

"BEYOND THE BOOKS: ASSESSING DIGITAL LITERACY COMPETENCE IN TODAY'S STUDENTS"

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Abstract: *This research endeavors to investigate and evaluate the digital literacy competence of present-day students, recognizing the growing importance of technological skills in contemporary education. The study employs a comprehensive approach to gauge students' proficiency in digital literacy. The objective of this study is to evaluate the digital literacy competence of contemporary students according to the factors that have been selected. This research through content analysis research design are used. Data collected from materials such as books, journal articles and descriptive proceedings. This study found that aspects of students' digital literacy are influenced by four factors, namely gender, age, students' digital media experience and parents' educational background. Furthermore, the research highlights the need for an integrated approach to digital literacy within the education system. As technology continues to evolve, educators and policymakers must collaborate to bridge gaps in current educational practices and develop effective digital literacy programs.*

Keywords: *Digital literacy, Students, Factors.*

Introduction

Digital literacy has become a vital skill set in the fast expanding terrain of the twenty-first century, particularly among students navigating an increasingly digitalized world. The capacity to acquire, interpret, analyze, and use information successfully in the digital domain is referred to as digital literacy. (Reddy et al., 2020). As students use a variety of online platforms, social media, and digital tools for both academic and personal purposes, the need of developing digital literacy skills has never been greater. Students must acquire critical thinking abilities to recognize reputable sources, evaluate the dependability of information, and navigate the digital world responsibly in an era where information is easily available at the press of a mouse.

The incorporation of technology into education has heightened the importance of digital literacy among students. Globally, educational institutions are introducing digital tools, online resources, and e-learning platforms into their curricula, requiring students to traverse these digital worlds with ease. Beyond fundamental computer abilities, digital literacy includes the capacity to use technology for communication, collaboration, and problem solving. A firm foundation in digital literacy provides students with the skills needed to flourish in a digitally linked and information-rich society as they prepare for future academic and professional aspirations. According to Fu, (2013), digital literacy is a set of abilities necessary by individuals in modern times in order to use digital resources to help them achieve their life objectives.

Definition of Digital Literacy

New technologies and innovations affect the way individuals use technology and complete activities, various writers define digital literacy differently. Furthermore, Guri-Rosenblit, (2009) and Martin & Grudziecki, (2006) has agreed that 'digital literacy' is a multidimensional concept entailing a complex integration of technical skills, cognitive skills, and meta-cognitive processes, as well as civic engagement and ethical awareness.

Tabusum et al. (2014) defined digital literacy as the capacity to use digital technology to discover, organize, comprehend, evaluate, and analyze information. He claims that being computer literate is not the same as using digital technology to transmit information via digital platforms.

The Scenario of Digital Literacy in Malaysia

One of the earliest pondok institutions in Pahang was established in Pulau Tawar, which is located near the mouth of the Pahang River. The Pondok in Pulau Tawar was founded by Sheikh Ahmad bin Abdul Rahman Al-Fathani, a renowned Islamic scholar from the Hadhramaut region of Yemen, in the early 1800s. The Pondok attracted students from all over Pahang and the surrounding areas, and it became a center for Islamic learning and scholarship.

Another notable pondok in Pahang is the Pondok Lubuk Tapah, which was established by Haji Muhammad Yusuf bin Haji Abdul Majid in the early 1900s. The Pondok became known for its emphasis on Islamic teachings and the cultivation of moral values. Many prominent Islamic scholars and leaders in Pahang and the surrounding regions were educated at this Pondok.

Today, Pondok schools continue to play an important role in Islamic education in Pahang. They serve as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge and values, and provide opportunities for young people to learn about their cultural heritage and identity.

Student Digital Literacy Factor

Gender

An estimated 73% of Asia-Pacific youth aged 15-24 years used the internet in 2022. It is anticipated that by 2030, basic digital skills would be required for 80% of occupations in Southeast Asia. However, across the area, girls and young women are less likely to pursue professions in technology, especially STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), since they are perceived as "men's jobs" or "too difficult." (Pdr & Nam, n.d.).

Based on report by Pdr & Nam, (n.d.) girls are 1.8 times less likely to own a smartphone than boys. Women are 25% less likely than males to understand how to utilize technology for fundamental tasks. Approximately 27% of girls utilized the internet on their phones, compared to 46% of boys. While girls and boys frequently have equal levels of digital literacy at early ages, as they move through education, females begin to fall behind and, significantly, are less likely to achieve advanced digital competencies. This is confirmed further by a survey by Rizal et al., (2021) of prospective physics teachers, which discovered that males had higher mean digital literacy scores than females.

