



Information Literacy Among Distance Learners Of University Of Jammu In Digital World : A Case Study

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The development of a knowledge society in general begins with Information literacy. Distance learning has been viewed as the most feasible alternative to the traditional educational system in promoting accessibility, achieving equality, and support continuous education to diverse learners separated by time and space. This study highlights the assessment of Information literacy skills in using digital library resources among the distance learners of University of Jammu. The study further discusses the significance of digital Information literacy in improving learning for distance learners. The primary data is collected by using survey method and a well semi-structured 200 questionnaires are distributed among the respondents enrolled in one or more distance education courses, 162 of questionnaires are received with a response rate of 81.00%. The gathered data is analysed using percentage analysis and a variety of statistical tools and techniques, such as MS-Word and MS-Excel. The study revealed that the majority of the respondents are aware of the concept of digital information literacy and possess knowledge about basic search strategies. The maximum number of respondents favoured using the simple keyword search strategy for seeking information online. It is discovered that a majority of respondents prefer using online resources to search for information in the present digital world since it is a simple, adaptable, and cost-effective method. Digital literacy is the ability to utilise technologies to participate in and make a contribution to contemporary cultural, social, political, and economic life. It refers to the set of skills necessary for existence, learning, and succeeding in the age of the internet. The study provides a few suggestions for helping distance learners achieve effective and appropriate digital literacy competencies by raising their awareness as well as including effective digital literacy programmes into course curricula. Users need to be aware of a variety of search techniques in order to further narrow down their searches.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Digital Literacy, Distance learners, University Students

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INTRODUCTION

Prof. Paul G. Zurkowski, President of the US Information Literacy Associations, coined the term "Information literacy" for the first time in 1974. Information literacy refers to the ability to recognise the information that is required, comprehend how the information is organised, select the best information sources for a particular need, locate those sources, critically assess those sources, and share that information. Information literacy (IL) enables individuals to use information in an efficient, effective, creative, legal, ethical and strategic manner in order to accomplish their goals. We all are living in a dynamic world where new data is being generated every second, which causes information overload. The continuous advancement in Information and communication technology (ICT) and Artificial intelligence (AI) has impacted multiple domains of life such as Economics, Information relations, Politics, Science & Technology, etc. Information for All Programme of UNESCO created a Working Group on "Measurement for Knowledge Societies," with a special emphasis on three priority areas: information literacy, information preservation, and information ethics, all of which are crucial for the growth of knowledge societies. In today's data-centric world, Information processing plays an essential role for the growth and empowerment of both individual and nation, for which IL skills are crucial to develop. When it comes to higher education institutions, Information literacy is of utmost importance. It encourages people from all different backgrounds to efficiently locate, assess, use, and generate information to fulfil their own social, linguistic, and educational objectives. In other words, IL is the precursor for knowledge society. University libraries are continuously educating their users on how to use the library, how to access information, and how to use the various bibliographic tools through library orientation, training for users, and bibliographic instruction. Distance learning is a form of education that provides educational opportunities and instruction to students who do not physically participate in regular or conventional learning courses. Distance learning programs in India are the only viable option for many students who reside in remote and isolated regions of the nation and lack access to the facilities required to pursue formal education. The Internet takes over as the main source for acquiring information for distance learners

Who do not have physical access to a library like regular students. Therefore, understanding how distance learners use online information resources and their experiences doing so will aid librarians in developing instructional programmes that would improve students' information literacy skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies that are related to the current study are listed below:

Subba Rao, S. (2006) in their study focused on India's efforts to increase literacy levels through distant learning by making use of available technologies, notably information technology. The study suggested the necessity of digital libraries (DLs), their integration, and the use of IT to provide high-quality education to populations that are in remote areas and to improve the quality of education in already-existing educational institutions. Ameen, K., & Gorman, G. E. (2009) conducted a study to examine the overall extent of information and digital illiteracy (IDL) in developing nations and how it impedes the development of people and countries by taking the case of Pakistan. They found that IDL training and practise are not common in Pakistani education system or libraries, nor are they considered operational priorities. The importance of learning to be "critical consumers" of knowledge for both individual and national development is also highlighted. Koneru, I. (2009) conducted the study to find out how easily accessible and useful library and information services and resources were for Dr. BR Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) students, as well as their familiarity with and use of ICTs, their capacity to search and retrieve information from the Web, their ability to assess the quality of information sources, their knowledge of fair use policies, and their preferred language and mode of IL instruction. Their study concluded from the findings that the BRAOU learners have a low degree of information literacy. Ozdamar-Keskin, N., Ozata, F. Z., Banar, K., & Royle, K. (2015), in their study examined the digital literacy skills and learning habits of students enrolled in Anadolu University's open and distant learning programmes in Turkey. Students believed they have the project management and problem-solving abilities to handle academic challenges. However, it appears that they only have minimal digital literacy skills and expertise on how to use information and communication technologies.

