

Addressing Digital Literacy Gap Among Students and Educators in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article examines digital literacy, gaps in this regard, methods and relevance of digital literacy development, situation in this field in Uzbekistan, and problems in this field. The article presents the role of digital literacy mainly in the field of education, its impact on education, the levels and opinions of teachers and learners in this regard, and the ideas and considerations necessary to improve digital literacy.

Key words: digital literacy, information technology, social networks, information processing, gadgets, online education.

Introduction

Digital literacy is very important not only in everyday life, but also in professional life and educational process in today's rapidly developing era. In education, the impact of improving the Digital Literacy of both teachers and students on the quality of education is enormous. Therefore, Uzbekistan, like all developed countries of the world, is making efforts to increase information technology and digital literacy in the country. An example of this is the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan ON APPROVAL OF THE STRATEGY "DIGITAL UZBEKISTAN - 2030" AND MEASURES FOR ITS EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION. According to the decree, comprehensive measures are being implemented in our country for the active development of the digital economy, the widespread introduction of modern information and communication technologies in all sectors and areas, first of all, in public administration, education, health care and agriculture. Also, on the basis of specialized higher educational institutions and digital technology training centers, organization of education and training of responsible leaders of state bodies and organizations, local executive authorities, and many other reforms and their implementation measures are envisaged[3].

Material and methods

Today, as a result of the development of the Internet, every aspect of our daily life is closely connected with digital literacy. The development of various sites, platforms, social networks, phone applications, web pages and various other tools has also taken a drastic turn in the field of education, since today it is possible to find any information and gain a lot of knowledge through the Internet. There are a lot of methods and materials to achieve this.

This raises the question: what is digital literacy? According to Twinkle.Com, digital literacy is the ability to understand, appreciate, use, and create content about information technology and the Internet. Digital literacy is different from offline literacy such as reading, writing and numeracy. But it can also include reading and writing information related to information technology and the Internet. According to an article published by researchers at the Open University of the Netherlands, digital literacy has the following requirements: general knowledge, use in everyday life, work and creative expression, communication and collaboration, information processing, privacy, legal and ethical

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practices, balanced attitude, awareness, always learning, informed decisions about appropriate digital technologies, continuous use[4].

Increasing the digital literacy of every teacher and student will help them achieve their goals faster and strengthen their knowledge and skills. The digitalization of education has accelerated, especially after Covid-19. Almost all over the world, the education system was forced to switch to a digital form. Therefore, many programs, applications, web pages and platforms have been developed in the field of education. In Uzbekistan, classes were held online. This process was carried out using various TV channels, zoom platform, Telegram application, MOODLE program and various other digital tools. As a result, a large part of the population was able to improve their digital literacy.

However, the level of digital literacy currently varies among teachers and learners. Especially in older teachers we can see a big difference in this regard. As young people are naturally curious and quick to adapt to changes, they absorb new things and innovations much faster than adults. Adults, on the other hand, often find it difficult to use technology and the Internet. Among teachers, the majority of those who say they have difficulty using digital tools are older teachers. Because of this, they stated that their interest in digital tools is not as high as that of young people.

But there are other reasons for low levels of digital literacy. Such reasons can be explained by social and economic factors. Many Uzbek families do not allow their female children to use the Internet and social networks. They believe it will have a negative impact on their behaviour. For this reason, some Uzbek girls do not have the opportunity to improve their digital literacy. However, it is worth noting that the situation is improving every year, and many Uzbek families are paying special attention to improving the education and digital literacy of their daughters.

As mentioned above, the economic factor can also be one of the main reasons for the digital literacy issue. Because in increasing digital literacy, first of all, the Internet, information media, and gadgets play an important role. Some families cannot afford to buy these tools and use them efficiently and permanently. This in itself hinders the development of digital literacy. Such problems have a negative effect on children from families with poor economic conditions. But such problems can be solved nowadays, because communication companies and Internet service centers can be found in the remote parts of the country, and in such places it is possible to develop digital literacy, acquire the necessary knowledge and skills about the Internet and information technologies[5].

Results

A variety of strategies are presented in various sources to bridge the digital literacy gap and increase the digital literacy levels of students and teachers. The effectiveness of such strategies may vary in different situations and circumstances. One of the biggest reasons for the gap in digital literacy is the lack of interest in this area among both students and teachers. This factor is mostly among teachers. Most people have a basic understanding of digital tools, but we cannot say that they meet the demands of modern education today. Due to a lack of interest, many teachers and learners alike are content with the basic concepts they already have, and the interest in developing their existing knowledge and inquiring and learning new things is waning. This can be caused by the many distractions these days.

According to the survey conducted among students and educators, Celebrating and sharing digital success stories, recognizing and highlighting the achievements of students and teachers who effectively integrate digital skills into their learning and teaching practice can be very useful factor for the improvement. Also, students should be encouraged creativity and digital creation: for instance, to promote opportunities for students to create digital content, such as videos, podcasts, websites, or blogs encourages them to be more efficient. This fosters creativity, problem-solving skills, and digital fluency. When teaching students digital literacy, it is recommended to begin by helping them identify keywords. Having the right keywords can enable them to find information closest to what they are looking for. It's also important to help students learn to interact with different formats.

Educators should receive training on how to effectively teach digital literacy skills and integrate technology into their teaching. This could include workshops, online courses, or mentoring programs.



Furthermore, they should understand the meaning of what is being taught and explained, and need to see real experience, and what benefits they can take from it. This automatically shows more appeals to it and supports them to create an easy way to learn it. In addition, an alternative would be including different kinds of digital literacy lessons into the education curriculum from kindergartens to universities. One student says that encouraging a growth mindset where students and educators are open to learning new digital skills and are not afraid to experience and make mistakes.

Conclusion

To bridge the digital literacy gap, a multimodal strategy is needed. Improving access to high-speed internet and technology is a crucial strategy, particularly in places that are neglected. Digital literacy curriculum integration guarantees that children are ready from an early age, and community training initiatives assist adults in acquiring the skills they need. Large-scale training programs can benefit from the resources and assistance that public-private partnerships can offer. Accessibility for those with disabilities is guaranteed by inclusive technology design. Campaigns to raise awareness emphasize the value of digital literacy and promote lifelong learning as well as technological adaptability. All of these initiatives support fair participation in the digital world.

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