

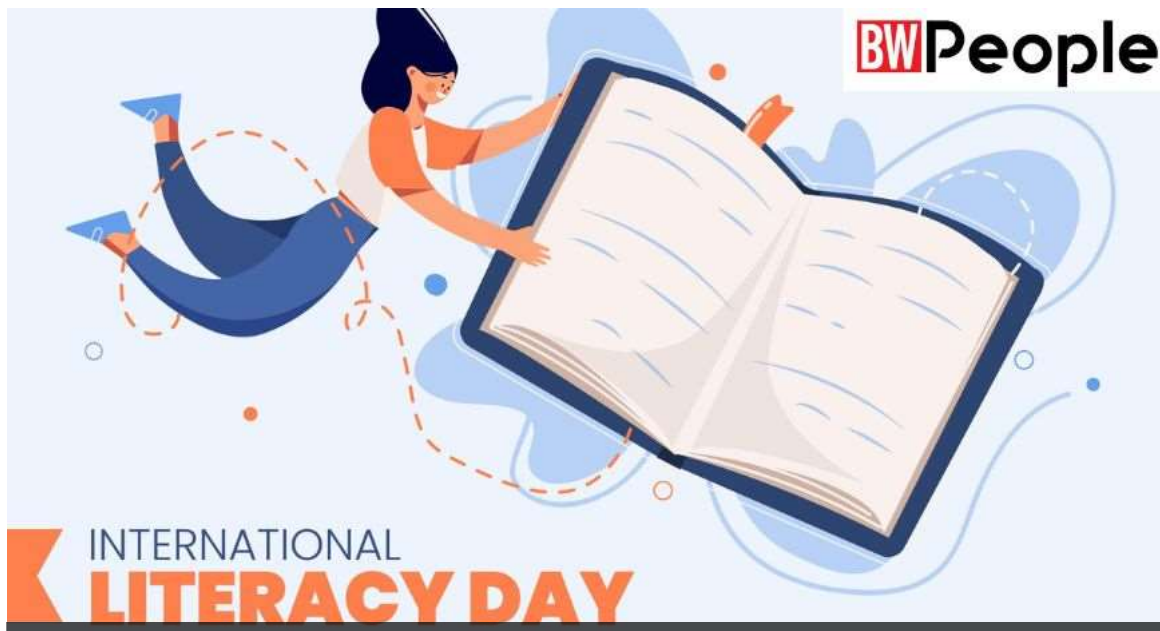
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International Literacy Day: Bridging The Digital Literacy Gap In India

The celebration of International Literacy Day serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent need to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that the benefits of the digital age are accessible to all. In this era, possessing digital literacy is imperative to actively engage in the digital age



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08 September, 2023 by Savi Khanna

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Since 1967, International Literacy Day's primary purpose is to emphasise the essential nature of literacy as both a fundamental human right and a matter of dignity. This day provides an opportunity for promoting the cause of literacy, with the ultimate goal of creating a society that is not only more literate but also sustainable.

According to a report by Ideas for India, significant disparities exist between urban and rural areas in terms of digital literacy rates. Urban areas exhibit a notably higher digital literacy rate, standing at 61 per cent, in contrast to a mere 25 per cent in rural areas. This glaring disparity underscores the urgent need to bridge the digital divide ensuring equal access to digital opportunities across all regions of our diverse country.

Girija Kolagada, VP- Engineering, Progress said, "India's digital transformation presents a massive economic opportunity, poised to reach an impressive \$1 trillion digital economy by 2025. To seize this potential, businesses should strategically leverage existing technology infrastructure and tap into India's diverse talent pool by adopting cutting-edge technologies, making substantial investments in digital infrastructure, emphasis on diversity and inclusion and embracing remote and gig workers to bridge the digital divide."

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The statistics provide a compelling illustration of the significance of digital literacy in India. In an era where the world is becoming progressively interconnected through the internet, possessing digital literacy is imperative for individuals to access information, communicate efficiently and actively engage in the digital age.

Rency Matthew, Global People Leader APAC, Sabre commented, "A recent study by PwC revealed that 55% of businesses believe they lack digital skills among their employees, hampering their competitiveness. To fill India's digital literacy gap, we need a multifaceted approach, including revamped curriculum, accessible digital resources, and community outreach. In this era of digital revolution, investing in upskilling, embracing automation, nurturing talent and fostering digital literacy is the compass to a prosperous future."

