Current status of Digital literacy in India

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Abstract

Digital literacy is the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within life situations. Simply put, it is the ability to access the computer/mobile/internet for our day-to-day activities and be connected with others through the internet. In the past few decades, India has seen incredible progression in various technology-driven sectors such as Unified Payment Interface (UPI) and Aadhaar, which necessitates being not only literate but also active in the digital world. Digital transformation has called for a mass movement to promote digital literacy in the country. For this, all stakeholders, including technological and educational institutions, play a crucial role in achieving desired results. Information is the main commodity in the present-day knowledge society, and whoever has quick access to information, of course, has the greatest advantage. Technology provides an opportunity to transform the teaching and learning process, and therefore it presses the need to constantly update and develop education models that suit the new era's demands in view of the fast-changing technology. Covid-19 The pandemic has also changed the sort of educational landscape, and virtual reality has become the new reality in today's times, wherein it has brought many changes and challenges. During the pandemic, students and all stakeholders became more and more positive about the online education; many top institutions have launched their own platforms to deliver academic aspects. The government has taken many initiatives to promote digital education in India. But still, there are many challenges with regard to this. The aim of the paper is to examine the current status of digital literacy in India.

Introduction

Digital transformation has called for a mass movement to promote digital literacy in the country. For this, all stakeholders, including technological and educational institutions, play a crucial role in achieving desired results. Information is the main commodity in the present-day knowledge society, and whoever has quick access to information, of course, has the greatest advantage. Technology provides an opportunity to transform the teaching and learning process, and therefore it presses the need to constantly update and develop education models that suit the new era's demands in view of the fast-changing technology. Online courses can help and bridge the gap in affordability. It enables students in even the remotest parts of the country to have access to quality education at an affordable cost. This virtual classroom will be available to everyone who has an internet connection and hence enable everyone to access it. Secondly, online classes will help a lot of those who are not able to attend classes in person, such as working professionals and housewives. Online classes are very helpful to them for enhancing their skill sets and increasing their employability. Covid-19 The pandemic has also changed the sort of educational landscape, and virtual reality has become the new reality in today's times, wherein it has brought many changes and challenges. Before the Covid pandemic, teachers were not trained to deliver academic aspects online by using various available platforms like Google Meet, Zoom, etc. Most of them had never delivered anything online, and the students might not have proper internet connectivity; many of them might have left their laptops there when they went home. But the spread of corona virus necessitated the new mode of education called hybrid mode of education. It is a mixture of both online and offline classes. In online classes, a series of lectures are delivered; there may be fewer interactions

between teachers and students due to the higher cost of internet connectivity. Here academically weaker students can access the video at any number of times for easy understanding and remembering. In offline classes students come to classes for discussion and interaction. Here, in-person education takes place; most of the students who do not have internet connectivity are attending physical classes. During the pandemic, students and all stakeholders became more and more positive about the online education; many top institutions have launched their own platforms to deliver academic aspects. The government has taken many initiatives to promote digital education in India. But still, there are many challenges with regard to this. This paper tries to highlight all these aspects in many ways.

Significance of the study

Digital technology has evolved significantly in the past couple of decades. This evolution of digital technology has changed the way we interact with our surroundings or perform daily life tasks. Tasks like shopping, making payments, sending emails, communicating with someone, etc have changed completely thanks to technology. The developments in the field of technology and the Internet have spread out to almost every corner of the world and basic tasks like payments, communication, shopping, etc require us to be aware of the digital world.

Awareness regarding the digital world can be promoted through digital literacy, which in simple words means understanding the use of digital technologies and devices to fulfil our basic needs. The need for understanding the use of mobile and computing devices has become necessary to get tasks like paying bills, making payments, shopping online, and communicating with someone done.

Digital devices are everywhere, the screen that you are reading this on, is also a part of a digital device. Apart from this, almost everyone owns a smartphone nowadays and if you know how to use a smartphone to get various things done, you are considered digitally literate. In a country like India where internet penetration is increasing with every passing day, digital literacy is very important.

UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) because digitalization has affected all the areas of our lives, including our education system too. So now when digitalization has become a part of our daily work and life, there is a need to know the relevance of digital literacy as well as in education too and also the efforts which have been made by the government to improve digital literacy and the challenges and solutions. Therefore, there was a need to conduct this study.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the impact and challenges of digital literacy on socio-economic development.
2. To describe the opportunities of digital learning.
3. To explain the challenges of digital education.
4. To examine the government initiatives to promote digital education

Review of Literature

Midha (2016) recognized Digital India as a great plan to develop India as a knowledge hub, but he also expressed his doubt regarding implementation due to lack of infrastructure and support of stakeholders. He admitted that if the Digital India programme is implemented properly, there will be many reforms in the lives of every citizen and society.

Lyons, A.C., & Kass-Hanna, J. (2021). The research paper focuses on measures of digital literacy on traditional methods. Address the challenges associated with the traditional methods of measuring associations. Devices used for usage of digital literacy among citizens.The focus is on financial literacy and digital financial literacy, which brings a combination of both digital literacy and financial literacy to people's lives. The paper used a multidimensional test for measuring the respondents.

Gautam, R.S., & Kanoujiya, J.A.G.J.E.E.V.A.N. (2022). The article is based on regional development and digital literacy. It takes 29 states and 2 union territories three years of fiscal data for analysis of data. It used the panel data analysis method for the study. RRBs bring advanced technologies in their operations which will boost rural people's knowledge of the digital operation of banks. People also know how to use advanced technology in their lives. It reveals that the government and RRBs have created infrastructure in rural areas which will automatically bring developmental activities to rural areas.

Li, M., & Yu, Z. (2022). The study focuses on teachers' digital literacy on teaching and learning impact on students during the COVID-19 medical emergency. It compares the traditional teaching methods and modern methods of learning for the career advancement of students. It has taken three elements – teachers' digital literacy, career satisfaction and professional skills – which will bring new changes in the teaching and learning process. During medical emergencies, teachers realise the importance of technology in the teaching-learning process. Innovative measures for active learning of students without teachers' presets in the classroom. COVID-19 brings new perceptions in the teaching field, like learning from home, MOOC courses, online learning, development of online educational platforms, and development of ed-tech companies.

Methodology: This study collects the information from secondary data. Secondary data are collected from books, journals, articles and websites.

The present study is based on secondary sources like articles, websites, journals, news, expert opinions, etc. The method used is the descriptive analytic method.

Digital literacy:

The term digital literacy term was initially introduced by Paul Gilster in 1997. He defined digital literacy as the capacity to understand information and make use of it via computers and the internet in multiple formats.

According to Tabusum et al. (2014), technologies to share knowledge on digital platforms go beyond simply knowing how to use computers.

The American Library Association (ALA) defines digital and communicative information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2018) defines "the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes competencies that are referred to as computer literacy, ICT literacy, and information literacy. Covello (2010) defines digital literacy as an umbrella for a variety of integrated subdisciplines or literacies.

Digital literacy is the capacity to recognise and use technology in a confident and creative way that satisfies the need and challenges of daily life, learning and working in a digital world. A person who is digitally literate can use technology to efficiently find and evaluate information and apply it to their real-world activities.

Importance of Digital Literacy:

The invention of digital technology has changed how we interact with our environment and perform daily life tasks. Digital literacy, which means knowing how to use digital technology and devices to meet our basic needs, can help spread awareness of the digital world. Digitally literate people are better able to take care of their own needs and adjust to the ever-changing demands of this digital world. Being digitally literate used to be a choice, but now it is a requirement of time.

Digital literacy has been recognised by UNESCO (2011). Currently, having digital literacy skills is necessary for effectively contributing to the developing digital economy and society. Digitally literate youth are more prepared to actively participate in the social, economic, intellectual and cultural life of the present and the future.

