



# Digital Literacy For Achieving SDG 4: Meeting The Challenge Through Digital Inclusion

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**Abstract:** Technology has encompassed almost every field of our lives. Education is not an exception to this. Education today is a prominent beneficiary of the boons of Information and Communication Technology. Hence, this requires the teachers and the students to become digitally literate. Digital literacy refers to one's ability to use ICT as well as finding, evaluating, creating and communicating information that calls upon cognition and technical skills. The paper also in short highlights on the pertinent role of digital literacy towards achieving Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. The UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 consisting of 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Besides, Goal 4 relates to achieving inclusion, equity and quality in education and lifelong learning for all. Being digitally literate makes it a powerful media for achieving the required practices to make quality education available to all. However, in order to achieve the objective of SDG 4 through digital literacy, it is highly essential that digital inclusion is put into practice. Digital inclusion aims to ensure access and equity in the process of becoming digitally literate. Therefore, meeting the challenge of digital inclusion is considered a first step towards digital literacy. Also, just like digital literacy, digital inclusion should be considered a right for effective, quality and inclusive education.

**Index Terms:** Digital literacy, Sustainable Development Goals, Digital inclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

Technology has today encompassed every field of human life. There is hardly any area that has not been touched by technology. In this direction, educational sector has been one of the important beneficiaries of technology. Technological advances have an important role in pushing forward the teaching-learning process and products. However, in this technology driven society and education system, it is highly imperative that teachers and learners are in tune with the technological advancements. Therefore, it is necessary that they are literate in the digital skills for coping with the digital explosion and ever-increasing information and communication technology. Particularly, the pandemic brought to us the importance of the need to be digitally literate, for teachers and students in particular and for every individual in general.

## DEFINING DIGITAL LITERACY

Although, literacy skills viz., reading and writing skills are highly essential for the learners, digital literacy goes beyond mere reading and writing. Literacy skills are an important part of being digitally literate, yet digital literacy is broader and encompasses other skills and competencies. According to the task force on digital literacy of the American Library Association digital literacy refers to “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills” (Loewus, 2016). Thus, digital literacy goes far beyond merely using ICT but also involves creating and judging the technology that is created and used. Further digital literacy involves the skills to use technology in a safe, effective and responsible manner (Lcom Team, 2022). Also, “digital literacy is the ability to define, access, manage, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies and networked devices for participation in economic and social life” (Teng, 2018). Therefore, digital literacy refers to the means and ways of utilizing ICT in the most appropriate way for fulfilling the maximum possibilities required in the present digital era.

## IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL LITERACY

However, in this age of increasing utilization of ICT, digital literacy has become imperative not only for the students but also the teachers. Being digitally literate can be a boon for the learners, teachers and for the complete education system because of its vast benefits. The importance of digital literacy for educators and learners can be listed as follows:

**Educational progress:** There has been an increase in the use of technology in the field of education. Large numbers of digital learning platforms have been introduced for learners of all ages. Being digitally literate can enable an individual to navigate through these learning platforms for supplementing their educational progress. It also gives them the confidence to use these resources for their educational benefits and hence increase the boundaries of learning. Teachers can utilize these resources to supplement their classroom teaching and provide additional support to the pupils' learning (Lcom Team, 2022)

**Enhance online security:** With the increase in technology and internet services; there have been greater risks these days regarding online security. There are problems related to online safety and security and the students and teachers are bound to face the challenges. Yet, digital literacy equips them with the know-how and

resources to prevent safety breaches and safeguard their safety while using ICT for their learning and advancements (Lcom Team, 2022).

**Enhanced Responsibility:** With the availability of vast sources of learning; the right of the teachers and learners to utilize these advancements is undeniable. However, it is also very important that they behave in a responsible way online. In other words, students and teachers need to observe the norms of ethics online. Learners understand the issues of plagiarism, copyright, cyber-crime etc. Similarly, it is the digitally-literate teachers that can help learners in better understanding about these issues. This enables them to behave responsibly and become responsible digital citizens (Lcom Team, 2022).

