YOUTH SHIELD: A TECHNOLOGY AWARENESS AND CYBERSECURITY EDUCATION PLATFORM FOR YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Young people aged 12–18 are increasingly exposed to cybercrime such as phishing, hacking, and identity theft, yet the Kurdistan Region has no official platform that provides cybersecurity education in their native language, and the few existing awareness resources are scattered and rarely available in Kurdish. To address this gap, this study designs, develops, and presents Youth Shield, a bilingual (Kurdish–English) web-based educational platform intended to raise cybersecurity awareness among Kurdish youth. The study is guided by four research questions: how aware young people are of electronic threats and self-protection methods; what information they need, and in which language, to strengthen their cybersecurity; how a website can present this information effectively; and which features are required to meet these needs. Methodologically, the study follows an applied-developmental approach in which the platform was built with the Waterfall software development methodology (requirements, design, implementation, testing, verification, and maintenance) using HTML5, CSS3, Bootstrap, PHP, and MySQL. The main findings indicate that the resulting platform, organized into a user section and an administrative section, successfully integrates an awareness and education hub, platform-specific social-media security guides, tutorial videos at three skill levels, translated international security reports, severity-rated threat alerts, an FAQ system, and expert support, and now has over 30 guides, 8 tutorial videos, and 5 translated international security reports. Finally, the study finds that a dedicated platform in the native language of the target audience, like Youth Shield, is a much-needed platform for Kurdish cybersecurity education, and its modular concept can be used as a template for school- and home-based digital-safety initiatives, and its effectiveness in raising awareness of digital-safety issues could be measured and evaluated formally in the future. Future work also includes turning the platform into a mobile application and introducing cyber-attack awareness into school curricula, mainly within computer education, or through regular seminars in schools.

KEY WORDS: Cyber Security, Digital Awareness, Youth, Social Media, Self-Protection.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the world is defined by connectivity through social media and digital technology in ways previous generations never experienced. As social media has grown faster than any other medium, new electronic threats to digital privacy and security have emerged. Children and young people are more likely to trust social media and other technologies, but many don't have the experience or knowledge to keep themselves and their personal information safe from these threats.

With the increasing use of the Internet and social media among young people in the Kurdistan Region, there is a clear need for an authentic source of information about cybersecurity and how it relates to personal safety, as well as the practices that safeguard an individual's online identity, in their native language. To meet this need, this research tackles the issue by creating a web platform that educates the youth of the

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Kurdistan Region on cybersecurity and technology-related topics: Youth Shield.

The problem that motivates this work can be summarized as follows: there is no formal and institutional platform for raising cybersecurity awareness among young people; sometimes misinformed individuals exploit young people as if they were giving them guidance; accounts are often lost due to a lack of knowledge about how to protect them; there is no dedicated team to provide continuous expert support; there is no platform for young people to share reliable knowledge; and the available social awareness materials for the young audience are negligible in the Kurdish language.

The primary aim of this research is to offer cybersecurity services and correct information to youth in their own language, regarding protection from cybercrime, account security, and the most recent security protection features being offered by technology vendors. The specific objectives of the study are: (1) to explore the current level of cybersecurity awareness among Kurdish youth and the online threats they face; (2) to identify the information and guidance young people need to protect their accounts and personal data; (3) to design and develop a dynamic, bilingual website for disseminating self-protection methods; (4) to select, translate, and localize relevant international security publications into Kurdish; (5) to produce instructional videos and practical guides for securing social-media accounts; and (6) to establish an official, reliable platform and community through which young people can find support and share knowledge and experience. Overall, the study aims to make young people, particularly those aged 12–18, aware of cyber-attacks and how to protect themselves from them. As future work, the website is planned to become a mobile application, which is easier for this age group to use, and cyber-attack awareness is proposed as part of the school curriculum, ideally within computer education; where this is not possible, awareness seminars on technology and cybersecurity could be held in schools at least twice a year, especially for secondary school students. The study is founded on three hypotheses: an effective, tailored Kurdish language platform can raise youth cybersecurity awareness, native language content leads to understanding and engagement, and a modern web technology stack (HTML, CSS, Bootstrap, PHP, and MySQL) can provide an effective user experience.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cybersecurity is the process of managing technological risk to protect systems, networks, and applications from being breached. By causing the corruption, destruction, or ransom of sensitive data or by denying access to it, attacks are often difficult to defend against because of the number of connected devices and the increasing sophistication of attackers; it is increasingly important for organizations to integrate people, processes, and technology to serve as a defense (Powell, 2010).

