



Research Paper

## Assessing the Digital Literacy and E-readiness of Students in South Delhi's Low-cost Private Schools

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**ABSTRACT:** This primary study aims to explore digital literacy and e-readiness among secondary-stage students in low-cost private schools (LCPS), with a focus on examining the integration of ICT in education through the levels of digital literacy and e-readiness in applying digital technology for education. The article employs a descriptive research design, utilizing a survey questionnaire to gauge students' proficiency with digital learning tools and their readiness for the digital educational ecosystem. Findings indicate a need for improved digital literacy and e-readiness among LCPS students to enhance educational outcomes.

**KEYWORDS:** E-learning, e-readiness, low cost, private school, digital literacy

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### I. INTRODUCTION

#### Information And Communication (ICT) In Education

In the past two decades, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has witnessed a wide range of expansion (Aksentijević, Ježić, & Zaninović, 2021). Its application has been cross-sectoral which ranges from healthcare, finance, agriculture, government, and education. ICT is defined as a wide range of technological resources and tools which includes sharing, transmitting, storing, and exchanging information. The internet, computers, radio, television, mobile devices, and satellites are some examples of these technological tools and resources (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2009).

The integration of ICT in education is perceived to have a positive impact in the future (Aksentijević, Ježić, & Zaninović, 2021), as the educational institutions and its stakeholders have appreciated the virtual mode of learning. The factors leading to the emergence of online learning (e-learning) are credited to initiatives such as Digital India Mission, COVID-19 pandemic, National Education Policy (2020), to name a few. (Khan, Vivek, Nabi, Khojah, & Tahir, 2020).

#### Low-Cost Private School

As per the UDISE+ report for 2021-2022, the total number of private schools in India stands at 3,40,753 out of which 2,610 are in Delhi (Kaishyap, 2023), of those, 80% are the Low-cost Private Schools (Kumar, 2023). In its 2019 study, Endow stated that a Low-cost Private School also referred to as Low-fee Private School or Affordable Private School, caters to the needs of low-income households, which constitute the majority of Indian population (Endow, 2019). The growth of such schools is credited, firstly, to the government's failure to meet the demand and supply, and secondly, the poor quality of education in public schools (McLoughlin, 2013).

#### Digital Literacy

In an attempt to define digital literacy, Martin & Grudziecki mentioned that the term 'Digital literacy' was popularized by Paul Gilster, who, in his book named Digital Literacy defined it as: "The ability to

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understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers” (Martin & Grudziecki, 2015).

Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India defines digital literacy as ‘the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within life situations” (NIELIT, 2023).

A report by the Digital Empowerment Foundation highlights that 30% of the Indian population lacks basic literacy whereas 90% digital literacy (Hassana & Mirza, 2021). Several literatures suggest that digital literacy helps learners navigate the information they need to learn, enhancing critical thinking and communication skills. Digital literacy empowers students to make use of technological tools in the learning process (Ervianti, Sampelolo, & Pratama, 2023). Students lacking digital literacy can make it difficult to explore e-content. To attain educational objectives, digital literacy improves education by enabling them to use digital tools and e-resources (Hassana & Mirza, 2021). Precisely, digital literacy is a crucial skill set for individuals to thrive in today's interconnected and technology-driven society. The 78th round of the government's National Sample Survey (age group 15-29) showed that around 60% of Indians can't copy or move a computer file or folder. Also, it highlights that only 39.4% can use copy-and-paste tools to duplicate or move information whereas only 26.7% can send e-mails with attached files (e.g., documents, pictures, and videos) (Asrar, 2023).

**E-Readiness**

E-readiness and digital literacy are two related terms but contain different meanings. Let’s look into its definition, scope, and focus in the below-mentioned table.

**Table 1. Comparison of Digital Literacy and E-Readiness**

CHARACTERISTICS	DIGITAL LITERACY	E-READINESS
Definition	The ability to use digital tools and technologies to access, create, manage, and communicate information.	The state of being prepared to use digital technologies for specific purposes.
Scope	Broad	Specific
Focus	Skills and knowledge	Motivation, attitudes, and access

To put it in context, a student digitally literate can operate a computer or digital device and the internet but they may not be e-ready for online learning if they do not have access to a reliable internet connection or are not comfortable using a digital learning tool.