Witt & Gloerfeld (2017) reinforced the need for digital literacy because it educates people on how to survive in the digital world by using technology as a tool.

Digital literacy is the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within life situations. Simply put, it is the ability to access the computer/mobile/internet for our day-to-day activities and be connected with others through the internet. In the past few decades, India has seen incredible progression in various technology-driven sectors such as Unified Payment Interface (UPI) and Aadhaar, which necessitates being not only literate but also active in the digital world. The pandemic of 2019 has accelerated the digital transformation of industries, creating huge opportunities for all organisations around the globe. The demand of being digitally literate is driven by market forces that make people acquire new skills and aggressively use technology in personal as well as professional life. The objective of digital literacy is to impart basic ICT skills relevant to the needs of the trainees, which would enable them to use IT and related applications to participate actively in the democratic process and further enhance opportunities for their livelihood. The persons shall be able to access information, knowledge and skills through the use of digital devices.

Impact and Challenges of Digital Literacy on Socio-Economic Development:

Offering different citizen-centric services and transferring government benefits for the welfare of people in digital mode is not only cost-effective but also makes the service/benefit delivery mechanism hassle-free. People are also able to bypass machinery at lower levels of government, thus having access to enhanced accountability & transparency in service deliveries.

Globally the digital process has made the arena one where one can access the phenomenon around the globe and connect with people on the other side of the terminal, which helps them and creates a better management information system (MIS) & decision support system (DSS). In a global economy, knowledge of digital processes transforms the way in which people work, collaborate, disseminate & consume information, and entertain them. India must rethink its talent development approach to retain its lead role in the digital era. Since the nation targets & projects towards becoming a knowledge economy, we must focus on the participation of more & more people in digital platforms. The government's mission always has a dual

objective of economic growth and inclusive development. Connecting digitally will also have an improvised impact on the social life of the people, especially in remaining in touch with one another.

It will also augment the government's efforts to provide better education, health and employment opportunities. It also helps in socio-cultural mobilisation in Indian society.

Aspects of Digital Literacy:

1. The Power of the Internet: We may call the internet a window to the world. Its users may reap uncountable benefits through constructive & ethical use of the internet. Users are being added every moment, which creates a pool; they may or may not know each other, but having access to know each other on different social sites has become a trend not only among youth & children, but frequently one must have seen older people searching for their old school friends and primary class teachers on social sites. This has fostered the social relationship & family bond. The power of the Internet is unlimited and beyond imagination, so one can reap the benefits of e-governance in a real sense through the Internet.

2. Use of Emails: Registered letters, speed post, and telegrams days are gone. Now in this digital era, physical delivery of the communication seems to be outdated. Emails are quick, reliable and easy ways of sending & receiving information. It has become part and parcel of the communication process. Workers may have an email account for taking advantage of government schemes and seamless, fast communication.

3. Uses of Apps: Specific customer-centric applications for specific work had steeped us in the world of computer applications, popular as apps. Apps are generally sequential computer programmes that make a specific task more user-friendly & are used for a specific category of work. Now apps are commonly used by everyone every day. Remembering the long syntax of the website, the app is easier. By downloading the various useful apps, the lives of workers may be easier.

4. Uses of Browser: Browser is the main component to access the world of information through the internet. Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome are famous browsers. Different types of browsers are enabled with different technology to cater to the specific needs of the users. It depends on users to choose the right browser for a specific function.

5. Uses of government apps like Umang, Yono, etc.: Presently, the government is emphasising digital governance through various extensive uses of different operation-specific apps. Workers have to learn the use of these customer-friendly apps for taking direct benefits of different government schemes and programmes and credit of the subsidy money/benefits directly in their respective accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

6. Uses of Unified Payment Interface (BHIM): Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) is an app that lets you make simple, quick & easy payment transactions using Unified Payments Interface (UPI). Users can make instant bank-to-bank payments and pay & collect money using just mobile numbers or Virtual Payment Address (UPI ID).