Digital awareness is a skill set that involves the ability to use digital devices safely, effectively, and knowledgeably, which encompasses the use of the internet safely, the protection of privacy, ethical use of technology, and critical evaluation of digital information. With the increasing frequency of data flows, digital awareness has become a key factor in helping individuals prevent cyber-threats, disinformation and privacy infringement, and also create responsible digital citizens (McCown, 2012).

Social media is a content, conversation, and information-sharing tool on the Internet, which includes social networks, blogs, photo sharing, video sharing, and instant messaging. It enables personal connection, professional networking, and organizational engagement, and its size gives rise to its greatest threat – threats that are the focus of this study – to the University of South Florida (n.d.).

Self-protection in cybersecurity includes using strong, unique passwords and passphrases, adopting multi-factor authentication (MFA) and other security measures, maintaining regular software updates, utilizing password managers, having a secure home network, using a VPN on public Wi-Fi, and backing up data regularly, as well as being aware of and avoiding phishing and suspicious requests for information (Australian Cyber Security Center 2025).

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Hacking is unauthorized access to a computer system, network, or device, commonly classified by intent as black-hat (malicious), white-hat (ethical, aimed at strengthening defenses), or grey-hat (mixed intent). Rising financial losses from cybercrime have driven demand for ethical hacking skills to identify and remediate vulnerabilities before attackers exploit them (edX, 2025).

Phishing, a form of social engineering, uses fraudulent emails, messages, calls, or websites to trick victims into revealing sensitive data or installing malware by impersonating a trusted party and pressuring the target into action, such as clicking a link or opening an attachment (Matthew, 2023; IBM). Underlying these platform features are core web and data technologies—HTML for content structure, CSS for presentation, PHP for server-side logic, and MySQL for data storage—which together provide the technical foundation for delivering interactive, multilingual educational content at scale (Kristensen, 2022; GeeksforGeeks, 2026).

At the global level, young people are the most connected age group: 82% of those aged 15–24 were online in 2025, compared with 72% of the rest of the population (ITU, 2025), and in the United Kingdom more than 99% of children aged 10–12 already go online (Ofcom, 2025). Among U.S. teenagers aged 13–17, about nine in ten use YouTube, 68% TikTok, 63% Instagram, and 55% Snapchat, while 40% say they are online almost constantly (Faverio & Sidoti, 2025). The type of risk also changes with age. Users aged 12–18 face mainly threats to their personal safety: Snapchat was involved in 40% of the recorded offences of sexual communication with a child in England and Wales where the platform was identified (NSPCC, 2025), and the games Minecraft and Roblox were used as lures in about 3.1 million and 1.6 million attack attempts, respectively (Kaspersky, 2024). Users aged 18–25 face more financial fraud: in 2024, people in their twenties filed 71,399 cybercrime complaints in the United States with losses of USD 540.1 million, against 17,993 complaints and USD 22.5 million for those under 20 (FBI, 2025).

In Iraq, internet penetration reached 83.8% (39.6 million users) by late 2025, social-media user identities equaled 84.9% of the population, and mobile connections exceeded the population itself (108%); people aged 13–24 make up about a quarter of the population (Kemp, 2025).

Within the Kurdistan Region, local studies point to heavy and often risky use among school students. In Erbil, 73.2% of 557 secondary school students aged 15–18 showed some degree of internet addiction (Saber et al., 2024). In Duhok, 78.2% of 384 high school students used several social media platforms, 68.8% used them at bedtime, and 17.4% had social media addiction (Abdullah et al., 2024).

A survey conducted in Sulaymaniyah at Qaiwan International University surveyed 356 students, with the results showing that 60.1% did not understand the meaning of phishing, and 84.8% of the students had not been given any cyber-security training (Rasul et al., 2026). Comparable published data for other cities, such as Zakho and Koya, could not be found, which itself shows the shortage of local evidence. Taken together, high connectivity and low awareness make easy-to-reach, Kurdish-language self-protection education a clear need. These statistics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Recent Statistics on Youth Internet Use and Online Risks: From Global to Local Level.