In a general context, readiness means the state of being physically and mentally prepared to do something. Specifically, e-readiness is the extent of preparedness of an individual to participate in a networked society. It also affects the success of academic programs that use ICT (Dudunga, Hasanaha, Salman, Priyanto, & Ramdhan, 2022).

Network Readiness Index 2022, a report by Portulans Institute assesses the e-readiness based on their performances in four different pillars: Technology, People, Governance, and Impact ranked India 61<sup>st</sup> out of 131 (Dutta & Lanvin, 2022).

Based on these four pillars, below is a contrasting comparison between India’s rank and the world economies (out of 131).

**Table 2. India's NRI sub-indices score in contrast to world leaders (Dutta & Lanvin, 2022)**

PILLAR	SUB-INDEX	INDIA'S SCORE	INDIA'S RANK	WORLD LEADER'S SCORE	WORLD LEADER'S RANK
Technology	Access	46.08	105th	United States (88.18)	1 <sup>st</sup>
Technology	Content	42.23	105th	United States (87.21)	1 <sup>st</sup>
Technology	Future Technologies	39.95	105th	United States (88.18)	1 <sup>st</sup>
People	Individuals	55.28	46th	Singapore (72.03)	1 <sup>st</sup>
People	Governments	54.01	46th	Singapore (72.03)	1 <sup>st</sup>
People	Businesses	48.36	46th	Singapore (72.03)	1 <sup>st</sup>
Governance	Regulatory Environment	58.12	83rd	Singapore (84.84)	1 <sup>st</sup>

Governance	Business Environment	56.11	83rd	Singapore (84.84)	1st
Impact	Economic Impact	55.53	23rd	Singapore (72.91)	1st
Impact	Social Impact	46.97	23rd	Singapore (72.91)	1st

*Dutta, S., & Lanvin, B. (2022). The Network Readiness Index 2022. Washington DC: Portulans Institute*

## II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Based on literatures reviewed, it is found that limited studies have been undertaken to assess the issues and challenges faced by students studying in Low-cost Private Schools (LCPS). Almost every literature on private schools talks about schools in general, with little to no reference to LCPS. Recognizing this gap in the literature, this study aims to delve into the status of LCPS with a focus on the level of digital literacy and e-readiness among secondary stage students (9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> class).

Recently, COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of e-learning tools and platforms, where it becomes a necessity for students (irrespective of socio-economic background) to immerse themselves in a digitally-driven educational ecosystem. Henceforth, it becomes imperative to probe into the status of digital literacy and e-readiness of students enrolled in LCPS. It is also pertinent to explore the same as the 21<sup>st</sup> century's National Education Policy, 2020 ascertains to incorporate ICT in the realm of education.

## III. OBJECTIVES

- o To evaluate students' digital literacy in Low-Cost Private Schools (LCPS) in South Delhi.
- o To assess students' e-readiness studying in Low-Cost Private Schools (LCPS) of South Delhi.
- o To provide recommendations and suggestions making education inclusive and equitable.

## IV. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

### Low-Cost Private Schools (LCPS)

Low-Cost Private School (LCPS) is synonymously known as Low-fee Private Schools, Affordable Private Schools, or Budget Private Schools typically charging a monthly fee ranging from ₹ 400 to ₹ 3,500 (Narang & Sudhakar, 2022).

### Digital Literacy

In this study, digital literacy refers to the ability or skillfulness of students to access, manage, understand, and integrate ICT for educational purposes.

### E-Readiness

E-readiness (electronic readiness) in this study, is referred to as a student's digital readiness or ICT readiness. It is a state of preparedness or willingness of students to actively participate in the digital or ICT realm. It encompasses a range of factors that indicate an individual's or an organization's ability to engage effectively with electronic systems and digital technologies.

