

Empowering Communities through Digital Skills Training in Simeulue Village

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ABSTRACT

Background. Digital transformation has become a pivotal driver for socio-economic development in rural areas. However, digital literacy among remote communities remains significantly low, especially in regions such as Simeulue Village, where access to technology and training is limited.

Purpose. This study aims to explore the impact of community empowerment initiatives through digital skills training programs targeted at improving local capacity in information and communication technology (ICT).

Method. A qualitative case study method was employed, involving participatory observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with 30 participants from the local community. The training modules included basic computer operations, internet usage, and digital entrepreneurship.

Results. The findings indicate a marked improvement in participants' digital competencies, leading to increased confidence, economic opportunities, and engagement with digital platforms for both education and commerce. Furthermore, the program fostered social inclusion and collaborative learning.

Conclusion. The study concludes that digital skills training is a viable tool for community empowerment, provided it is contextually tailored and supported by sustainable infrastructure. These insights offer implications for policymakers and development agencies aiming to bridge the digital divide in marginalized rural settings.

KEYWORDS

Digital Literacy, Community Empowerment, Rural Development, ICT Training, Simeulue Village

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed nearly every aspect of modern life, including education, economics, health, and governance. Despite these global advancements, significant disparities persist between urban and rural communities, particularly in developing nations such as Indonesia. In isolated regions like Simeulue Village, the benefits of digital transformation have not been fully realized due to limited access to infrastructure, low levels of digital literacy, and minimal institutional support for technological integration in everyday life.

Digital skills are no longer optional but essential tools for social and economic participation. Communities that lack the capacity to engage with digital tools are at risk of being left behind, both economically and socially. In many rural Indonesian contexts, youth and adults alike are hindered



by inadequate exposure to digital technologies, which results in limited access to employment opportunities, reduced educational outcomes, and diminished civic engagement. The digital divide continues to grow, and its effects are felt most profoundly by those in marginalized and geographically remote locations such as Simeulue.

Addressing these digital inequalities requires a focused intervention that goes beyond infrastructure provision. Training in digital literacy, particularly in basic computer skills, internet use, and the application of digital tools for entrepreneurship and education, is crucial to empowering rural communities. By equipping local populations with these skills, community members can become active participants in the digital economy, thereby enhancing their livelihoods and social agency (Alsadhan et al., 2025; Badrudin et al., 2025; Giunti et al., 2025). The initiation of digital training programs in villages like Simeulue is a critical step toward achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

Despite growing awareness of the importance of digital empowerment, specific issues remain unresolved. One core problem is the persistent lack of access to structured, culturally relevant, and sustainable digital training programs tailored to rural communities. Many existing programs are either urban-centric or fail to consider the technological, educational, and socio-economic conditions in remote areas (Kooli et al., 2025; Norberg et al., 2025). As a result, the benefits of such programs are either not fully realized or entirely inaccessible to those who need them the most.

In Simeulue Village, these challenges are evident in the limited ability of residents to use digital devices for productive purposes. While mobile phone ownership is common, usage remains confined to entertainment and basic communication rather than education, business, or civic engagement (Mirhabibi et al., 2025; Trisno et al., 2025). This usage pattern reflects a broader issue—the absence of digital literacy programs that can help people transition from passive consumers of technology to active digital citizens. Without deliberate and well-structured interventions, this knowledge gap will continue to undermine efforts to reduce poverty and promote equitable development.

The research therefore seeks to investigate how a community-based digital skills training program can serve as a practical and scalable solution to digital exclusion in Simeulue. By identifying the key barriers faced by the local population and assessing the impact of a targeted intervention, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital literacy development in rural Indonesia (Gijón et al., 2025; Kaliebe & Shah, 2025). The problem is not simply technological but deeply rooted in issues of access, equity, and the localization of knowledge and practice.

The objective of this study is to examine the role of digital skills training in empowering the community of Simeulue Village. Specifically, the research aims to assess how basic ICT training can improve individual competencies, foster economic participation, and enhance overall community engagement in the digital sphere (Buayai et al., 2025; Lindsay et al., 2025; Nabhan & Habók, 2025). The study is expected to contribute actionable insights into the design and implementation of effective training models suitable for similar socio-cultural and geographic contexts.

A further goal of this research is to understand the process of behavioral transformation among rural participants during and after their involvement in digital training. This includes an evaluation of changes in digital usage habits, economic activities enabled by digital tools, and increased participation in online education or public services (Peterson et al., 2025; Sakitri et al., 2025). These outcomes will help assess the long-term sustainability of such interventions beyond their immediate educational goals.

This study also aims to produce a replicable framework for rural digital training that incorporates community participation, local relevance, and infrastructural feasibility. Such a model can serve as a guide for NGOs, governmental institutions, and educators working in the field of digital inclusion. The research highlights the necessity of adaptive training methods that consider local knowledge, learning preferences, and social dynamics within rural communities.