Source	Age group / scope	Key findings
1. World		
ITU (2025)	15–24; worldwide	82% online in 2025, vs. 72% of the rest of the population.
Ofcom (2025)	10–12; United Kingdom	More than 99% go online.
Faverio & Sidoti (2025)	13–17; United States (n = 1,458)	YouTube 92%, TikTok 68%, Instagram 63%, Snapchat 55%; 40% online almost constantly.
NSPCC (2025)	Under 18; England and Wales	Snapchat involved in 40% of 2,111 offences of sexual communication with a child (platform identified).
Kaspersky (2024)	Young gamers; worldwide	Minecraft ≈ 3.1 million and Roblox ≈ 1.6 million attack attempts (July 2023 – June 2024).
FBI (2025)	Under 20 vs. 20–29; United States	2024: 17,993 complaints, USD 22.5 million (under 20) vs. 71,399 complaints, USD 540.1 million (20–29).
2. Iraq		
Kemp (2025)	All ages; Iraq	Internet penetration 83.8% (39.6 million users); social media identities 84.9%; mobile connections 108%; ages 13–24 ≈ one quarter of the population.

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Source	Age group / scope	Key findings
3. Kurdistan Region		
Saber et al. (2024)	15–18; Erbil (n = 557)	73.2% showed some internet addiction (33.6% mild, 37.3% moderate, 2.3% severe).
Abdullah et al. (2024)	High school students; Duhok (n = 384)	78.2% use several platforms; 68.8% use them at bedtime; 17.4% social media addiction.
4. Sulaymaniyah		
Rasul et al. (2026)	University students; Sulaymaniyah (n = 356)	60.1% unaware of phishing; 84.8% never received cybersecurity training.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed applied-and-developmental research approach. It combined a needs analysis of Kurdish youth cybersecurity awareness with the iterative design, development, and evaluation of a working software artifact. The platform was built using the Waterfall software development methodology. Waterfall is a linear, sequential process in which each phase must be completed before the next phase can begin. The methodology comprised six phases:

- Requirements (discovery): gathering stakeholder needs, target-user characteristics, and content requirements through research and review of existing resources.
- Design: producing a detailed plan of the platform's structure, page hierarchy, and database schema prior to implementation.
- Implementation: building each design element — front-end pages, back-end logic, and database — in sequence.
- System testing: integration, functional, and performance testing to confirm the platform behaves correctly under expected use.
- Verification/integration: validating that all components function together as intended.
- Maintenance: ongoing bug fixes and feature additions following deployment.

The platform was implemented using HTML5 and CSS3 for structure and presentation, Bootstrap for responsive layout, PHP for server-side logic, and MySQL for data storage, developed in Visual Studio Code with a XAMPP local server environment.

The study and the development of the platform were guided by the following four research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How aware are young people in the Kurdistan Region of electronic threats and self-protection methods?

RQ2: What information do young people need, and in which language, to strengthen their cybersecurity?

RQ3: How can a website effectively present this information and guidance to young users?

RQ4: Which features must the platform include to meet these objectives and provide an appropriate service?

4. RESULTS / ANALYSIS

The resulting platform, Youth Shield (available at www.yshd.net), is a bilingual Kurdish–English technology and cybersecurity awareness website for young people aged 12–18 and their parents, with Kurdish (Sorani) as its primary language. It includes awareness articles, account protection how-to guides for social media, online games, mobile devices, and computers, tutorial videos for beginner, intermediate, and advanced level users, translated international security reports, severity ranked threat alert emails with recommended protective steps, a blog, FAQ and a contact and support service. The platform is divided in two sections: a user section for the general public and an administrative section for the managers and the subject-matter experts. An entity–relationship diagram is provided in Figure 1 to show the underlying data structure that underlies both areas.

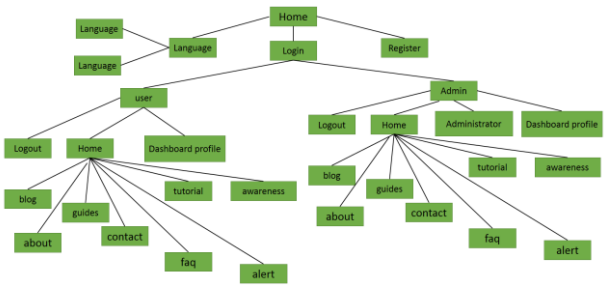


Figure 1. Entity–Relationship Diagram of the Youth Shield Platform.

The Home page (Figure 2) is the main page and provides usage statistics, topics for the week and

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quick access to the navigation. The awareness and education page (Figure 3) is the main source of knowledge on threats like phishing, hacking and identity theft, and password security tips.