## V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design to provide an understanding of the current state of digital literacy and e-readiness among Low-cost Private Schools (LCPS) at the secondary-stage<sup>3</sup> in South Delhi, India. A set of inclusion criteria was taken into consideration while including samples for this study; firstly, the population must reside in South Delhi, India; secondly, the student must be enrolled in secondary level (i.e., 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>) in a Low-cost Private School; thirdly, the student's monthly fee must be between ₹ 400 – ₹ 3,500 (Narang & Sudhakar, 2022). A purposive sampling method was employed to draw a subset of participants from the population. A total of 18 respondents participated in this study, responding to a questionnaire having a set of 16 open-ended and multiple-choice questions designed to assess their level of digital literacy and e-readiness. The required secondary data were gathered from various sources such as Google Scholar, journal articles, and other published sources. The results of this study were analysed using SPSS 27, using descriptive statistics.

### Limitations of the Study

This study does not include the views or opinions of the teachers, as responses couldn't be elicited from them. Additionally, it was challenging to approach schools to draw samples because the low-cost private school's administration was apprehensive about participating in such studies.

<sup>3</sup> Corresponding to National Education Policy, 2020 pedagogical structure.

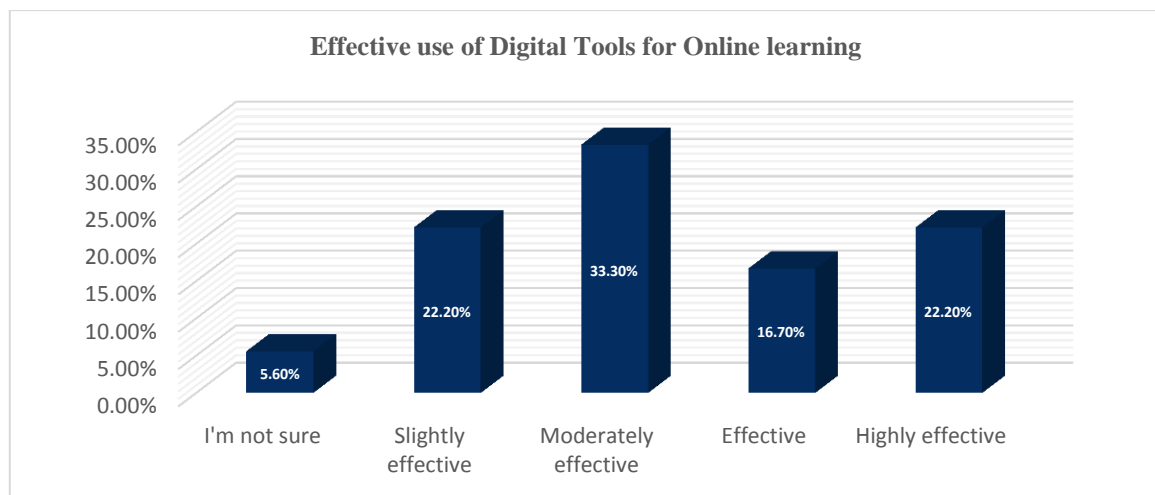
## VI. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### DIGITAL LITERACY AMONG LCPS STUDENTS

Karagul, Seker, and Aykut reported in their study that one of the basic necessities for online learning is digital literacy. In the context of online learning, it is unlikely for one with a lack of digital literacy to make the most out of web-based learning (Karagul, Seker, & Aykut, 2021). Students of LCPS in South Delhi took self-assessment-based questions to rate themselves on items such as proficiency in using software like Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, using basic keyboard shortcuts (e.g., Ctrl+C, Ctrl+V), identifying common file formats (e.g., PDF, DOC, JPG, MP3) and confidence in troubleshooting elementary technical issues during online learning.

#### Effective Use of Digital Tools for Online Learning

It is evident from the figure 1, which highlights that a majority of 33.30% (n=6) students feels that they can moderately utilize video conferencing, messaging apps, and shared documents for online learning. A number of students (38.9%, n=7) responded that they comfortably use digital tools or platform for online learning whereas 22.20 % (n=4) mentioned that they are slightly effective and 5.60% were unsure about the use of digital tools and platform for online learning.

