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Digital literacy among Students and Teachers

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Abstract

With the advent of the internet, many sectors went into Digi-mode. During this time, a lot of work began to be done online and the convenience led it to spread. The pandemic brought about a faster spread of digital usage among people. Commercial sectors, government units, educational sectors, sales and retail, food and groceries; all these units and many more embraced the online platform. Like all other sectors, the educational sector also became dependent on digital classes and e-learning. With this, it became inevitable for the students and the teachers to educate themselves digitally. This scenario brought a need for not only students and teachers to be educated digitally but also for the parents as well, since they were now more involved in their child's education than before. The parents of the students were now responsible for making sure that the child had completed the work given, for making sure that they are available online physically and mentally during the class. It has been a huge change for everyone to be moving into a digital phase and while many have gladly embraced it and are finding it very convenient, there are others who are facing technical problems like inconsistent electricity supply, lack of necessary devices, low speed bandwidth and many more. In this paper, I am going to talk about digital literacy among students and teachers what are the challenges that they have faced and how they brought about solutions to the challenges and what more can be done to enhance digital literacy among teachers and students.

Keywords: Digital literacy; ICT; challenges; strategies;

1. Introduction

Let us start with what digital literacy is. It means being able to use ICT and digital devices at a personal and professional level for example using it for social media, surfing the internet, using program and applications to gain knowledge on topics and for professional purposes, getting educated by using the internet etc. Digital literacy has gained worldwide importance due to the shift of most work being done on online platforms. It is especially important when it comes to education because using the internet for educational purposes can open a treasure

chest of knowledge and pave pathways for success. The Internet is an ocean of information and those who are digitally literate, are at a great advantage over those who are not. Digital literacy includes having the knowledge to operate digital devices like laptops, computers, smartphones, tablets and making effective use of them for educational and professional purposes. A person can be in possession of these devices and may not be able to use it efficiently and effectively. Using these devices is what we can call digital literacy. It is a skill that must be on every teachers' resume in today's digital age after the virtual shift of classes online and a lot of homework being given through internet links and project works that need internet surfing. With today's generation being naturally knowledgeable in the digital aspect, being born into this age, the teachers must also be well-acquainted and must take classes especially those belonging to time before of the advent of the internet and need to effectively use these digital skills for proficient working.

Literature review

With technology being embedded in the society, it becomes the duty of the teachers to equip the students with digital literacy to make them valuable and responsible adults. According to Yoram Eshet, Digital literacy involves more than the mere ability to use software or operate a digital device; it includes a large variety of complex cognitive, motor, sociological, and emotional skills, which users need in order to function effectively in digital environments. The tasks required in this context include, for example, "reading" instructions from graphical displays in user interfaces; utilizing digital reproduction to create new, meaningful materials from existing ones; constructing knowledge from a nonlinear, hypertextual navigation; evaluating the quality and validity of information; and have a mature and realistic understanding of the "rules" that prevail in the cyberspace.(2004).

Paul Gilster (1997) describes digital literacy as 'the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via a computer'. It was Paul Glister who initiated the term digital literacy in his book written in 1997. During this year, the digital age was yet to evolve to what it has become today. A more recent definition by e-learning programme of European commission, is "Digital Literacy is the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze and synthesize digital

resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process.”

Research questions

What is the importance of digital literacy for teachers and students?

Challenges faced to attain digital literacy?

How can we overcome these challenges?

Digital devices for education

It has been established that the use of digital devices enhances learning abilities and improves the outcome of the learner. Under this topic, we will discuss some benefits that are a result of using digital devices. Tech-savvy classrooms open up many new doors for acquiring knowledge and skills. It comes with not only a wide array of learning materials but with teachers, educators and programs throughout the world. It gives the students more opportunities to learn and share far and beyond the classroom. Getting assignments done with the use of libraries and books is a time-consuming task. The use of internet for these assignments makes it much simpler and saves a lot of time. The students have opportunities to interact with other students globally and share their experiences and knowledge with one another. It gives a platform for self-learning and self-acquired knowledge. Hence, building upon the intellect of the students. Digital devices that are being used for education include laptops, computers, smart screens, smart boards, cell phones etc. These devices provide instantaneous answers and wider access to information. It is good for visual and auditory learners, who grasp knowledge better through images and videos.

Importance of Digital literacy among teachers and students

Virtual classrooms have made their way in the new era. With all the advantages digital learning brings with it, it has become a must for teachers to be digitally literate. There is an ocean of knowledge available on the world wide web. Technology in the classrooms have made the scope of education wider and opened up many opportunities for learning advanced lessons in a shorter period of time. Professionals in the education sector must have hands on knowledge of technology which is used in classrooms as inevitable as it is during the digital age. Tech knowledge of the teachers helps them in increasing students' efficiency to study and certifies the effective use of digital tools to enhance their project works and assignments.

It plays a key role in the orientation of the work of students. The possession of technical skills provides support and knowledge to the students. There are many platforms available for students to enhance their knowledge on the web. They are interconnected with a series of information from all over the world and can create and share digital content with one another.