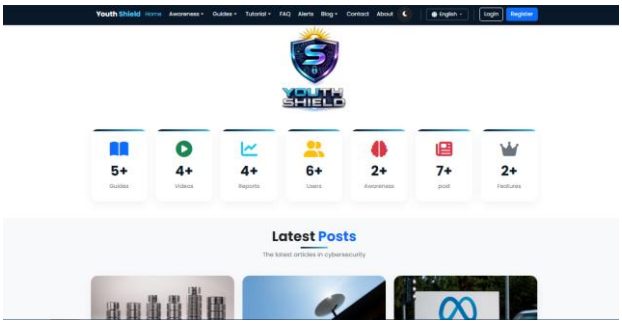


Figure 2. Youth Shield Homepage.



Figure 3. Awareness and Education Page.

For each of the seven most popular social networks (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Telegram), as well as the most popular online games, there are their own pages that explain how to configure privacy settings, enable two-factor authentication and prevent attacks step by step and illustrated with screenshots, with the explanations being told in Kurdish. A continuously updated features page, and a video library provides beginner, intermediate and advanced lessons with narration and Kurdish subtitles. Reports from the international cyber security community are translated into Kurdish and summarized with key statistics, and an FAQ module is available, which has been segmented into categories of account security, password management, privacy, technical and legal, allowing users to search, rate the answers and submit their own questions. A contact and support module includes a comprehensive request form, priority levels, file attachments and live chat (when available) and a directory of the experts and emergency contacts.

A full account-management system helps users register and log in to the site with password strength checks, to verify their email and account, and to enable two-factor authentication, while also allowing registered users to monitor progress, saved topics and watched videos on their personal dashboard (Figure 4) and to update account information, passwords and privacy settings, or to delete their account. There's a parallel dashboard for admin, and for content management, users and platform-wide stats. A news-and-alerts module informs about new occurrences of breaches, scams and vulnerabilities and provides them with a severity rating (low, medium, high, critical) and proposed action, and a blog module is updated regularly with news and advice.

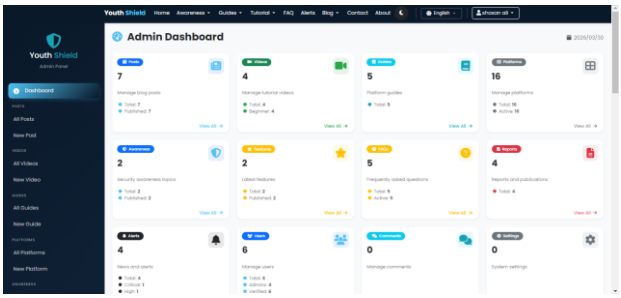


Figure 4. Administrative Dashboard.

In aggregate, the platform currently has over 30 guides, 8 tutorial videos, and 5 translated international reports, distributed among the awareness, guides, tutorial, and reports modules described above.

5. DISCUSSION

The main result of this research is that creating a platform for cybersecurity awareness education content, cybersecurity self-protection skills, and expert support that is accessible in the Kurdish language would be a new and valuable product for Kurdish youth, which the research problem in Section 1 had revealed was not available. This aligns with the general body of research on digital awareness and how native-language delivery contributes to a better understanding of the digital world and more responsible digital behavior (McCown, 2012).

A second challenge identified in the introduction is that there is no team available to offer ongoing, authoritative advice. This is addressed by the use

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of a dual section design of the platform, one for the public and one for experts and administrators. Youth Shield is not just a one-off education tool, but is a resource for both support and community with interactive elements (FAQ voting, live chat, community features) and static content (guides, videos, translated reports), reflecting best practice in self-protection, which emphasizes continuous awareness and vigilance (Australian Cyber Security Center 2025).

There are some caveats to be noted. Some claims about the impact of the platform on awareness levels are not based on formal, quantitative evaluation data, such as pre/post awareness testing with a youth sample; the platform has been designed and implemented, but data on impact are not reported in this study and should be considered as design hypotheses supported by feature analysis. The current content set (30+ guides, 8 videos, 5 reports) and coverage of seven social platforms are significant and will need constant upkeep of new platforms and threats. Structured user testing with the target age group (12-18) would help to strengthen the evidence base for the platform's educational effectiveness.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to fill the gap of a formal educational resource in Kurdish language about cybersecurity for young people. This gap is filled by the resulting platform, Youth Shield, which brings together awareness information, step-by-step protection guides, tutorial videos, international, translated reports and expert support in one bilingual platform. The applied and developmental research design used in the Waterfall approach resulted in a platform, structured around the separation of the public user services and administrative management, including over 30 guides, 8 tutorial videos, 5 translated reports and a threat severity classification system for real-time actionable safety information.