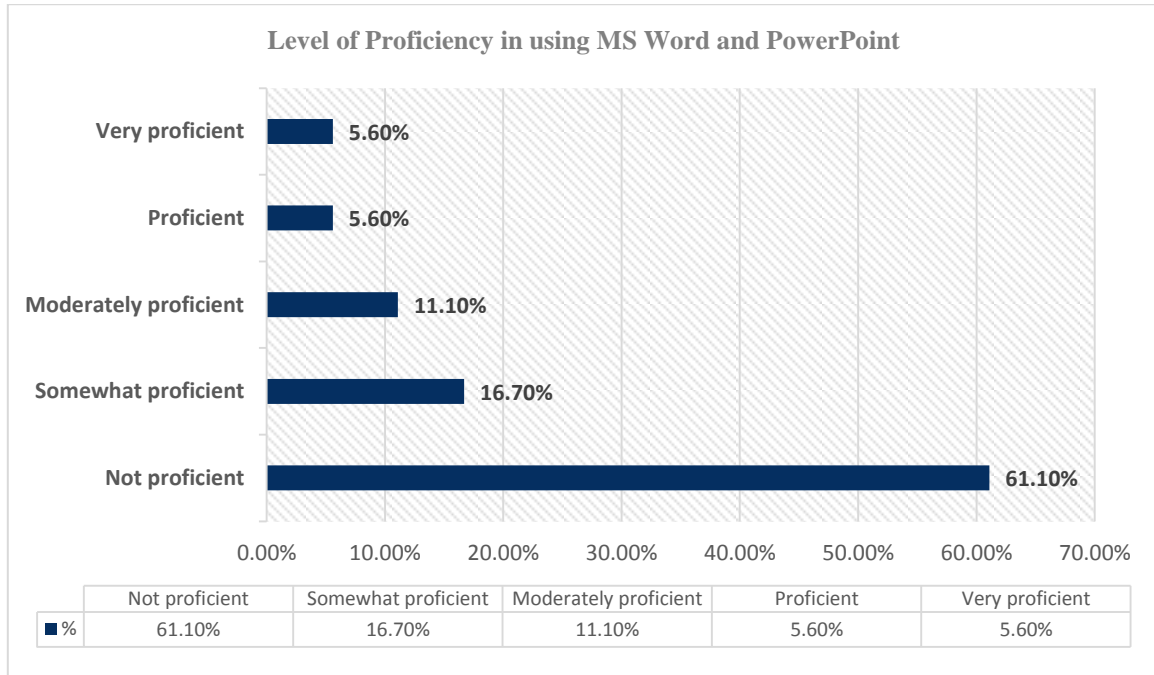


**Figure 1.** Effective use of Digital Tools for Online Learning.

Conclusively, the figure represents that 61.1% (i.e., Moderately effective 33.30%, Slightly effective 22.20% and I'm not sure 5.60%) of the respondents were either moderately effective or slightly effective in using digital tools for online learning.

#### Level of Proficiency in using Microsoft Word and PowerPoint

Students were asked to rate themselves on a proficiency Likert scale where 1 represented “Not proficient” and 5 “Very proficient”. The students’ proficiency level in using Microsoft Word and PowerPoint is shown below in figure 2. Referring to the figures, a few numbers of students find themselves proficient in using MS Word and PowerPoint i.e., 11.20%, (“Proficient” and “Very proficient”). A majority of students falls into the category of “Not proficient” (61.10%, n=11).



**Figure 2.** Level of Proficiency in using Microsoft Word and PowerPoint

However, 27.80% (“Moderately proficient” 11.10% and “Somewhat proficient” 16.10%) of students responded that they are proficient only to some extent. A large portion of respondents agreed to be incompetent in using MS Word and PowerPoint for educational purposes.

**Familiarity with Basic Digital Files and Computer Shortcut Keys**

Students of LCPS were asked to identify computer shortcut keys (e.g., Ctrl+C, Ctrl+V) to perform common tasks and to identify digital file formats (e.g., PDF, DOC, JPG, MP3) to assess their digital literacy. From the Table 3, it shows that 72.20% (n=13) of respondents were able to identify one or the other mentioned file formats whereas 22.20% were unsure and 5.60% were unable to identify the same. However, when it comes to performing simple tasks using keyboard shortcut keys, only 16.70% (n=3) agreed to have known about it while 55.60% (n=10) were unfamiliar with such shortcut keys.

