

Report on Digital Literacy

Introduction

The Webinar was chaired by Sh. Santosh Kumar Sarangi, and distinguished speakers like Prof. Saroj Sharma Chairperson NIOS, Prof. N.K. Ambasht Former chairman NIOS, Prof. N. Singh, and Prof. Pankaj Arora discussed the theme 'Digital Literacy for Youths and Adults' as part of International Literacy Day, which aims to commemorate the importance of literacy and digital literacy in the twenty-first century for ensuring an equitable and just society.

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown India's educational environment into disarray. Schools and universities have begun offering online lectures and tests as part of their remote learning initiatives. The educational landscape has shifted dramatically, with digital learning emerging as the major option. This abrupt shift and over-dependence on technology has come with a set of drawbacks. In the midst of this change, the Ministry of Education, launched the New Education Policy on July 29, 2020, for the first time in 34 years. The policy proposes a number of initiatives aimed at encouraging digital learning and improving infrastructural requirements. Given India's socioeconomic and regional variety, there are several barriers to accessibility and widespread acceptance of online teaching and learning. In this regard, NIOS organized a webinar that will guide the education system to "widely use technology in teaching and eliminate language barriers."

The National Digital Educational Architecture (NDEAR) is set in the context of the Digital First-Mindset where digital architecture support teaching and learning activities. The National Digital Education Architecture encourages innovation and experimentation by the entire educational ecosystem, including the governments of Centre, States, and UT, as well as the private sector, non-profit organizations, and technology players. It is part of the Government of India's Digital India initiative, which strives to make life easier for students, parents, teachers and administrators.

Session Highlights

1) Prof. Saroj Sharma Chairperson, NIOS deliberated upon "Youth and Adult Digital Literacy" and emphasized the importance of human rights and digital literacy in building a cultured and sustainable society. She stressed upon "technological-enabled literacy" making learning more inclusive and meaningful. She discussed the abilities to navigate through various digital platforms for meaningful communications and transactions and making citizens digitally and socially responsible.

Prof. Saroj Sharma said that the rapid shift to online learning and also highlighted the persistent digital divide in terms of connectivity, infrastructure, and the ability to engage with technology. She said the relevance of digital literacy is to facilitate educational and professional opportunities, develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology and promote communication and collaboration. She spoke about digital literacy and how it is different from digital fluency focusing on some contemporary IT Tools. She also pondered on and scrutinized the data required to promote digital literacy in the country.

She concluded by saying that to become good, successful, innovative, adaptable, and productive human beings in today's rapidly changing world it is necessary to imbibe some critical skills and be digitally literate. She mentioned some digital innovations at NIOS including Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA), DAISY-enabled talking books for visually challenged, The State-of-the Art HD Studio equipped, ICT based On Demand Examination System (ODES), Developed Open Educational Resources (OER) in areas of academic and vocational education, Digital Mark sheets on DigiLocker, NIOS Virtual Open Schooling, An interactive web radio Mukta Vidya Vani (Open Education Voice) and NIOS website.

2) Prof. N.K Ambasht discussed about digital literacy and its opportunities and challenges. He referenced digital literacy as significant as it helps in expanding sources of knowledge, giving distinctive and digital platforms for learning and advances towards adaptable learning. He accepted that the new algorithm of digital education ought to be propagated, learned and rehearsed.

Prof. N.K Ambasht concluded his session by proposing the accompanying approaches to advance and empower digital learning:

- Promoting digital literacy and integration with common service centres
- Providing cheap affordable devices
- Unifying and bridging the cusp areas
- Simplifying digital terminology so that ordinary people can understand

3) Dr. Nagendra Singh discussed issues, concerns and initiatives related to youth and adult digital literacy. He mentioned that literacy and school education programs should be based on skills, scale and speed. In his view, a comprehensive formal curriculum should include basic literacy, numeracy and vocational skills development and continuing education. This mission is achievable through NETF (National Educational Technology Forum) to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education that fosters lifelong learning, simulations, game-based learning, augmented and virtual reality digital repositories. In addition, he highlighted the use of existing digital platforms such as DIKSHA and SWYAM, which currently provide training opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

4) Prof. Pankaj Arora explored the true meaning of Digital literacy and "how digital literacy is considered as the ability to interpret and design nuanced communication across fluid digital forms." He examined digital literacy as a constellation of life skills promoting equitable use of technology and encompassing scope and use of digital literacy touching all aspects of our everyday lives. He analyzed the components of digital literacy like functional skills, creativity, E-safety, etc. and emphasized the importance of pursuing and engaging with Digital technologies and Digital media. He further elaborated upon Delhi University's Digital literacy initiatives like ILLL, DUDISCAD, One DU and SOL. He concluded his session by advancing and promoting digital literacy and minimizing the digital divide in the country. He stressed upon the need to include Right to technology in right to education.

The viewers raised the following questions in the webinar:

- 1) Can there be voice based solutions to add pace to Literacy. It will be better if the voice based solutions are in the local language?
- 2) How the visually impaired and hard of hearing people in our society be benefited by the Digital Literacy?
- 3) How can NETF ensure a mechanism or curriculum for students with learning disorders?
- 4) What is the difference between One-DU and DIKSHA?
- 5) Can the DUDISCAD be extended to schools and institutions in the rural areas for the benefit of the unreached group of the society? And why this has not been extended till now?

Conclusion

The speakers of the webinar are institutions with rich knowledge and experience in their academic fields. Their vision will make young people and adults aware of the importance of digital literacy and bring a series of changes to the education system.

Some of the action points emerging from the webinar are:

- Encouraging self-learning
- Differentiating between misinformation or opinion-based content and fact-based content.
- Importance of learner generated e-learning content
- Community participation for narrowing the digital divide
- Nurturing Netiquette
- Developing curriculum based on simulation and game-based learning; augmented reality and virtual reality.

JS coordinator of MOE Shri. Vipin Kumar ended the webinar with a thank note expressing his gratitude to the speakers for their excellent discourse and deliberations bringing out the pertinent issues and concerns in perspective of Digital Literacy in our country.