Age

Based on Ad, (2019) The digital literacy of children varies depending on their age, local culture, and circumstance. It comprises information, skills, and attitudes that enable children to be safe and empowered in a digital environment, in addition to technical expertise. Even when they are not online, children must be digitally literate since digital technologies are affecting their life, education, social welfare, and future career chances.

According to the research by Juhaňák et al., (2019), the age at which students first use a computer can influence their perceived competence and autonomy in ICT usage, with children who begin using a computer later displaying poorer ICT competence.

Strengthening digital rights programs, practices, and policies for both children and young adults is critical to increasing their digital literacy.(Nawaila et al., 2019)

Student Digital Media Experience

In today's digital age, students must be digitally literate. It includes the capacity to discover, assess, produce, and share information using information and communication technologies, which necessitates both cognitive and technical abilities.(Smith & Storrs, 2023). That is, the student must have prior familiarity with digital media in order to get digital literacy, so that they can become acquainted with the technology in a short period of time because of that Smith & Storrs, (2023) suggest need more emphasis should be placed on digital literacy in the undergraduate curriculum.

Furthermore, digital media creation promotes literacy among secondary students with varying learning capacities by incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concepts into literacy training.(Leach, 2017)

Parental Educational Background

Parents' educational backgrounds have been discovered to be a key determinant in their digital literacy abilities, which can affect their capacity to assist their children's education, particularly in online learning environments. According to one study by Akman et al., (2023), parents with

better educational backgrounds had greater levels of digital literacy and data security awareness than parents with lesser educational backgrounds. This implies that parents with a higher level of education may be better suited to meet their children's digital learning demands.

Another research by Rice & Ortiz, (2021) emphasized the relevance of parental digital literacy in aiding disabled children in online learning environments. It underlined the importance of parents' digital literacy and learning abilities in ensuring their children's academic success.

In addition study by Tomczyk & Potyrała, (2021), parents' knowledge and literacy about internet safety and digital skills was found to be rather inadequate in certain circumstances, indicating a need for development in this area.

Discussion

The study of student digital literacy has yielded interesting insights into the effects of numerous characteristics such as gender, age, student digital media exposure, and parental educational background. The obvious gender discrepancies highlight the difficulties that girls and young women confront while pursuing jobs in technology, underlining the importance of tailored interventions to promote inclusion in the digital sphere. The need of customizing digital literacy activities to different age groups and ensuring age-appropriate education to improve overall competence is highlighted by the impact of age in determining perceived competency in ICT usage.

Furthermore, given the importance of digital literacy in today's world, it is critical to incorporate comprehensive and inclusive tactics into the undergraduate curriculum. Incorporating Universal Design for Learning ideas emerges as a critical strategy for creating an inclusive educational environment that accommodates varied learning styles and abilities.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of parental educational background as an important predictor in promoting children's digital learning. Parents who have a good educational background can help bridge the digital literacy gap and prepare the next generation for the difficulties of the developing digital world.

A comprehensive strategy is advised to address the numerous components of digital literacy, including efforts to reduce gender biases, offering age-appropriate instruction, adopting curricular reforms, and building strong family support. This holistic approach is critical in developing a digitally literate generation capable of navigating and meaningfully contributing to the expanding digital world. As we enter a more technologically advanced era, encouraging digital literacy becomes not just an educational need but also a societal obligation, ensuring that all persons are prepared to succeed in the digital age.

Conclusion

The conclusion part focuses on major results concerning student digital literacy aspects such as gender, age, student digital media experience, and parental educational background. Gender differences in digital literacy are prevalent, with girls and young women encountering difficulties in pursuing careers in technology. The role of age on perceived proficiency in ICT usage highlights the importance of age-appropriate digital literacy initiatives. The significance of incorporating digital literacy into the undergraduate curriculum and applying Universal Design for Learning concepts in order to create inclusion is emphasized. The educational background of the parents appears as a crucial indicator of the capacity to assist children's

digital learning. To bridge the digital literacy gap and prepare pupils for the expanding digital world, a complete and inclusive strategy is required, including gender biases, age-appropriate education, curricular modifications, and parental support.

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