They require instruction on how to utilise digital tools more effectively for educational purposes. Munshi, S. A. (2016) conducted a study to assess the information literacy of postgraduate students at Aligarh Muslim University with reference to the library's resources and to learn about their fundamental information demands and information search methods in both physical and online sources. The researchers discovered that there are several worthwhile recommendations provided by the users in response to their desire to increase their information literacy skill, including project based learning, motivational speeches, seminars, conferences, and symposiums. Krishnamurthy, C., & Shettappanavar, L. (2019) conducted a study to assess the level of digital literacy among female postgraduate students at Karnatak University in Dharwad. The use of various search algorithms for efficient information retrieval is also found to be poorly understood by students, and only a small percentage of respondents are aware of copyright concerns. Kayaduman, H., & Battal, A. (2020) conducted a correlational study that looked at the relation between UG students' perceptions of distant learning and digital literacy and concluded that if students have higher digital literacy skills, their perceptions of distance learning might improve. Alternately, as students' digital competence decline, their perceptions of distance learning also decrease. KARAKIŞ, Ö. (2022) organized a study where online learning motivation factor was used to analyse the digital literacy of university students enrolled in distance learning programmes during the Covid-19 epidemic. It was discovered that there is a statistically significant association between the students' motivation levels for online learning and their levels of digital literacy.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As the information explosion advances, tens of thousands of new and updated informational resources are posted online every day. Millions of users are drawn to the range of user-friendly and easy-to-use interfaces that online search engines offer. However, there are questions regarding the authenticity and reliability of information found online. Distance learners have limited access to instructors who can help them work in a digital environment that does in fact require IL skills. In this study, we therefore sought to identify the IL competencies of distance learners of University of Jammu to find, recognise, collect, and assess information from various electronic sources.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine awareness of concept of digital Information literacy among selected distance learners.
- To determine awareness and use of library services by selected distance learners.
- To assess the IL competencies among distance learners to search, identify, obtain, and evaluate information from multiple sources.
- To identify the challenges faced by distance learners when utilising electronic resources.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study primarily focuses to determine the abilities of distant learners of University of Jammu in order to find, recognise, gather, and evaluate information from diverse electronic sources. This study is limited to assessing the Information literacy skills in digital environment among the distance learners of University of Jammu only because of time constraint. The sample of this study covers 162 distance learners enrolled in different courses at University of Jammu, Jammu.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey research method to collect data from distance learners of University of Jammu in order to assess their Information literacy skills in electronic environment. The major tool for gathering data was a questionnaire, and the data collected were analyzed using percentages, tables & charts. The major findings obtained from this analysis are discussed below:

01. Distribution of Respondents by Gender:

According to Table 1, 162 responses from distance learners were received, of which 99 (61.1%) were submitted by women and 63 (38.9%) by men. In distance education, female students outnumber male students, according to study results.

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Male	63	38.9%
Female	99	61.1%
Total	162	100.00%

Table 1 showing distribution of Respondents by Gender

02. Frequency of visiting the Library:

Table 2 and Figure 1 indicate that majority of distance learners 54 (33.3%) rarely

Visit their library, 38 (23.5%) of them visit library once in a month and 38 (23.5%) visit library once in a week. 25 (15.4%) of respondents visit library daily whereas 7 (4.3%) of them never visit library.

Therefore, it is concluded that the majority of distance learners rarely go to the library, however some do so on a weekly or monthly basis. Only a small percentage of respondents visit libraries regularly, and a smaller percentage never do.

