



DIGITAL LITERACY - GS II AND III MAINS

Q. Digital literacy in India has a long way to go. Discuss why India needs to achieve digital literacy. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Why India must measure digital literacy*

What's in the news?

- The World Development Report talks about the emerging “digital dividend” from the rapid expansion of digital technologies.
- It states that if we can bridge the digital divide the impact of digital technologies on development can be much greater.

Digital Literacy:

- Digital illiteracy refers to the lack of knowledge and skills necessary to effectively navigate and utilise digital technologies and resources. It is the inability to use digital devices, access the internet, and utilise digital tools for various purposes.

Need for Digital Literacy:

Lack of Information and communication technology (ICT) access and adequate digital skill hampered rural development in India in the following ways:

1. Poor learning outcomes:

- Lack of digital education failed to improve learning outcomes of rural students compared to urban ones.
- Example: ASER 2020 found that only 18% of rural students attend online classes during lockdown.

2. Disparities in Healthcare:

- Absence of Internet connectivity impeded the progress of telemedicine in rural areas.
- Digital platforms like COWIN for vaccine rollout couldn't be effectively used by rural people and hampered vaccine access.

3. Challenges in implementation of welfare schemes:

- Inclusion and exclusion errors of beneficiaries due to improper seeding of Aadhar and delay in access to payments made under DBT schemes due to lack of digital infrastructure.

4. Digital divide and e-governance:

- In the absence of rural IT infrastructure, the people have to move to the nearby town because of which they have to pay a huge amount of money to access information through e-governance applications.



5. Farming crisis:

- Lack of digital resources at farmer's disposal led to the inefficient utilization of resources and failed to improve the productivity of fields.

6. Rural unemployment:

- Digital divide can cause lack of opportunities amongst non-users.
 - Opportunities of information access, employment and skill-based training.

Government Initiatives:

1. National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM):

- Also known as the "DISHA" or Digital Saksharta Abhiyan, this program was initiated in 2014 with the objective of imparting IT training to 52.5 lakh persons, including Anganwadi and ASHA workers and authorized ration dealers in all the states/UTs across the country.

2. Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA):

- Launched in 2017, this initiative aims to make six crore adults in rural areas digitally literate.
- The scheme intends to provide digital literacy to one person per eligible household. As of July 2020, around 3 crore candidates had been registered, with 2.5 crore candidates trained and about 2 crore candidates certified under PMGDISHA.

3. BharatNet project:

- An ambitious project aimed at providing high-speed broadband connectivity to all 2,50,000 gram panchayats (village councils) in the country.

4. Swayam:

- It's an online education platform that provides free access to high-quality educational content for everyone, anywhere, anytime.

5. eBasta program:

- This initiative focuses on making school books accessible in digital form as e-books, which can be read and used on tablets and laptops.

Significance of Digital Literacy:

1. Supporting Educational Goals:

- With the increase in smartphone usage from 36% in 2018 to 74.8% in 2022, measuring digital literacy helps ensure that digital tools effectively support education.

2. Economic Development:

- As the World Development Report suggests, understanding digital literacy is crucial for realizing the potential of the digital dividend in economic growth.

3. Pandemic Recovery:

- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the necessity of digital literacy for uninterrupted learning, making its measurement vital for educational resilience.

4. Future Workforce Preparedness:

- Accurate measurement of digital literacy is key to preparing India's youth for a digital economy, ensuring they can contribute productively.



WAY FORWARD:

1. Digital literacy programs:

- Implementing targeted digital literacy programs in rural areas is vital.
- These programs should focus on providing basic computer skills, internet usage, and online safety. NGOs, government agencies, and private organisations can collaborate to facilitate such programs.

2. Local language content:

- Promoting digital literacy in rural areas requires the availability of content in local languages.
- This will make it easier for people to understand and utilise digital platforms effectively.

3. Public-private partnerships:

- Collaboration between the government, private sector and civil society organisations is crucial for bridging the digital divide.
- Public-private partnerships can help in providing digital infrastructure, training programs, and creating employment opportunities in rural areas.

4. Infrastructure development:

- It is essential to improve ICT infrastructure in rural areas to ensure better access to digital technologies.
- This includes expanding internet connectivity and establishing community centres or digital libraries where people can access computers and receive training.

Digital literacy must be perceived as a fundamental right in the digital age and prioritized accordingly in policy design and implementation. As India progresses in its digital journey, it must ensure that no citizen is left behind. The nation must strive to uphold this essence and shape a digitally inclusive future for all its citizens.