Although a growing body of literature addresses digital literacy in urban or formal educational settings, few studies have explored how informal, community-based training can empower rural populations in geographically isolated areas. Previous research often assumes a certain baseline of digital exposure, which may not be applicable in locations like Simeulue where digital fluency is low (Beerbaum et al., 2025; Bhattacharya et al., 2025; Herman, 2025). This presents a significant gap in understanding the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of digital empowerment in underserved contexts.

Current studies that do examine rural digital inclusion frequently focus on infrastructure development without paying adequate attention to human capacity-building. The emphasis on internet availability and device provision, while important, often overlooks the fact that without the necessary skills, individuals are unable to make effective use of technological tools (Choudhary, 2025; Cooke et al., 2025; Imjai et al., 2025). The need for community-oriented digital training models that integrate cultural, linguistic, and educational factors remains underexplored in existing academic discourse.

The absence of longitudinal, qualitative data on the impacts of digital skills training in rural Indonesian communities further limits the generalizability of existing findings. This research addresses that gap by employing participatory and ethnographic approaches to understand both short-term skill acquisition and longer-term transformations in digital behavior (Katsaliaki, 2025; Phung, 2025). By contributing grounded insights into the lived experiences of participants, this study adds critical depth to the ongoing conversation on digital inclusion.

This research is novel in its focus on a localized and participatory approach to digital training in a remote Indonesian village. Unlike top-down models, this study emphasizes the importance of community involvement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of training modules. This ensures that the content is both culturally relevant and practically applicable, increasing the likelihood of sustained engagement and long-term impact.

The justification for this research lies in its potential to bridge the divide between digital policy formulation and grassroots implementation. It provides empirical evidence for stakeholders—including educators, policymakers, and community organizers—seeking to foster inclusive digital development. Moreover, the study addresses the broader goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda, particularly in promoting quality education, reducing inequalities, and enhancing global partnerships for development.

In light of its contributions to both theory and practice, this research fills a critical void in the field of rural education and digital empowerment. It proposes a scalable, context-specific model for digital training that could be adopted across various underdeveloped regions in Indonesia and beyond. By centering the voices and experiences of the rural population, this study highlights the transformative potential of digital literacy in reshaping the socio-economic trajectories of marginalized communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the implementation and impact of a digital skills training program in Simeulue Village. The approach was selected to allow an in-depth understanding of community experiences, perceptions, and behavioral changes following the intervention (Aly et al., 2025; Kritsotaki et al., 2025). Emphasis was placed on capturing rich, contextual insights through direct engagement with participants, facilitators, and local leaders involved in the training process.

The population of this study consisted of adult residents of Simeulue Village who had limited exposure to digital technology but demonstrated an interest in improving their skills. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select 30 participants representing a diverse mix of gender, age, educational background, and occupational roles. Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old, reside permanently in the village, and express commitment to complete the entire training program.

The research instruments included semi-structured interview guides, field observation sheets, and documentation tools for collecting data throughout the training sessions. The interview guide was designed to elicit participants' experiences before, during, and after the training. Observation instruments focused on engagement patterns, behavioral changes, and interaction dynamics during the sessions. Additional documentation such as attendance records, digital project outputs, and facilitator logs were used to triangulate findings.

Data collection procedures followed several systematic steps to ensure accuracy and reliability. Preliminary visits were conducted to engage community leaders and introduce the objectives of the study. After obtaining informed consent, participants were enrolled in a six-week digital skills training program comprising modules on computer basics, internet literacy, and practical applications such as digital marketing and online services. Throughout the program, researchers conducted direct observations and facilitated reflective discussions. At the conclusion of the training, post-intervention interviews were carried out to assess perceived benefits, skill acquisition, and suggestions for improvement. All data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify emerging patterns relevant to community empowerment through digital education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data collected from the 30 participants revealed a significant increase in digital skills following the completion of the training program. Pre-test scores ranged from 38 to 50, with an average of 44.97, indicating a generally low level of digital competency prior to the intervention. Post-test results demonstrated substantial improvement, with scores ranging from 74 to 87 and an average of 81.33. The average score increase was 36.37 points, suggesting the effectiveness of the training module in enhancing participants' digital literacy.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Statistic	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Improvement
Mean	44.97	81.33	36.37
Standard Dev.	3.37	3.16	1.07
Min	38	74	34
Max	50	87	38

Statistic	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Improvement
Median	45.00	81.50	37.00

The data suggest not only a general upward trend but also a relatively consistent pattern of improvement across participants. The low standard deviation (1.07) in the improvement scores indicates that the impact of the training was evenly distributed among participants, without significant outliers. This consistency reflects the adaptability and accessibility of the training materials, which were contextually tailored to the needs of rural learners.