Table 2 showing frequency of visiting the Library

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	25	15.4%
Weekly	38	23.5%
Monthly	38	23.5%
Rarely	54	33.3%
Never	7	4.3%

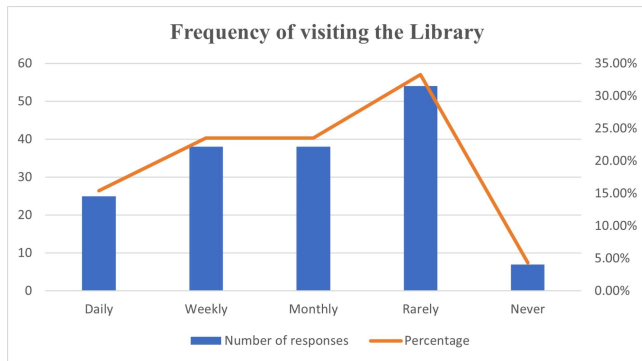


Figure 1 showing frequency of visiting the Library

03. Awareness regarding concept of Digital Literacy:

Table 3 and Figure 2 depict that majority of the respondents 126 (77.7%) are aware of the concept of Digital literacy whereas few 36 (22.2%) lack awareness regarding it.

This leads to the conclusion that while the majority of distance learners are aware of what digital literacy is, there are still some who need to be informed about it.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	126	77.7%
No	36	22.2%
Total	162	100.00%

Table 3 showing awareness regarding concept of Digital Literacy

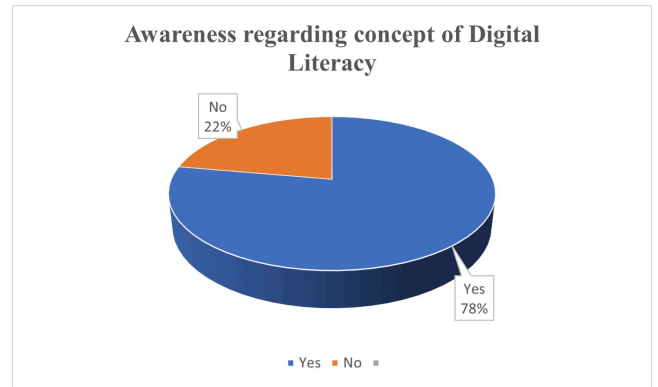


Figure 2 showing awareness regarding concept of Digital Literacy

04. Awareness regarding services and resources library offers:

Table 4 and Figure 3 show that 132(81.5%) of respondents are aware of the resources and services their library provides, while only 30(18.5%) respondents are not.

This suggests that although if the majority of distance learners are aware of the resources and services their library offers, there are some who still need to be made aware of them.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	132	81.4%
No	30	18.5%
Total	162	100.00%

Table 4 showing awareness regarding services and resources library offers

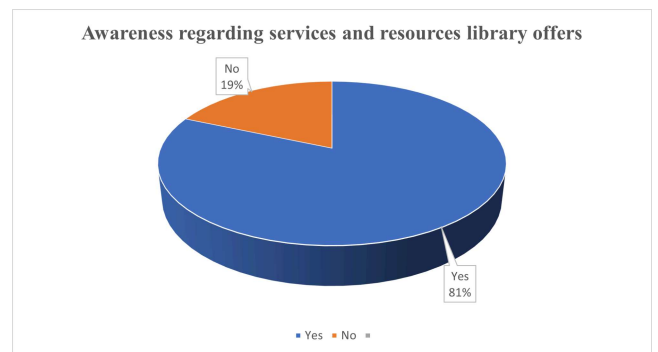


Figure 3 showing awareness regarding services and resources library offers

05. Preferred Information sources:

Table 5 and Figure 4 indicate that majority of the respondents 130 (80.24%) prefer both print and digital Information sources. Few 15 (9.25%) of them prefer only print materials whereas 17 (10.49%) prefer electronic materials alone.