**Table 3. Familiarity with Basic Digital File Types and Computer Key Shortcuts**

S. No.	Items	Yes		No		I'm not sure	
		N (N = 18)	N %	N (N = 18)	N %	N (N = 18)	N %
1	Familiarity with key shortcuts	3	16.70%	10	55.60%	5	27.80%
2	Identify file types	13	72.20%	1	5.60%	4	22.20%

**Source:** The authors.

Therefore, it can be understood that the students are aware of the different file types but lack familiarity with keyboard shortcut keys.

**Level of Familiarity with Learning Tools**

To gauge the level of e-readiness among students’, 3 items were given viz. their familiarity with learning tools such as Google Meet, Microsoft Team, Zoom, Learning Management System (Google Classroom), and instant messaging like WhatsApp and Telegram.

**Table 4. Level of Familiarity with Learning Tools**

S. No.	Items	Not familiar at all		A Little familiar		Fairly familiar		Quite familiar		Highly familiar	
		N (N = 18)	N %	N (N = 18)	N %	N (N = 18)	N %	N (N = 18)	N %	N (N = 18)	N %
1	Familiarity with Google Meet Microsoft Team & Zoom	0	0.0 %	6	33.3 %	8	44.4 %	4	22.2 %	0	0.0 %

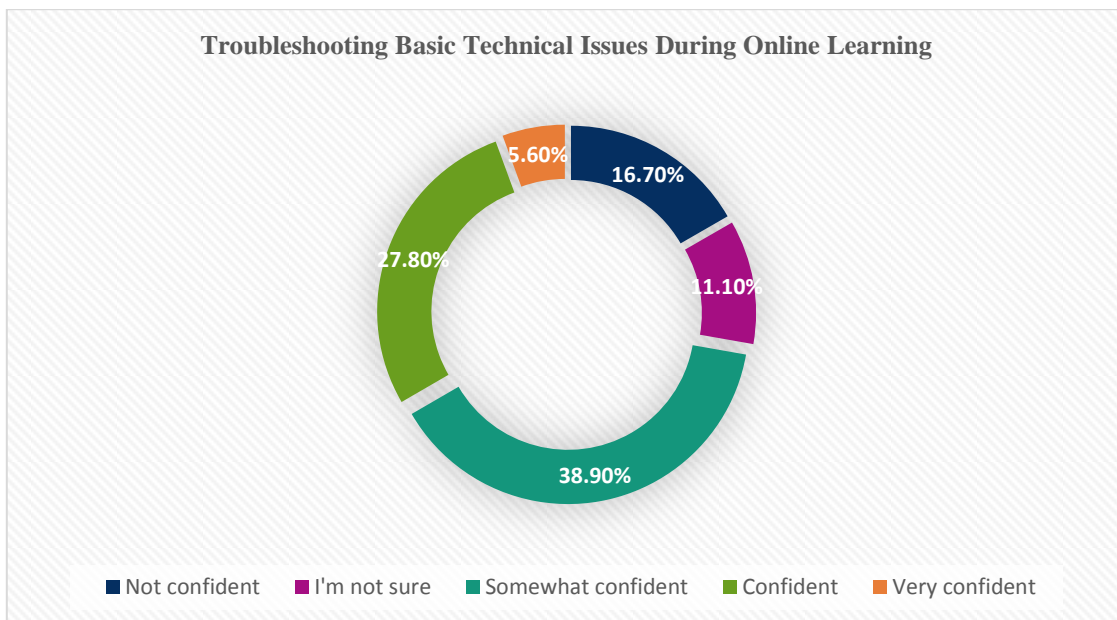
2	Familiarity with LMS	11	61.1%	4	22.2%	3	16.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
3	Familiarity with Instant Messaging (WhatsApp or Telegram)	0	0.0%	1	5.6%	2	11.1%	5	27.8%	10	55.6%

Source: The authors.