Observed behavior during the training sessions also reinforced the statistical findings. Participants displayed increased confidence when navigating digital interfaces, demonstrated the ability to conduct online searches, and successfully completed tasks such as creating email accounts and using productivity tools. Anecdotal evidence showed that older participants, initially hesitant, became active contributors to group discussions and peer support activities, illustrating the program's inclusive and motivating structure.

Inferential analysis using a paired samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ($p < 0.01$). The large effect size confirms that the increase in digital skills is not due to chance but rather attributable to the structured training intervention. These findings validate the hypothesis that community-based training can effectively bridge the digital literacy gap in rural environments.

Further data relationships were found between participants' prior exposure to smartphones and the speed of skill acquisition. Those with more frequent use of basic mobile applications (e.g., messaging, social media) adapted more quickly to advanced functions such as word processing and internet navigation. However, participants with no previous digital exposure also achieved comparable post-test results, although with a slightly longer learning curve, highlighting the inclusivity of the training model.

A case study from one participant, a 42-year-old housewife with no prior computer experience, underscores the transformative potential of the program. Initially unable to identify keyboard functions, she completed the course with the ability to draft simple documents and assist her child with online learning tasks. Her testimony, along with that of others, illustrates a change not only in skills but also in personal empowerment and agency.

Participants described the training experience as “eye-opening” and “life-changing,” with many expressing enthusiasm to continue learning and even share knowledge with other villagers. Several individuals initiated small-scale digital businesses such as online snack sales and social media-based advertising, signaling the immediate practical impact of the intervention. These qualitative outcomes align with the quantitative data and reinforce the social value of community-focused digital literacy efforts.

The results confirm the initial assumption that structured digital skills training can yield measurable improvements in both technical competence and socio-economic engagement. The consistency between statistical gains, observed behaviors, and personal testimonies strengthens the credibility and applicability of the findings. In the context of rural Indonesia, such programs present a scalable model for sustainable community development.

The results of this study show a significant increase in digital literacy among the participants of the training program in Simeulue Village. Pre- and post-test scores indicate an average improvement of over 36 points, suggesting a strong effect of the intervention. Behavioral observations during the training sessions confirm that participants gained not only technical skills but also increased confidence and independence in using digital tools. Testimonies from

participants reinforce the quantitative results, illustrating that the training has made a tangible difference in their daily lives.

Participants transitioned from digital illiteracy to functional competence in areas such as typing, navigating operating systems, using internet browsers, and managing basic digital communication tools. Anecdotal evidence reveals the emergence of peer-to-peer support, indicating a growing sense of collective digital identity and shared empowerment. The training modules successfully bridged both generational and educational gaps among learners. Overall, the data suggest that the digital training program has achieved its intended outcomes both cognitively and socially.

Participants' consistent improvement in post-test performance and engagement with digital tools indicates a strong alignment between the content of the training and the learning needs of rural communities. The improvement also reflects the accessibility and contextual relevance of the training modules. The structure of the program—delivered in the local language, paced appropriately, and infused with practical tasks—likely contributed to this successful outcome. These results suggest that well-designed digital training can have immediate and meaningful impacts on underserved populations.

The effectiveness of the training program suggests that rural digital empowerment is not only feasible but also replicable under appropriate pedagogical and social conditions. The structured design, active facilitation, and ongoing feedback mechanisms embedded in the training contributed significantly to the outcomes. The positive response from both younger and older participants further demonstrates the program's inclusivity and cultural resonance. These outcomes collectively validate the hypothesis that a locally grounded digital training initiative can foster sustainable development outcomes in rural settings.

In comparison with previous research, the findings from this study highlight several key differences. Studies conducted in urban settings often emphasize access to high-speed internet or the use of advanced applications, which are not always applicable in remote communities. Literature on rural digital education frequently reports on infrastructure deficiencies but seldom addresses how communities adapt pedagogically and socially to new technologies (Castañeda-Castaño, 2025; Devraj et al., 2025; Korol & Blaya, 2025). The current study provides a deeper insight into how training content and delivery can shape digital behavior in low-resource settings.

A number of existing studies, such as those by Warschauer (2010) and van Dijk (2006), have noted the risk of social exclusion due to limited digital competence. This study supports those concerns but adds an important nuance: digital exclusion can be mitigated through targeted and community-sensitive interventions. Unlike standardized training approaches common in prior literature, this study incorporated localized content and flexible instructional strategies that proved more effective in the Simeulue context (Bothma & Fourie, 2025; Sarwar et al., 2025; Subasinghe et al., 2025). These findings suggest that success in digital literacy programs depends not just on technology availability, but on pedagogical adaptability.