The study ends that a specially tailored, bilingual, community-based website could be effectively used to make cybersecurity information more accessible for the Kurdish youth, and that this model could be a valuable contribution to future cyber-safety education programs, both in school and at home. Future activities include development of a mobile application, an AI-driven threat assistant, certified learning paths, school partnership programs, and a structured research survey and analytics to measure impact that will be expanded to other regions.

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پاراستنی گەنجان: پلاتفۆرمێک بۆ هۆشیارکردنەوەی تەکنەلۆژی و پەروەردەی ئاسایشی سایبەری بۆ گەنجان

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درع الشباب: منصة للتوعية التكنولوجية والتعليم في مجال الأمن السيبراني للشباب

الملخص:

يتعرّض الشباب في الفئة العمرية من 12 إلى 18 عامًا بصورة متزايدة لهجمات إلكترونية مثل التصيّد الاحتيالي والاختراق وسرقة الهوية، في حين يفتقر إقليم كردستان إلى منصة رسمية تقدّم لهم التوعية بالأمن السيبراني بلغتهم الأم، كما أن مصادر التوعية القليلة المتوفرة مبعثرة ونادرًا ما تكون متاحة باللغة الكردية. ولمعالجة هذه الفجوة، تتناول هذه الدراسة تصميم وتطوير وعرض منصة «درع الشباب» (Youth Shield)، وهي منصة تعليمية إلكترونية ثنائية اللغة (الكردية والإنجليزية) تهدف إلى رفع مستوى الوعي بالأمن السيبراني لدى الشباب الكردي. وتسترشد الدراسة بأربعة أسئلة بحثية: ما مدى وعي الشباب بالتهديدات الإلكترونية وأساليب الحماية الذاتية؟ وما المعلومات التي يحتاجونها، وبأي لغة، لتعزيز أمنهم السيبراني؟ وكيف يمكن لموقع إلكتروني أن يقدّم هذه المعلومات بفاعلية؟ وما الخصائص اللازمة لتلبية هذه الاحتياجات؟ ومن الناحية المنهجية، اعتمدت الدراسة منهجًا تطبيقيًا تطويريًا، إذ بُنيت المنصة وفق منهجية الشلال (Waterfall) في تطوير البرمجيات بمراحلها: تحديد المتطلبات، والتصميم، والتنفيذ، والاختبار، والتحقق، والصيانة، باستخدام HTML5 وCSS3 وBootstrap وPHP وMySQL. وتُظهر النتائج الرئيسية أن المنصة، المؤلفة من قسم للمستخدمين وآخر للإدارة، نجحت في أن تجمع في مكان واحد مركزًا للتوعية والتثقيف، وأدلة أمان خاصة بكل منصة من منصات التواصل الاجتماعي، ومقاطع فيديو تعليمية بثلاثة مستويات، وتقارير دولية مترجمة، وتنبيهات بالتهديدات مصنّفة حسب درجة خطورتها، وقسمًا للأسئلة الشائعة، ودعمًا من المختصين، وهي تضم حاليًا أكثر من 30 دليلًا و8 مقاطع فيديو تعليمية و5 تقارير مترجمة. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن منصة متخصصة بلغة المستخدم الأم مثل «درع الشباب» تسدّ فجوة مهمة في التثقيف بالأمن السيبراني باللغة الكردية، وأن تصميمها المعياري يمكن أن يكون نموذجًا لمبادرات السلامة الرقمية في المدارس والمنازل، على أن يُترك التقييم الرسمي لأثرها في مستوى الوعي لأبحاث مستقبلية. كما تشمل الأعمال المستقبلية تطوير المنصة إلى تطبيق للهواتف الذكية، وإدراج التوعية بالهجمات الإلكترونية في المناهج المدرسية، ولا سيما ضمن مادة الحاسوب، أو تقديمها من خلال ندوات دورية في المدارس.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأمن السيبراني، الوعي الرقمي، الشباب، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الحماية الذاتية

پوختە:

گەنجانی تەمەن ١٢ تا ١٨ ساڵ ڕۆژ لە دوای ڕۆژ زیاتر دەکەونە بەر مەترسی هێرشە ئەلیکترۆنییەکانی وەک فیشینگ، هاککردن و دزینی ناسنامە، لە کاتێکدا هەرێمی کوردستان هیچ پلاتفۆرمێکی فەرمی نییە کە بە زمانی دایکیان پەروەردەی ئاسایشی ئەلیکترۆنییان پێ بگەیەنێت، و ئەو سەرچاوە کەمانەی هۆشیاری کە هەن پەرشوبڵاون و بە دەگمەن بە زمانی کوردی بەردەستن. بۆ پڕکردنەوەی ئەم بۆشاییە، ئەم توێژینەوەیە پلاتفۆرمی «قەڵغانی گەنجان» (Youth Shield) دیزاین دەکات، پەرەی پێدەدات و دەیناسێنێت، کە پلاتفۆرمێکی پەروەردەیی وێبیی دووزمانەیە (کوردی-ئینگلیزی) و ئامانجی بەرزکردنەوەی ئاستی هۆشیاری ئاسایشی ئەلیکترۆنییە لەنێو گەنجانی کورددا. توێژینەوەکە لەسەر بنەمای چوار پرسیاری توێژینەوە بنیات نراوە: گەنجان تا چ ئاستێک ئاگاداری هەڕەشە ئەلیکترۆنییەکان و ڕێگاکانی خۆپاراستنن؛ پێویستیان بە چ زانیارییەک و بە چ زمانێک هەیە بۆ بەهێزکردنی ئاسایشی ئەلیکترۆنییان؛ ماڵپەڕێک چۆن دەتوانێت ئەم زانیارییانە بە شێوەیەکی کاریگەر پێشکەش بکات؛ و چ تایبەتمەندییەک پێویستە بۆ وەڵامدانەوەی ئەم پێداویستییانە. لە ڕووی میتۆدۆلۆژییەوە، توێژینەوەکە ڕێبازێکی پراکتیکی-پەرەپێدانی گرتووەتە بەر، و پلاتفۆرمەکە بە مۆدێلی وۆتەرفۆڵ (Waterfall) بۆ پەرەپێدانی نەرمەکاڵا دروستکراوە، کە قۆناغەکانی دیاریکردنی پێداویستییەکان، دیزاین، جێبەجێکردن، تاقیکردنەوە، پشتڕاستکردنەوە و چاککردنەوە لەخۆدەگرێت، و بە HTML5، CSS3، Bootstrap، PHP و MySQL بنیات نراوە. ئەنجامە سەرەکییەکان دەریدەخەن کە پلاتفۆرمەکە، کە لە بەشی بەکارهێنەر و بەشی بەڕێوەبردن پێکهاتووە، توانیویەتی ناوەندێکی هۆشیاری و پەروەردە، ڕێنمایی ئاسایش بۆ هەر تۆرێکی کۆمەڵایەتی بە جیا، ڤیدیۆی فێرکاری لە سێ ئاستدا، ڕاپۆرتی نێودەوڵەتیی وەرگێڕدراو، ئاگادارکردنەوەی هەڕەشەکان بەپێی ئاستی مەترسی، بەشی پرسیارە باوەکان و پشتگیری پسپۆڕان لە یەک شوێندا کۆبکاتەوە، و لە ئێستادا زیاتر لە ٣٠ ڕێنمایی، ٨ ڤیدیۆی فێرکاری و ٥ ڕاپۆرتی وەرگێڕدراوی تێدایە. توێژینەوەکە دەگاتە ئەو دەرئەنجامەی کە پلاتفۆرمێکی تایبەتمەند بە زمانی دایک وەک «قەڵغانی گەنجان» بۆشاییەکی گرنگ لە پەروەردەی ئاسایشی ئەلیکترۆنی بە زمانی کوردیدا پردەکاتەوە، و دیزاینە مۆدیولارییەکەی دەتوانێت ببێتە نموونەیەک بۆ پڕۆژەکانی سەلامەتی دیجیتاڵی لە قوتابخانە و ماڵەوەدا، لە کاتێکدا هەڵسەنگاندنی فەرمیی کاریگەرییەکەی لەسەر ئاستی هۆشیاری بۆ کاری داهاتوو جێهێڵراوە. هەروەها کاری داهاتوو بریتییە لە گۆڕینی پلاتفۆرمەکە بۆ ئەپلیکەیشنێکی مۆبایل، و زیادکردنی هۆشیاری لەسەر هێرشە ئەلیکترۆنییەکان بۆ مەنهەجی قوتابخانەکان، بەتایبەتی لە وانەی کۆمپیوتەردا، یان لە ڕێگەی سیمیناری بەردەوام لە قوتابخانەکاندا.

وشە سەرەکییەکان: ئاسایشی سایبەری، هۆشیاری دیجیتاڵی، گەنجان، تۆڕە کۆمەڵایەتییەکان، خۆپاراستن

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