Digital literacy in India

According to a recent study by NSO a survey shows the access to computers and internet in Indian households. According to this survey, only 1 out of 10 households have a computer which is either a desktop, laptop or tablet and almost 25% of homes have internet connections which are being used through mobile networks or other fixed networks. According to this survey, 20% of Indians above the age of 5 years have basic literacy. Digital literacy in the age group of 15 to 29 years which is the most imperative age of learning and includes students from colleges and schools contribute to only 40%. When seen region-wise Kerala displays the least inequality with more than 39% of rural homes having internet and 67% of urban homes being internet equipped. The highest quality is shown by Assam according to the survey where almost 80% of the urban homes have internet access and 94% of the rural homes are deprived of it. Furthermore, there is also inequality of digital literacy on the basis of gender, according to the ministry of statistics and programme implementation of 2019, the percentage of male and female members who could operate a computer were 12.6% males

and 7% females in rural areas and the ones who could use internet consisted of 17.1% for males and 8.5% for females. In urban areas, this rate increased to 37.5% among males and 26.9% females who were able to operate a computer and 43.5 % males and 30.1% females were able to use the internet.

Challenges being faced and the digital divide

There also come disadvantages to the use of digital devices in the classroom. These devices definitely have harmful effects due to prolonged exposure to screen. Sometimes there might even be inappropriate data that the students might happen to view. Cyber bullying and child harassments are cybercrimes that are prevalent in the world of internet and lastly, the use of digital devices creates 'The digital divide.'

As important as digital literacy is, not everyone is blessed to be acquainted to it. Especially in developing countries and rural areas. The dominance of ICT in all aspects during the pandemic, the education sector included, has given rise to the digital divide which appears as the disparity between those in possession of technical necessities and those without. The digital divide can also be described as the gap that is formed between those who have access to uninterrupted new information technology and those who have limited to no access to it. This Digital divide has further added to the already Covid-severed learning platforms. It has taken its toll on educators and students alike.

Strategies to overcome the Digital Divide

- *Setting up trusts and support groups*

Support groups can be set up for the specific purpose of helping out those people who do not have digital devices. These trusts can use their funds to set up broadband connections and

provide devices that students will need and further give technical support to the digitally deprived sections of the population. Communication towers can be set up in areas that are remote and are in need of telecommunication and signals. Non-profit organizations must be managed so that those in need receive maximum help and aid needed.

- *Setting up free cycle groups*

Organizations can be built with the sole purpose of cycling through technical devices. The devices in need can be bought and provided to the people who are in need of it. It should be availed by students and teachers who need it for the purpose of making lesson plans, acquiring the needed knowledge and taking it out on hard copies then for use when they would not have devices to avail from. These devices can be cycled among their entire group where and when needed.

- *Digital libraries and Tech rentals*

With the same pattern of libraries, Tech libraries can be created where students can rent the devices that they need for an affordable amount or even for free. People could sell the devices that they are not using for a reasonable amount to these libraries or even donate them for free use. Laptops, smartphones, desktops, tablets, and other devices can be donated here and rented to the people who need them. They could be rented to them for a certain period of time and returned for other people to use. If needed for a short time or for a particular lesson plan/project work, they could be made to avail them in the library itself. According to Tech digest, U.K. has set up a digital library in the month of June this year. Totality services, a leading IT service provider, has done so in partnership with CC foundation which will help hundreds of underprivileged students as well as teachers. Another example is of Sandeep Kumar Badsra, a former teacher from Punjab was concerned for those students who were missing out due to lack of essential technical resources and books. He initiated a mobile library and carried books and other essential items for the children of slums to aid them in their educational need.

- *Mass tech-learning programs*

A special educational system could be set up for particularly the rural areas. It could be a moveable, mobile school with system set up in vans. Resources that children would need, smart screens, projectors etc. These portable classes could be flexible and rural-friendly so they could be easily set up in a vacant ground. The same can be used for many villages time to time. It could promote video-based learning platforms and Digi-learning. NGO's can be set up with the mission to create and run these mobile classrooms.

Conclusion

This is a theoretical paper in the discussion of digital literacy. This paper it brings about knowledge of the prevailing digital literacy in India and what challenges we have to face due to the dependence on digital literacy. We have also discussed the strategies that can be used to overcome these rising challenges. This paper brings out the pros and cons of digital literacy. It tells us how vital it has become in today's era and how those who you are unschooled to it, are at quite a loss. We need to keep in mind that there are still those who are deprived of digital literacy and the education system must always include a window open for those scholars and teachers who do not have access to it due to financial or regional restraints. At the same time, the mental health of students must also be kept in mind when these devices are being used and focus must be kept on the safety of the students. Effective steps need to be taken to educate people on the use of digital devices because these devices will be of no value unless the students are equipped with the necessary knowledge of knowing how to use it and have the willingness to use them. It still remains a task and steps must be taken more efficiently to bridge this gap. Be it digital or economical, it is a major setback in prosperity and must be dealt with proficiently.

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