Table 4 underlines that 44.4% of students (n=8) reported being ‘Fairly familiar’, while 22.2% (n=4) indicated being ‘Quite familiar’ with item 1. In contrast, 33.3% (n=6) expressed having only a little familiarity with the same. With respect to item 2, 61.1% of students (n=11) are unfamiliar with LMS (Google Classroom) while the rest of them are a little to fairly familiar with it. For item 3, over half of the respondents (55.6%, n=10) indicated a high level of familiarity with instant messaging tools. This is not surprising given these tools are used on a daily basis.

**Level of Confidence in Troubleshooting Basic Technical Issues during Online Learning**

Agustina, Matra, and Karimah mentions that students faced several technical issues such as unstable internet connectivity, bad signal, unsupported devices, and limited data packages during online learning (Agustina, Matra, & Karimah, 2020). Students of LCPS expressed that they feel somewhat confident (38.90%, n=7) in troubleshooting technical issues like internet disruption or glitches in devices. Referring to Figure 3, it has been found that 16.70% of respondents were “Not confident” while 11.70% were “Not sure” about troubleshooting technical issues while online learning.



**Figure 3.** Level of confidence in troubleshooting basic technical issues during online learning.

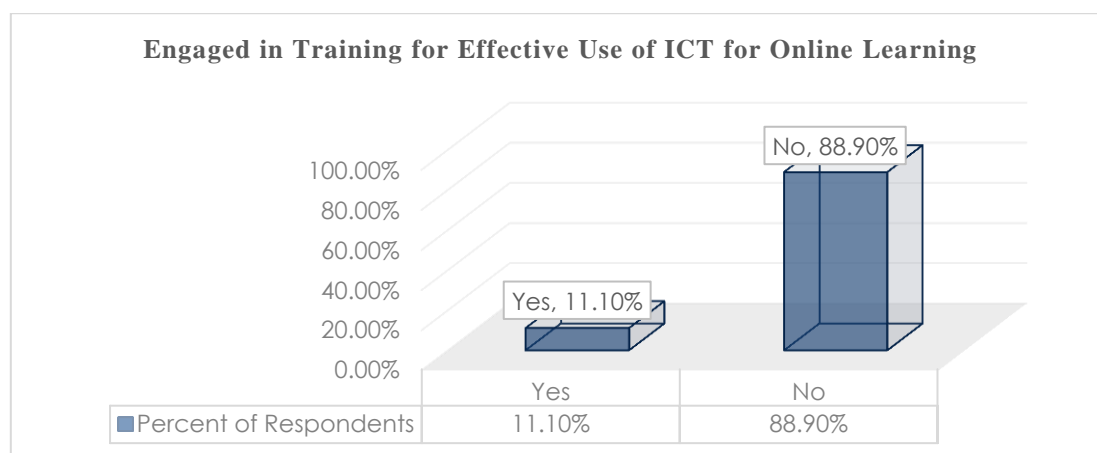
It shows that 27.80% and 5.60% of students feels confident and very confident respectively which makes 33.40% (n=6) combined. The figure highlights that the students of LCPS lacks confidence in troubleshooting technical issues while learning from digital devices and e-resources.

**E-READINESS AMONG LCPS STUDENTS**

Jamaluddin, Jufri, and Ramdani in their study state that e-readiness is defined as the readiness of a person to understand and bring to its application of ICT (Jamaluddin, Jufri, & Ramdani, 2021). It is vital for a student to be e-ready to participate in online learning. This section focuses on assessing the e-readiness of LCPS students by looking into their access to, attitude towards, and frequency of using digital technologies for educational purposes.

**Engaged in Training for Effective Utilization of ICT to Enhance Online Learning**

According to Ja'ashan, technical training is the very first step required for students to learn in this digital learning space. He also stresses that the success of e-learning essentially rests upon adequate skills training to use e-learning tools (Ja'ashan, 2020).



