



Short Paper

Project DigiTulay: A Literacy Program of Philippine Christian University to Bridge the Digital Gap in Barangay 694, Metro Manila

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of Project DigiTulay, a digital literacy program by the Philippine Christian University designed to bridge the digital gap in Barangay 694, Metro Manila, where access to technology remains limited. Forty-five participants, comprising Barangay Officials, Parents, and Youth, completed training in basic computer skills, internet navigation, and cybersecurity. Using a pretest-posttest design, the program demonstrated significant improvements in digital literacy scores across all groups ($p < 0.05$), with Youth showing the most substantial gains. These findings suggest that community-based digital literacy initiatives can effectively enhance digital competencies and reduce barriers to technology use, supporting greater inclusion and empowerment in underserved areas.

Keywords – digital literacy, digital divide, community empowerment, digital skills training



INTRODUCTION

In today's digital world, technology has woven itself into almost every aspect of daily life, shaping how people learn, work, and stay connected. From education to healthcare, digital tools have completely transformed traditional systems, making learning more interactive and improving the way medical services are delivered. For instance, in education, technology has changed how teachers engage with students, making lessons more dynamic and accessible (Culcasi et al., 2025; World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2024). In healthcare, digital advancements have streamlined operations, improved patient care, and increased efficiency (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2024).

However, while digitalization is moving at lightning speed, not everyone has the same level of access to technology. A significant portion of the global population is left behind due to limited resources and a lack of digital skills. This issue, known as the digital divide, creates a gap between those who can fully participate in the digital economy and those who struggle to keep up. Without proper access to technology, many individuals miss out on opportunities for education, employment, and financial stability, reinforcing cycles of economic inequality (Datta et al., 2019). Bridging this gap requires a collaborative effort from governments, businesses, and organizations to improve digital infrastructure, create inclusive policies, and provide digital literacy training for underserved communities (Datta et al., 2019).

The digital divide is especially visible in low-income communities, where financial hardships, poor internet access, and limited educational resources prevent residents from gaining essential digital skills. In the Philippines, while digital transformation is rapidly progressing, many individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle to keep up. Without access to computers, smartphones, or a reliable internet connection, they face challenges in education, job applications, government services, and even everyday tasks like online banking. As a result, they find themselves at a disadvantage in a world that increasingly depends on technology.

One such community facing these challenges is Barangay 694 in Metro Manila. Here, students, job seekers, and even senior citizens often struggle with digital tools. For students, limited access to technology makes online learning and research difficult. Job seekers may have trouble creating resumes, applying for jobs online, or attending virtual interviews. Meanwhile, older adults may find digital banking, telehealth services, or even basic smartphone applications confusing, leaving them disconnected from important services. Without digital skills, not only do individuals struggle, but the entire community faces setbacks in development and progress.

To address this urgent issue, Philippine Christian University (PCU) has launched DigiTulay, a digital literacy program designed to empower the residents of Barangay 694.

This initiative aims to bridge the digital divide by providing hands-on training in computer literacy, internet navigation, online safety, and the practical use of digital tools for education, employment, and daily life. Through DigiTulay, community members gain the knowledge and confidence to navigate the digital world, opening doors to new opportunities and improving their quality of life. More than just teaching technical skills, this program fosters inclusion and ensures that no one is left behind in today's fast-moving digital age.

Importance of the Study

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, digital literacy is no longer a privilege but a fundamental requirement for individuals to participate effectively in education, employment, and civic engagement. The ability to navigate digital platforms, access online resources, and utilize e-government services is crucial for personal and professional growth. However, many underserved communities, such as Barangay 694 in Metro Manila, continue to face barriers in acquiring these essential skills due to limited access to technology, lack of formal training, and socio-economic constraints.