7. Ethical Uses of Internet: Since the internet allows us to access the entire world at a time, we should be very careful while using it. Videos, photos & other text information harmful to anyone should not be aired. We have to always keep in mind that anything good or bad uploaded/aired will be accessible to a large segment of the populace & what its next consequences will be. We have already witnessed instances of using social media for support of communal riots in India. Numerous porn sites misleading our youth must be dealt with appropriate laws and need a social ban.

8. Threats of Cyber Security: Keeping our system & data safe & secure stands as the biggest challenge before us. Attackers sitting thousands of miles away from us may harm us through cyber-attacks. So we must be extra careful towards possible cyber-attacks. We should not share our user ID/password or OTP with anyone.

Digitally Literate Household

If at least one person in the household has the ability to operate a computer and use the internet (among individuals who are 5 years of age and older), it is defined as a Digitally Literate Household. Only 38% of households in India are digitally literate. In urban areas, digital literacy is relatively higher at 61% as compared to just 25% in rural areas. By occupation profile in rural India, households that reported to have received regular wages/salaries from non-agricultural occupations have the highest percentage of digitally literate households at around 53%. In contrast, casual workers in the agriculture sector have the lowest level of digital literacy at 13%. Scheduled Tribes have the lowest overall digital literacy at the household level at 21%. In urban India, digital literacy is highest among regular wage/salaried workers at 73% and lowest among casual workers at 30%. The state government of Kerala launched the Akshaya project with the aim of making at least one person in each household computer-literate in the Malappuram district of Kerala, making Malappuram the first e-literate district in India.

The Digital India Programme was conceptualized on nine pillars, and in the rural context, besides the creation of manufacturing infrastructure, the key areas were:

1. Governance Access to databases, use of online repositories, integration platforms through Aadhaar, public grievance redressal, etc.

2. E-Kranti: Electronic delivery of services like e-education, e-healthcare, information to farmers, financial inclusion, ice, etc.

3. Financial Inclusion: With the help of Digital India, financial inclusion has been accelerated through schemes such as Digital India, direct benefit transfer, Rupay, UPI payments, etc. The Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile has created a positive impact on the banking sector in the country. The benefits have percolated to the rural areas, and financial literacy has improved as the rural population gets integrated into the system. Direct benefit transfer (DBT) has created a major positive financial impact for rural communities by plugging leakages and speeding up distribution of subsidies, pensions, and other benefits under various schemes. All this has created a positive economic outlook in rural India.

4. E-Governance: Projects such as Kisan Call Centers, Jagriti E-Sewa, eDistrict, Common Services Centers (CSCs), Mobile Seva, etc., have led to better service delivery, transparency and accountability, and improvement in government efficiency. The empowerment of people through information is slowly but surely spearheading rural India to contribute to the next phase of growth in the economy.

5. Education (PMGDISHA): Initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA) have been started with the target of making six crore people in rural India digitally literate. The world's largest digital literacy programme with a target of making 60 million people in rural areas digitally literate, the Govt of India launched PMGDISHA in 2017. Toate, approximately 2.76 crore candidates have been certified as digitally literate under PMGDISHA schemes to expand the objective to enhance the livelihoods of beneficiaries through usage of technology.

SWAYAM & MOOCS: Reaching rural education in India is crucial for the next phase of growth, and projects like SWAYAM are spearheading e-education through an offering of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for leveraging e-education. Swayam provides a platform that facilitates hosting of all courses taught in classrooms from Class 9 till post-graduation with open access. The objective of the scheme is to provide 20 hours of basic training on digital devices and the internet and how to use these tools to avail government-enabled e-services with a special focus on cashless transactions. .

Farmers Digital Agriculture Literacy: Enhance digital literacy among farmers and spread awareness about sustainable farming techniques. A crucial step towards upskilling the agricultural workforce is by setting up implementing agencies, such as Common Service Centers and Krishi Vigyan Kendrass.