Therefore, it is concluded

That most distance learners prefer both print and electronic information formats, whereas only a small number are comfortable using either print or electronic sources.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Print	15	9.25%
Electronic	17	10.49%
Both	130	80.24%

Table 5 showing preferred Information sources

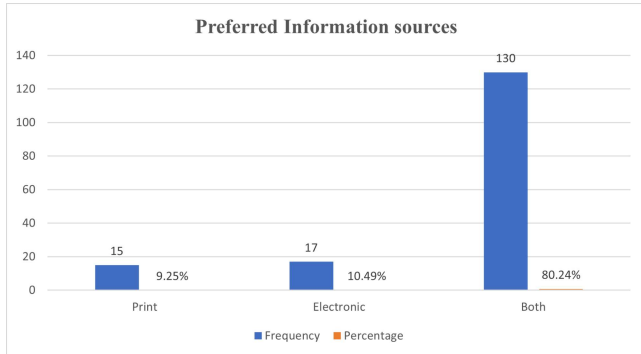


Figure 4 showing preferred Information sources

06. Knowledge of utilising various Digital resources (Selected more than one option):

Table 6 and Figure 5 show that out of 162 respondents, 136 (83.9%) have significant knowledge of using the internet, 122 (75.3%) have knowledge of using social media, 111 (68.5%) have knowledge of using e-mail services, 90 (55.6%) have knowledge of using image/visual materials, 86 (53.1%), have knowledge of using audio materials, and 71 (43.82%) have knowledge of using the OPAC in the library. Only 61 (37.5%) of respondents knew how to use library e-services.

It is determined that distance learners know little about using the library's OPAC or using its electronic resources and services.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Image/Visual Materials	90	55.6%
Audios	86	53.1%
Use of Internet	136	83.9%
Social media	122	75.3%
e-mail	111	68.5%
OPAC	71	43.82%
Library e-services	61	37.65%

Table 6 showing knowledge of utilising various Digital resources

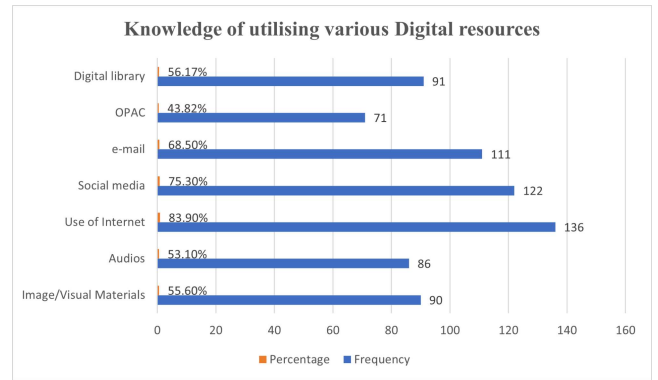


Figure 5 showing knowledge of utilising various Digital resources

07. Different strategies used for searching up information online:

Table 7 and Figure 6 show the search methods and techniques employed by distance learners to find information. Of the respondents, 112 (69.1%) use simple keyword search techniques, 28 (17.28%) use field search, 16 (9.87%) use Boolean operators, and 6 (3.7%) are unaware of searching information online.

It was found that most of the respondents were unaware of the numerous search mechanisms available for efficient information retrieval. The majority of survey participants simply know basic search techniques.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Simple Keyword search	112	69.1%
Boolean search (AND, OR, NOT)	16	9.87%
Field search (Author, Title, URL)	28	17.28%
Don't know	6	3.7%

Table 7 showing different strategies used for searching up information online

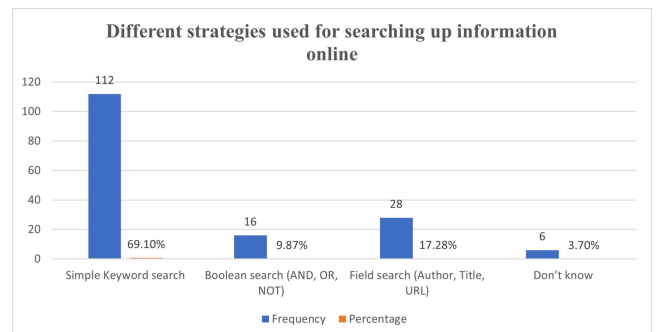


Figure 6 showing different strategies used for searching up information online

08. Knowledge/skills necessary to search, access, evaluate and use information online (Selected more than one option):

Table 8 and Figure 7 show that out of 162 respondents, 137 (84.6%) are most likely to have knowledge or abilities related to searching for information online, 81 (50%) are familiar with how access information online, and 86 (53.1%) are knowledgeable about how to use information effectively. 53 (32.7%) of the respondents have knowledge of evaluating the information they seek for.