This study, through the implementation of DigiTulay, seeks to empower the residents of Barangay 694 by equipping them with foundational digital skills that will enhance their capacity to learn, work, and interact in an increasingly digital world. By providing structured digital literacy training, the program aims to:

1. Improve Educational Access - Students will gain the skills needed to conduct research, engage in online learning, and utilize digital tools for academic success.
2. Enhance Employment Opportunities - Job seekers will be better prepared to create digital resumes, apply for jobs online, and participate in virtual interviews.
3. Promote Digital Inclusion for All - Senior citizens and other community members will develop the confidence to navigate e-government services, digital banking, and essential online platforms for communication and daily transactions.

Beyond its immediate benefits to the community, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital inclusion programs in the Philippines. It will serve as a model for similar initiatives in other underserved communities, providing insights into the best practices for implementing digital literacy programs at the grassroots level. By highlighting the impact of DigiTulay, this study will also inform policymakers, educators, and non-government organizations on how to effectively address the digital divide and promote inclusive technological empowerment across the country. Ultimately, this research underscores the critical role of digital literacy in fostering economic mobility, social inclusion, and lifelong learning, ensuring that no community is left behind in the digital age.

Problem Statement

Despite government efforts to promote digital inclusion, many individuals in urban poor communities remain digitally illiterate. The lack of formal training programs and limited access to digital resources have resulted in a significant gap between those who can effectively use technology and those who cannot. In Barangay 694, Metro Manila, residents face multiple challenges that hinder their ability to participate in the digital world, including:

1. Limited Access to Technology - Many residents lack computers, smartphones, or a stable internet connection, restricting their ability to engage in digital activities.
2. Lack of Digital Literacy
 - a. Students struggle with online learning, research, and using digital tools for academic success.
 - b. Job seekers face difficulties in creating digital resumes, applying for jobs online, and attending virtual interviews.
 - c. Senior citizens and other community members encounter challenges in using essential online services such as digital banking, telehealth, and e-government platforms.
3. Economic and Social Disparities
 - a. Limited financial resources make it difficult for individuals to acquire the necessary devices and training.
 - b. Low levels of education and digital literacy restrict opportunities for employment and economic mobility.
4. Impact on Community Development
 - a. The lack of digital skills leads to reduced access to education, job opportunities, and government services.
 - b. The community as a whole struggles to keep up with the rapid pace of digital transformation, widening the gap between those with and without digital access.

To address these issues, Philippine Christian University (PCU) launched the DigiTulay project, a digital literacy program aimed at bridging the digital gap in Barangay 694.

Aim of the Paper

This initiative provides structured training in computer literacy, internet navigation, online safety, and the practical use of digital tools to empower community members. This research seeks to answer the question:

"How effective is DigiTulay in enhancing digital literacy among the residents of Barangay 694, Metro Manila?"

To achieve this, the study aims to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the DigiTulay program in improving digital literacy and access among the residents of Barangay 694.
2. Assess its impact on education, employment, and digital inclusion within the community.
3. Identify best practices for implementing digital literacy programs in other marginalized communities.
4. Contribute to policy discussions on bridging the digital divide and promoting inclusive technological empowerment in the Philippines.

Through examining the outcomes of DigiTulay, this research seeks to highlight the importance of digital literacy programs in fostering economic mobility, social inclusion, and sustainable community development.

Research Gap

While several national and private initiatives focus on digital literacy, most programs cater to students or professionals with pre-existing technological knowledge. Few studies have examined the impact of grassroots-level digital literacy programs targeting marginalized urban communities. This research aims to fill that gap by assessing the effectiveness of DigiTulay and its role in reducing digital exclusion.

Evidence Supporting the Study

Studies have shown that digital literacy programs significantly improve employability, access to online education, and participation in digital governance. For instance, the ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme, launched in the Philippines in 2022, aimed to reach at least 20,000 beneficiaries, highlighting the importance of such initiatives in combating misinformation and empowering communities. However, a localized evaluation of digital literacy efforts, especially within Metro Manila's urban poor communities, remains insufficient. This study will provide empirical evidence on how community-based programs like DigiTulay impact digital skills development.