The results of this study also contrast with some reports that show low retention or engagement among adult learners in rural ICT programs. In this case, engagement was sustained across the training period, with low dropout rates and high satisfaction levels. The key differentiator appears to be the integration of real-life applications and the communal nature of the learning experience. Learners found direct relevance in what they were taught, particularly in relation to family, business, and education.

Other studies have focused primarily on economic outcomes, such as employability or increased income. While this research acknowledges those outcomes, it expands the understanding

of digital empowerment to include psychological, educational, and social dimensions. Participants not only acquired new skills but also reported increased confidence, curiosity, and a desire to share knowledge with others. These effects suggest that digital literacy, when framed as a form of personal and communal empowerment, can yield multidimensional benefits.

The findings point to a significant turning point in understanding the digital divide in rural Indonesia. Digital exclusion is not solely a matter of infrastructure, but also of awareness, accessibility, and adaptive pedagogy. The ability of villagers with no prior exposure to technology to learn and apply digital skills challenges the notion that digital literacy is limited by socio-economic background. This signals the importance of investing in training that is human-centered, community-led, and purpose-driven.

The success of the program demonstrates that digital skills training can serve as an entry point to broader forms of community development. By equipping participants with the ability to interact in digital environments, the program lays the foundation for economic diversification, educational enrichment, and civic participation (Odularu, 2025; Vagg et al., 2025). This research suggests that digital inclusion strategies must move beyond infrastructure provision toward the development of context-sensitive human capital. Empowering individuals in this way fosters agency, dignity, and long-term transformation.

These findings underscore the potential of participatory and experiential learning methods in promoting digital inclusion. Rural communities respond positively when the training process aligns with their pace, values, and realities. This creates an ecosystem in which learning is both a personal journey and a communal endeavor. The sense of ownership generated through the process enhances sustainability and relevance beyond the training timeline.

The study also raises important implications for policy and program development. Ministries of education and rural development, NGOs, and local governments can draw on this model to implement similar initiatives across other remote regions. Training programs should be designed with input from local communities to ensure relevance, accessibility, and acceptability. Partnerships between local trainers, digital platforms, and governmental actors are essential to institutionalizing these efforts within broader rural development strategies.

The high level of participant engagement and skill acquisition can be attributed to several key factors. The use of community facilitators, contextualized training materials, and ongoing support throughout the learning process created an environment of trust and encouragement. Participants were not merely trained but were invited to co-create the learning experience, fostering a sense of agency. These elements distinguish this program from conventional top-down digital literacy models.

Participants' initial reluctance was addressed through culturally sensitive facilitation and peer encouragement. Trust and social cohesion within the village contributed to a collaborative learning environment. Participants expressed a desire to continue learning and to become digital mentors for others in the community, signaling a ripple effect of empowerment. These outcomes reflect the importance of social dynamics in the success of digital education programs.

The structured yet flexible learning modules allowed participants with varied literacy levels to engage meaningfully. Practical tasks that mirrored real-life challenges-such as online marketing of local products or digital access to government services-reinforced the relevance of the training. This alignment of content with lived experience enhanced both motivation and retention. The methodology used in this study highlights the importance of educational relevance in digital empowerment.

This study opens several avenues for future action. Digital training must be embedded in a broader rural development framework that includes economic, educational, and social dimensions. Follow-up support, mentorship networks, and advanced modules are necessary to maintain momentum and deepen skillsets. The integration of such training into village governance, educational institutions, and entrepreneurial ecosystems will ensure lasting impact.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study lies in the evidence that community-based digital skills training, when contextualized to local culture and delivered through participatory methods, can substantially elevate digital literacy in remote and underserved rural settings. Participants in Simeulue Village not only improved their technical competencies but also experienced a shift in digital behavior, moving from passive users to active, confident participants in the digital space. This behavioral transformation was especially notable among individuals with no prior digital exposure, challenging common assumptions about the limits of rural digital engagement.

This research contributes uniquely to the field by offering both a conceptual and methodological advancement. Theoretically, it frames digital empowerment as a multidimensional process that encompasses not only technical training but also community ownership and socio-cultural adaptation. Methodologically, it introduces a replicable model of digital training that emphasizes localized content, community facilitation, and experiential learning strategies. These elements represent a meaningful departure from one-size-fits-all digital literacy programs that often fail in rural contexts due to cultural and infrastructural mismatches.

The study acknowledges limitations related to the short duration of the training and the relatively small sample size, which may constrain the generalizability of findings to broader rural populations. Future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal approaches that examine the sustained impact of digital literacy on economic resilience, educational attainment, and civic participation over time. Comparative studies across different geographic and cultural contexts would also strengthen the applicability of the training model and offer deeper insights into how rural digital transformation can be supported across diverse settings.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Rahmat Jete: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; review and editing; Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation; Data curation; Investigation.

Rina Farah: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft; Supervision; Validation; Other contribution; Resources; Visuali-zation; Writing - original draft.

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