E-NAM-NAMional Agriculture Market: E-NAM (National Agriculture Market) launched on 14th July 2022 – to promote uniformity in agriculture marketing by streamlining procedures across the integrated markets, removing information asymmetry between buyers and sellers and promoting real-time price discovery based on actual demand and supply.

Opportunities of Digital Learning

Some of the new opportunities which have been created by the development of modern technologies are as follows:

1. One of the biggest opportunities of technology is that, like teachers, the technologies do not have any preferences for the schools, colleges or any other institutions for which they work. The resources available on the internet are equally available to any students of any type of institution who have internet access and can bear the costs. Thereafter, students and teachers located at different places can also participate in real-time video conferences for various teaching purposes. In this way we see that the speed and accessibility of the internet are going to reduce a huge number of geographical distances, which normally creates a great number of disadvantages for poor students.

2. Advances in artificial intelligence technology nowadays allow teachers to provide different types of study materials and instructions to different students based on the levels of their skills.

3. The evolution of touch screen technology has enabled young children to get engaged in technology-aided instructions, as today there are many applications which help children to effectively achieve literacy and numeracy skills.

Challenges of Digital Education:

1. Lack of Good Internet Speed: In most of the places in India, the speed of the internet is very poor. Therefore, it is difficult for students to attend online classes and access online videos.

2. Lack of quality teachers: Teachers are not given proper training to conduct classes by using various digital platforms; even some of them are not aware of these, and some of the teachers are not even interested in online education; they prefer the traditional talk-and-teach method of teaching.

3.Digital Divide: It means lack of equal access to education for all strata of the society due to various constraints like non-availability of low-cost tablets and PCs, so weaker sections of the society will be deprived of online or digital education.

4. Insufficient Funds: Application and adoption of digital technology require amounts of funds and infrastructure, so it is very difficult for developing countries like India to develop the software and hardware required to upgrade the digital technology.

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9. Lack of Proper Policy on the Part of Government: Recently, the implementation of NEP 2020, but the government not focused more on online education. Digital education is all about tools, technology, platforms and many more. Unfortunately, we don't have a proper policy in respect of these aspects.

Initiatives of the government to promote digital education:

Following initiatives taken by the government to promote digital education in India.

1. Swayam (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds): It was launched by the MHRD, Government of India, under the Digital Programme to bring various professional and online courses from ninth standard to post-graduation. It enables professors and faculty of centrally funded institutes like IITs, IIMs, IISERs, etc., to teach students.

2.Deeksha: It is a national platform for school education, an initiative of NCERT, Ministry of Education. This platform is developed for school education and foundational learning programmes and to support inclusive learning for underserved and differently abled communities of learners and teachers.

3. National Digital Library (NDL): This is also a very ambitious digital initiative in higher education. Presently more than 80 lakh e-books are available through this portal to each and every one at no. This service can be accessed through the Android app also. Presently more than 20 lakh students are registered on this particular platform.

4. E-PG Pathashala: It is a portal under which high-quality, curriculum-based, interactive content in different subjects and languages is being developed. MHRD, under its national mission on education through ICT, has assigned work to the UGC for the development of e-content in 68 subjects at the postgraduate level. The contents and their quality are the key components of the education system.

5. Swayam Prabha: It includes 32 educational DTH channels which provide study material for different streams of students, such as arts, science and commerce, etc. Such types of study materials are useful for both regular students and for the lifelong learners also.

6. Pradhan Mantri E-Vidya Scheme: It is an initiative by the Ministry of Education that will help in facilitating access to digital/online learning as well as teaching materials of various types among students and teachers.

7. National Academic Depository (NAD): Through this particular initiative, every citizen can access digital certificates and awards issued by academic institutions. A number of academicians are associated with this depository, as it provides free storage, access and recognition to them.