Local Context

Barangay 694 is a densely populated area in Metro Manila, home to individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Many residents have limited access to personal computers and rely heavily on mobile devices for digital access. This setting presents unique challenges in digital literacy training, making it a critical area for intervention. The DigiTulay program aims to provide structured learning sessions covering essential digital skills, from basic computer operation to online safety and productivity tools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Literacy and Its Role in Community Development

Digital literacy is widely recognized as a foundational skill in the 21st century, essential for education, employment, and social inclusion (Culcasi et al., 2025; World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2024). It encompasses the ability to use digital devices, navigate the internet, and critically evaluate online information. As digital technologies become pervasive, communities lacking digital literacy face increased social and economic disadvantages, which exacerbate existing inequalities (Datta et al., 2019; Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024). Studies indicate that enhancing digital skills within marginalized communities can lead to improved educational outcomes, better job prospects, and greater civic engagement (Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024).

The Digital Divide: Causes and Consequences

The digital divide refers to the gap between those with sufficient access and skills to use digital technologies effectively and those without (van Dijk, 2020). This divide is shaped not only by material access to devices and internet connectivity but also by motivational and skill-based barriers (Tomczyk, 2020). Financial constraints, educational disparities, and social factors contribute to this inequality, particularly in underserved urban areas (Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024). In the Philippines, rapid digitalization has highlighted these gaps, especially among low-income populations who lack both infrastructure and digital literacy training (Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024).

Community-Based Digital Literacy Programs

Research shows that grassroots digital literacy initiatives are effective in bridging the divide by tailoring training to local needs and contexts (Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024). Community programs that focus on practical skills—such as internet navigation, online safety, and basic computer use—empower participants to leverage technology for education, employment, and daily tasks (Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024). However, most programs focus on students or professionals, with limited attention given to holistic community inclusion that spans various age groups and socio-economic statuses (Rahman & Panda, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The DigiTulay Project is built on Van Dijk's Digital Divide Theory and the idea of Categorical Inequalities, which look at both personal and societal factors that contribute to digital exclusion. These frameworks highlight the ongoing challenges that marginalized communities face in

accessing technology, developing digital skills, and fully participating in the digital world. Addressing these gaps, DigiTulay aims to create more inclusive opportunities for individuals who might otherwise be left behind.

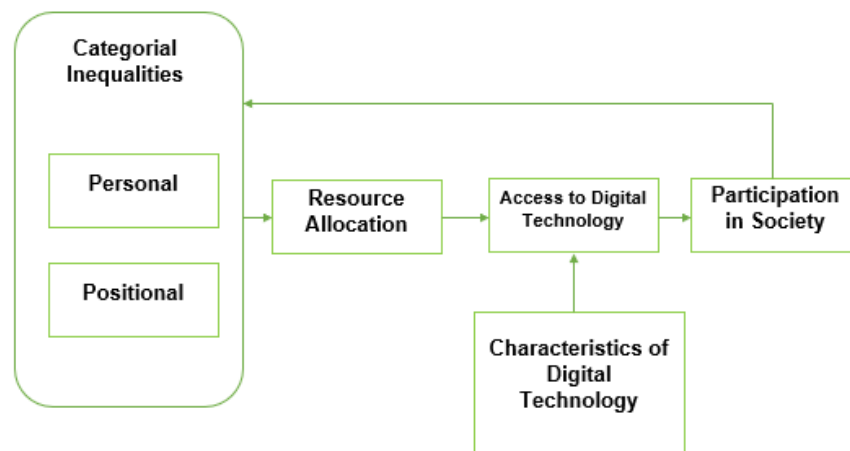


Figure 1. Digital Divide Theory

The DigiTulay Project is built on the ideas of Van Dijk’s Digital Divide Theory (van Dijk, 2020), which explains that digital inequality isn’t just about having or not having technology. It’s about the different challenges people face in using it effectively. Van Dijk identifies four key barriers that contribute to the digital divide:

1. Motivational Access – Some people don’t see the need for technology or feel intimidated by it.
2. Material Access – Not everyone can afford devices like computers, smartphones, or a stable internet connection.
3. Skills Access – Even with access to technology, many lack the digital skills to navigate it confidently.
4. Usage Access – Those who are more tech-savvy can take full advantage of opportunities like online learning and job applications, while others struggle to keep up.