**Enhances Equity:** Just as improving literacy can bridge the literacy gap, similarly increasing digital literacy among every individual can reduce the digital gap or digital divide. Mass digital literacy drives amongst the students from underrepresented groups can help in making them digitally literate. His in turn will help them reap the benefit of online learning resources and their own advancements and development (Lcom Team, 2022).

**Inclusive classroom:** At present, the classrooms are a lot more diverse than it were few years back. Students come with various experiences, backgrounds, disadvantages, disabilities, abilities, values, questions and overall individuality. Inclusive education requires teachers to respect and respond to all the diverse learning demands of the students. Digital literacy helps teachers and students to use various digital tools and platforms to not only meet the different educational needs but also make learning progress. Thus, digital literacy can help in creating inclusive classrooms (Jolene, 2022).

**Increased Career opportunities:** With increased digital literacy, learners and educators are more technology friendly and less resistant to the new advancements coming in. This makes them more suitable to the job market that requires them to be highly technology savvy. Thus, digital-literacy makes them more open to the job opportunities and utilize their skills therein (Lcom Team, 2022).

**Lifelong learning:** Since, the technologies are constantly changing; learners and educators have a responsibility to be in tune with such developments. This makes it inevitable for them to continue learning and hone their digital literacy skills throughout their lives. This will also in turn help learners to keep accessing newer resources for their continuous learning and also help teachers to become life-long learners (Lcom Team, 2022).

**Qualitative enhancement in education:** With the digital literacy skills teachers and learners are now equipped with vast learning resources and platforms with multiple. They can gauge the usability quality and security of these online availabilities. This enables them to use these resources to add to the knowledge stock. Quality learning opportunities are at an easy distance from the teachers and educators.

## Digital Literacy and the Sustainable Development Goals

Moreover, the summation of all above points is the major contribution of digital literacy would be the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 4. In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the “Agenda for Sustainable Development”. It consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals that are to be achieved by 2030. It provided a “blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future”. Besides, others goals, SDG 4 focuses on the aspect of education. Accordingly, goal 4 thrusts on “quality education”. It states to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2015). Hence, it can be observed that all the above points culminate towards achieving the SDG 4 laid down by the UN. Thus, the importance of digital literacy increases all the more as it can become an important medium for achieving quality education for all and not only at present but also in the future.

### DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR DIGITAL LITERACY

Since, digital literacy can play an important role in creating inclusive and equitable systems of education, it is high time that digital literacy is propagated among all individuals. However, one of the major barriers towards achieving digital literacy is ‘digital divide. It refers to the “gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communications technology and those that don’t”. Digital divide can be present between “developed and developing countries, urban and rural populations, young and educated versus older and less educated individuals, and men and women” (Taylor, 2022). Nevertheless, the solution towards this issue is ensuring digital inclusion.

Digital inclusion is defined as the “activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)”. It includes steps taken to alleviate the hurdles towards accessing and using the technological advances (“The words behind our work: The source for definitions of digital inclusion terms”, n.d). Therefore access to the ICTs becomes a first step towards achieving digital literacy.

Further digital inclusion requires ensuring proper access to internet, hardware and software technologies, digitally prepared content and importantly digital literacy skills training (“What is digital inclusion and why is it important”, n.d)

Moreover, digital literacy ensures that individuals and communities are ready to participate in the digital era. This makes sure that nobody is left behind in gaining the benefits that digital literacy has to offer in every field in general and in education in particular (InclusiveDocs, n.d). Also, just like digital literacy, digital inclusion is considered essential for effective, quality and inclusive education.

### CONCLUSION

Therefore, with the explosion of technological benefits each day, it is essential that every individual is digitally literate so that he/she is able to use and evaluate the benefits of these technologies in their life. Particularly, at present when education has been so much interlinked with technology, becoming digitally literate only benefits the teachers, learners and the entire field of education. Further digital literacy can help in achieving

the goal of quality education laid down by the UN. Moreover, it should be ensured that every individual is able to access the ICTs. Thus, digital inclusion becomes a prior area for helping every individual become digitally literate.

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