However, despite significant progress in global literacy rates, persistent challenges persist. As of 2020, an astonishing 763 million young people and adults worldwide still lack the fundamental skills of literacy. Recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts, have only served to compound these challenges, making the existing difficulties even more pronounced.

"The gap between the required skills can be reduced when we tap into young talent. The learning and development programmes should be designed and curated based on the business demand and upskilling needs within the teams. It gives employees within the organisation ample scope to learn and grow," **shared Yadhu Kishore Nandikolla, HR Head, MassMutual India.**

As outlined in the 'The Future of Jobs 2023' report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), a significant transformation is on the horizon for the job market. By 2025, the report predicts the obsolescence of 85 million jobs, counterbalanced by the creation of 97 million new jobs. These shifts are primarily attributed to the rapid advancements in fields like artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies.

Arundhati Ashoka, Global HR Head, CriticalRiver Inc. highlights, "Automation particularly with the advent of robotics, RPA and artificial intelligence have made machines more capable, versatile, and cost-effective. Automating repetitive tasks can significantly reduce operating costs, improve efficiency and reduce human errors. Loss of job opportunities due to the usage of machines needs to be addressed by reskilling the workers and transitioning them into new roles and human-machine collaboration."

Despite initiatives aimed at promoting digital literacy, India finds itself facing a substantial gap compared to countries with highly skilled workforces. To ensure competitiveness and relevance in the global marketplace, it is imperative for the Indian government, businesses, and educational institutions to prioritise investments in digital upskilling initiatives.

"To confront the challenges and boost global competitiveness, India urgently requires significant investments from government, businesses and educational institutions. Strategic reforms should focus on an accurate restructuring of skill development with a strong emphasis on IT skills. Outreach programmes targeting smaller towns and initiatives to enhance women's participation in the workforce through hybrid work norms are essential components. Revitalizing vocational education and effectively utilizing CSR funding from industries contribute to this holistic strategy. However, successful implementation depends on collaboration between governments, employers, training providers and the workforce to meet the rising demand for digital learning," **added Kolagada.**

Furthermore, the influence of machines in the division of labor is set to expand, particularly for repetitive and routine tasks. The jobs of the future will increasingly rely on data-driven and machine-powered processes, shaping a new paradigm for the workforce.

"Machines are transforming the workforce landscape. Currently, 60% of routine and repetitive tasks are automated. To stay relevant, we must embrace this shift and focus on nurturing unique human skills like creativity and empathy. The paradox of unemployable engineering and IT graduates persists, with 45% facing this issue," **shared Matthew.**

According to a joint report by Nasscom, Draup, and Salesforce, there is a significant 51 per cent disparity between the demand and supply of talent in the fields of AI & ML and big data analytics (BDA), even considering the current talent pool of 4,20,000 individuals. This demand-supply gap is notably more severe for roles such as ML engineers, data scientists, DevOps engineers and data architects, where the gap ranges from 60 to 73 per cent.

"The rising need for data analysts, data scientists, and data entry clerks in India's AI and machine learning sectors is driven by the technology disruption in industry. Businesses and organizations increasingly adopt data-driven decision-making to improve their customer reach, which is driving the demand for data professionals and scientists who can extract insights from data," **Ashoka highlights.**

This problem is further compounded by the quality of available talent. A significant number of engineering graduates are unemployable due to their current skill levels. This highlights the possibility of either insufficient training content or poor training quality, resulting in reduced employability.

Nandikolla added, "Organisations, communities and educational institutions, jointly developing and rolling out curriculum, giving the young graduates the opportunity to solve real-life problems, raises the possibilities to educate a larger section of the population even before they step into the job market. This would make the students job ready and make them flexible to adapt new technologies."

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India stands at the crossroads of a digital transformation that promises remarkable economic growth, but it also presents significant challenges. The celebration of International Literacy Day serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent need to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that the benefits of the digital age are accessible to all. Disparities in digital literacy rates between urban and rural areas underscore the importance of inclusive strategies.

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