Therefore it is concluded that majority of distance learners are capable of searching for the necessary information online, but they lack the ability to evaluate it.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Searching information	137	84.6%
Accessing information	81	50%
Evaluating information	53	32.7%
Using information	86	53.1%

Table 8 showing skills necessary to search, access, evaluate and use information online

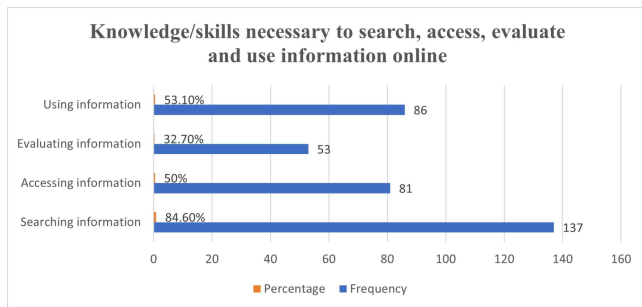


Figure 7 showing skills necessary to search, access, evaluate and use information online

09. Areas demand for an Information literacy programme (Selected more than one option):

Table 9 and Figure 8 show the type of options suggested by the respondents regarding the areas where an information literacy programme is needed, 111 (68.51%) respondents need training in using an OPAC, 107 (66.04%) respondents need training in using online information sources, 96 (59.25%) respondents need training in using digital libraries and 71 (43.82%) respondents need training in formulating various search strategies. 17 (10.49%) of the respondents require instruction in finding, evaluating, and utilising relevant print information sources.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Use of Print resources	17	10.49%
Use of Online Information resources	107	66.04%

OPAC	111	68.51%
Digital library	96	59.25%
Search strategies	71	43.82%
Other	70	43.20%

Table 9 showing areas demand for an Information literacy programme

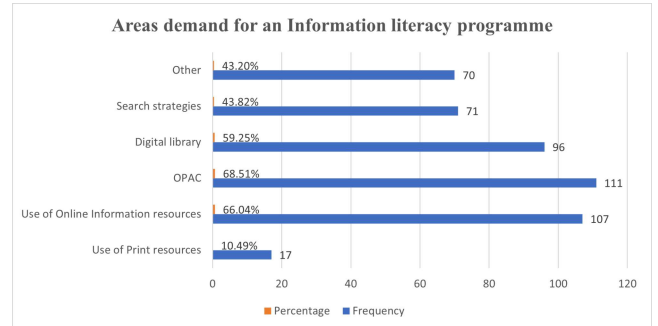


Figure 8 showing areas demand for an Information literacy programme

CONCLUSION

The prerequisite for the knowledge society is information literacy. Information literacy skills serve as the foundation of academic institutions in the digital age, which are making significant contributions to the research being done to make this world Information literate. We all know that distance learning is one of the best options offered to learners who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to devote their time to take regular courses. The results of the data analysis show that females registered in distance learning programmes are at a greater percentage than males do. It was determined that very few learners regularly visit the university's library and most of them rarely make use of libraries or their resources. The study also revealed that the majority of respondents are aware of the terms "digital literacy" and "library e-services," whereas some respondents are not. Maximum distance

Learners favour both print and electronic information formats, but they are not familiar with the use of library's OPAC or other electronic resources and services. Further, the majority of them lacked the skills necessary to critically evaluate the information they accessed online and were unaware of the various search techniques that are available for effective information retrieval. Lastly, the study revealed several options recommended by the respondents regarding the subject areas in which an information literacy programme is required and stated that they needed

Instruction in using an OPAC, online databases, digital libraries, and formulating different search techniques.

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are given based on primary data to improve the information literacy skills among the distance learners of University of Jammu and other parts of the world:

- There is a need to spread information literacy skills more widely among distance learners because many of them are unaware of the advantages it can provide.
- To foster the skills necessary for utilising library digital resources and services, proper workshops, courses, and training programmes should be organised for distance learners.
- It is necessary to provide the appropriate funding to support administrators in imparting IL skills among distance learners through a number of initiatives.
- Better rules and policy-making are required in order to provide services to all student communities who are enrolled in distance or online learning especially from remote areas.
- More research and studies need to be conducted in this rapidly expanding field to gain a better understanding of how information literacy competencies can be taught to students using a blended approach, using both online and offline learning platforms.

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