In Barangay 694, these barriers affect many residents. Some don’t have the necessary devices or internet connection, while others find it difficult to use technology for work, learning, or daily life because they lack digital skills. Van Dijk’s theory also connects to Categorical Inequalities, which highlight how financial, educational, and social factors impact digital access. These inequalities fall into two main categories:

A. Personal Inequalities

These inequalities are shaped by an individual’s background and resources.

1. Financial limitations – Those with higher incomes can afford better devices and training, while lower-income individuals often struggle to keep up.
2. Education and digital literacy – People with limited education may find it harder to use technology effectively.
3. Opportunities and participation – Those with strong digital skills can access better job opportunities and online services, while others get left behind.

B. Positional Inequalities

These are larger, structural issues that affect entire communities.

1. Unequal resource distribution – Government and corporate investments in technology tend to focus on wealthier areas, leaving marginalized communities with fewer opportunities.
2. Workplace technology gaps – Employees in tech-based industries have more access to digital tools, while informal workers and small businesses often lack the same resources.
3. Limited influence on digital policies – While marginalized groups have less influence over decisions that affect their access to technology, those in positions of power determine digital regulations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest research design, which involves measuring participants’ outcomes before and after an intervention without the use of a control group. This design is commonly applied in community-based and exploratory studies where randomization or comparison groups are not feasible due to practical and ethical constraints. The approach allows for the assessment of changes attributable to the intervention by comparing pre-intervention and post-intervention results within the same group.

In this study, the design was appropriate because Project DigiTulay was implemented as a community outreach initiative intended to provide immediate digital literacy training to all available participants in Barangay 694. The effectiveness of the program was evaluated by examining improvements in participants’ digital literacy levels following the intervention.

Participants

The participants consisted of 45 residents of Barangay 694, Metro Manila, including barangay officials, parents, and youth. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who represented key sectors of the community most affected by digital exclusion. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent before data collection.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured digital literacy questionnaire adapted from recent studies on digital skills assessment (Tomczyk, 2020). The instrument measured participants’ competencies in basic computer operations, internet navigation, and

cybersecurity awareness. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale with consistent verbal descriptors, ranging from 1 (Not Confident) to 5 (Very Confident). The scale was standardized across all items to ensure clarity, reliability, and consistency, addressing previous issues related to mixed terminology between confidence and knowledge levels.

Procedure

The DigiTulay program was implemented through a series of hands-on training sessions conducted at a community venue in Barangay 694. The sessions focused on basic computer use, internet browsing, online safety, and the practical application of digital tools for education, employment, and daily activities. A pretest was administered before the start of the training to establish baseline digital literacy levels. Upon completion of the program, a posttest using the same instrument was conducted to measure changes in participants' digital competencies.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to summarize participants' digital literacy levels before and after the intervention. A paired samples t-test was employed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between pretest and posttest scores. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$, and all analyses were performed using SPSS software.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of pretest and posttest data obtained from participants of Project DigiTulay. Table 1 shows the mean digital literacy scores of participants before and after the implementation of the digital literacy program. Before the intervention, participants demonstrated low to moderate levels of digital literacy, particularly in basic computer operation, internet navigation, and online safety practices.

Following the completion of the DigiTulay training, posttest mean scores increased across all participant groups, indicating an overall improvement in digital literacy. The results of the paired samples t-test revealed that the differences between pretest and posttest scores were statistically significant for all groups ($p < .05$). Among the three groups, youth participants exhibited the highest posttest mean scores and the greatest mean difference, suggesting a higher level of adaptability and responsiveness to digital skills training compared to parents and barangay officials. Parents and barangay officials also demonstrated substantial improvements, reflecting the effectiveness of the program across age groups.

Overall, the findings provide empirical evidence that Project DigiTulay was effective in enhancing digital literacy and reducing digital skill gaps among residents of Barangay 694, Metro Manila.