8. E-Shodh Sindhu: This platform provides more than 15,000 journals of national and international levels to the higher education institutions. This facility is run through the INFLIBNETBNET programme. . We can learn a lot through this specific program also.

9. E-Yantra: This particular initiative is very specific to the incorporation of robotics into engineering education, and it is based on computer science, mathematics and engineering concepts. All the content is available to everyone free of cost.

10. E-Kalpa: More than 160 online courses related to art and design learning are covered through E-Kapla, another digital initiative of higher education.

11. The Free and Open Source Software for Education (FOSSEE): This initiative is for the promotion of open source software in educational institutions. Different sorts of seminars, conferences, documentation and other programmes are conducted for the purpose.

12. E-Vidwan: Another digital initiative in higher education is E-Vidwan, which is run under the 'Information and Library Network' (INFLIBNET), and there is huge data of academicians and research scientists who belong to research organisations.

Suggestions

Important measures to be taken by the government to remove challenges for developing digital education in India based on the study can be summarized as follows:

1. The government would ensure quality education in a hybrid mode of education. Therefore, teachers must be provided proper training through modern digital platforms at regular intervals.

2. The government could take proper steps to reach online education in every part of the country by providing internet connectivity to every nook and corner of the nation.

3. The government should allocate sufficient funds for the development of digital infrastructure.

4. The government should encourage research and development activities to seek innovative educational models.

5. The government should make proper policy relating to the implementation of a hybrid mode of education compulsory at all levels of education so that digital education can be made more popular.

6. The government can tie up with corporate companies to build digital infrastructure through corporate social responsibility activities.

7. The government can make collaborations with foreign institutions to generate and adopt modern new innovative teaching methods, skills and platforms.

Conclusion

Digital literacy is the individual's ability to use all platforms. Use, evaluate, and compose clear information through writing and other media on various digital platforms. The study focuses on digital literacy, like computer knowledge, computer operating skills and web-related capabilities of common citizens. Digital literacy which helps the public with government schemes for common citizens. Nowadays, achievement of India is taking initiatives for the digitalization of all government activities. Now-a-days, everyone is using the internet through mobile phones, which provide all the global trends at our fingertips. The Government of India started the Digital India programme for easy access to all government schemes for the common public. Digital literacy, the current administration's problems bring social changes in the country. In the part of digitalization, banks, local authorities, hospitals, government offices and non-government organisations are effectively using online platforms in their day-to-day activities. These initiatives bring easy governance of public activities in rural areas. Rural area people also get benefits from public schemes. Today the definition of literacy has changed, and it is considered incomplete without the knowledge of digital literacy, while digital literacy means the ability to locate, organize, understand, evaluate, manage and create information using digital technology. It is estimated that nowadays almost half of the world population owns a mobile phone, and more than a third of these people are on social media, which indicates that there is a massive shift towards digital technology. As observed, while we have achieved great results in certain areas, we are yet to cover a big portion of our unexplored skill force, which can go on to contribute to making India the future world power, and to prepare India for the coming generations, we should try to make at least one person from every family a digitally literate individual. Thereafter we see that as it is extremely difficult to arrange a big fund to digitally educate the entire population of India, the Government of India has to specifically plan various ways to digitally educate the Indian population for the future. Education plays an important role in the overall development of individuals and the nation. Education must be a holistic process comprising lab work, working with computers, interacting in groups and continuous learning. Emotional connection and proper guidance are possible only in in-person or offline classes. Therefore, the government must encourage both offline and online classes and educate society about the positivity of the hybrid mode of education. Digital education must complement the in-person education. Finally, the quality of the education should not be deteriorated; that should be taken care of. Digital India is one platform created by the Indian government for all the citizens for effective governance in the economy. Even rural area citizens are getting knowledge towards usage of

technology and enjoying the sweetness of technical fruits. Technology is providing innovative things for the betterment of human life. We have to use it in a better manner; otherwise, technology will collapse our lives.

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