide and life skills education for prospective teachers?", highlight several important suggestions aimed at bridging the digital divide and enhancing life skills education for prospective teachers. Respondents emphasized the need to update the current education system to place greater importance on both digital literacy and life skills. They recommended the establishment of computer labs in all institutions and providing more technological exposure to teachers. Additionally, it was suggested that periodic programs be arranged to familiarize teachers with the latest digital developments and that prospective teachers be equipped with essential digital technologies. There was a call for incorporating more techno-pedagogic content into teacher education curricula, addressing socio-

economic disparites, and offering professional training in life skills education. Further, the respondents proposed that the government allocate funds to support digital education initiatives, implement policy changes, and provide flexible refresher courses to help teachers stay updated. Finally, there was a strong emphasis on raising awareness about digital platforms to ensure teachers are well-prepared to navigate the evolving digital landscape.

11. Conclusion

This study revealed how life skills education can help bridge the digital divide among prospective teachers. To tackle the digital divide faced by prospective teachers, not only curriculum and policy changes but also the allocation of more funds at the government level and the implications of collective action in the private and public sectors are essential. It has become essential to include life skills education in the B.Ed. and M.Ed. curricula and also to make the students aware of its importance from the secondary level onwards.

12. Suggestions for Further Research

1. Conduct a longitudinal study to examine the long-term impact of life skills education on bridging the digital divide among prospective teachers.

2. Compare the effectiveness of life skills education programs in urban and rural teacher education institutions to assess regional disparities in digital readiness.

3. Expand the scope of the study by conducting similar research in different cultural or geographic contexts to explore how

cultural factors influence the integration of life skills education.

4. Investigate the role of emerging technologies, such as AI, virtual reality, or gamification, in enhancing life skills education and digital preparedness among aspiring teachers.

5. Study the influence of government policies or institutional initiatives on the success of integrating life skills education into teacher training programs.

6. Explore how life skills education can address the digital divide for non-traditional learners, such as adult education students or career-switching professionals in teacher training.

7. Examine how life skills education impacts the digital readiness of prospective teachers based on gender, considering the unique challenges faced by different gender groups.

8. Investigate how integrating life skills education with other disciplines, such as psychology or management, can enhance digital competencies in teacher training.

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