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Digital Literacy Scores of DigiTulay Participants (n = 45)

Participant Group	Test	Mean (M)	Mean Difference	t-value	df	Sig.
Barangay Officials	Pretest	2.41				
	Posttest	3.68	1.27	4.12	14	.000
Parents	Pretest	2.35				
	Posttest	3.74	1.39	5.06	14	.000
Youth	Pretest	2.62				
	Posttest	4.12	1.50	6.21	14	.000

Note: Mean scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale. Statistical significance was tested using a paired samples t-test. $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that Project DigiTulay effectively enhanced digital literacy among residents of Barangay 694, Metro Manila. Significant improvements in digital skills across all participant groups demonstrate the value of community-based training in reducing digital divides in underserved areas. Consistent with recent studies, participants showed increased competence in basic computer use, internet navigation, and online safety (Tomczyk, 2020). This supports Van Dijk's Digital Divide Theory, which emphasizes that overcoming digital exclusion requires not only access but also the development of relevant skills (van Dijk, 2020).

Youth participants exhibited the highest gains, consistent with research showing that younger individuals adapt more readily to technology due to prior exposure and educational engagement (Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024; Tomczyk, 2020). However, improvements among parents and barangay officials indicate that digital literacy can be effectively developed across age groups through tailored instruction and inclusive community programs (Datta et al., 2019; Culcasi et al., 2025). The program's impact extends beyond individual skill acquisition; by enhancing digital competencies, residents are better equipped to access online education, employment, and essential services, promoting social inclusion and community development (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2024).

Limitations of the study include the pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, which restricts causal inference due to the absence of a control group (Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024). Additionally, the focus on a single barangay and the small sample size limit the generalizability of findings. Future research should consider quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs with larger, more diverse samples to strengthen the validity and applicability of results (Prasastiningtyas et al., 2024).

In conclusion, Project DigiTulay exemplifies how university-community partnerships can effectively bridge the digital divide through grassroots digital literacy initiatives (Datta et al., 2019; Culcasi et al., 2025).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that Project DigiTulay significantly improves digital literacy among residents of Barangay 694, Metro Manila. The findings show meaningful gains in digital skills for all participant groups, with youth exhibiting the greatest improvements. The program successfully reduced barriers to technology use, empowering community members to better engage with education, employment, and essential services.

Based on these results, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Expand Digital Literacy Programs** — Similar community-based initiatives should be implemented in other underserved areas to address the persistent digital divide across the Philippines.
2. **Tailor Training to Diverse Groups** — Programs should consider the unique needs of different demographics, such as older adults and parents, to maximize participation and skill acquisition.
3. **Incorporate Follow-up Support** — Continuous learning opportunities and digital support services can help sustain gains and adapt to evolving technological demands.
4. **Strengthen University-Community Partnerships** — Collaborations between academic institutions and local communities provide effective frameworks for inclusive digital empowerment.
5. **Policy Advocacy** — Policymakers should prioritize funding and support for grassroots digital literacy efforts to promote equitable access and participation in the digital economy.

Future research should employ more rigorous experimental designs and larger sample sizes to validate these findings and explore long-term impacts.

IMPLICATIONS

The positive outcomes of Project DigiTulay highlight the critical role of digital literacy programs in fostering inclusive community development. By equipping marginalized populations with essential digital skills, such initiatives contribute to reducing socio-economic inequalities and enhancing access to education, employment, and public services.

For educators and community organizers, this study underscores the importance of designing culturally relevant and accessible training programs that address the diverse

needs of participants. It also emphasizes the need for ongoing digital support beyond initial training to maintain skill levels and confidence.

Policymakers can use these findings to advocate for expanded funding and the integration of digital literacy initiatives within national and local development plans.

Furthermore, fostering partnerships between universities, local governments, and civil society organizations can amplify the reach and effectiveness of digital inclusion efforts.

Ultimately, improving digital literacy at the grassroots level empowers communities to participate meaningfully in the digital economy, promotes lifelong learning, and drives sustainable socio-economic progress.

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DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Ethics Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Philippine Christian University Ethics Review Board.

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