**Figure 4.** Engaged in Training for Effective Utilization of ICT for Enhanced Online learning.

The Figure 4 indicates that a majority of 88.90% (n=16) of respondents did not receive any technical training in the last year, either formal (institutional) or informal (from family and friends). Some students expressed that they learned to use digital tools and platforms on their own while in the process of attending virtual classes during COVID-19. The untrained students are inadequate in navigating through digital tools and resources making them unable to make the best use of ICT. A fraction of respondents (11.10%) agreed to have attended technical training to use ICT for educational purposes.

#### Access to Digital Devices at Home

The respondents indicated their accessibility to digital devices on parameters i.e., “Own”, “Shared”, and “No Access/Unavailable”. From Table 5, it is evident that a majority of students (61.1%) owns a mobile device whereas 38.9% mentioned they share it with their family members. Some respondents underscored that they found it difficult when they and their siblings both needed the mobile device at the same time but one had to compromise due to limited access.

Item 2 draws attention towards 61.1% (n=11) of the respondents not having access to a computer or laptop whereas 38.9% (n=7) have shared access to the same. Only a minority of 11.1% agreed to have shared access to item 3 on the contrary 88.9% said they do not have access to printer/ scanner.

**Table 5. Access to Digital Devices at Home**

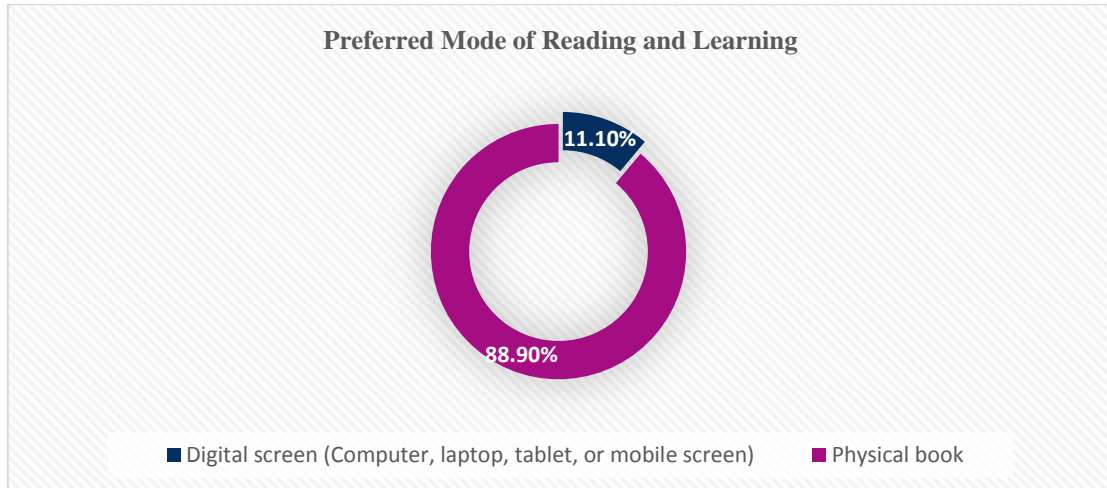
S. No	Items	No Access/Unavailable		Shared		Own	
		N (N = 18)	N %	N (N = 18)	N %	N (N = 18)	N %
1	Mobile Tablet access	0	0.0%	7	38.9%	11	61.1%
2	Computer Laptop access	11	61.1%	7	38.9%	0	0.0%
3	Printer Scanner access	16	88.9%	2	11.1%	0	0.0%
4	E-Reader access	18	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
5	Broadband internet access	5	27.8%	12	66.7%	1	5.6%

**Source:** The authors.

None of the students have access to an e-reader device whereas item 5 underscores that a majority of 66.7% of respondents have access to a shared connection of broadband internet in contrast 5.6% own a personal connection and 27.8% do not have access to it. The table suggests that students do have fair access to mobile/table and broadband internet connection; however, they lack accessibility to resources such as computers, e-readers, and printers, which are supposed to be frequently required by students in contemporary period.

#### Preferred Mode of Reading and Learning

Students were asked to indicate their preference for reading and learning among physical books or a digital screen. They opted for the physical book (88.90%) over the digital screen (11.10%).

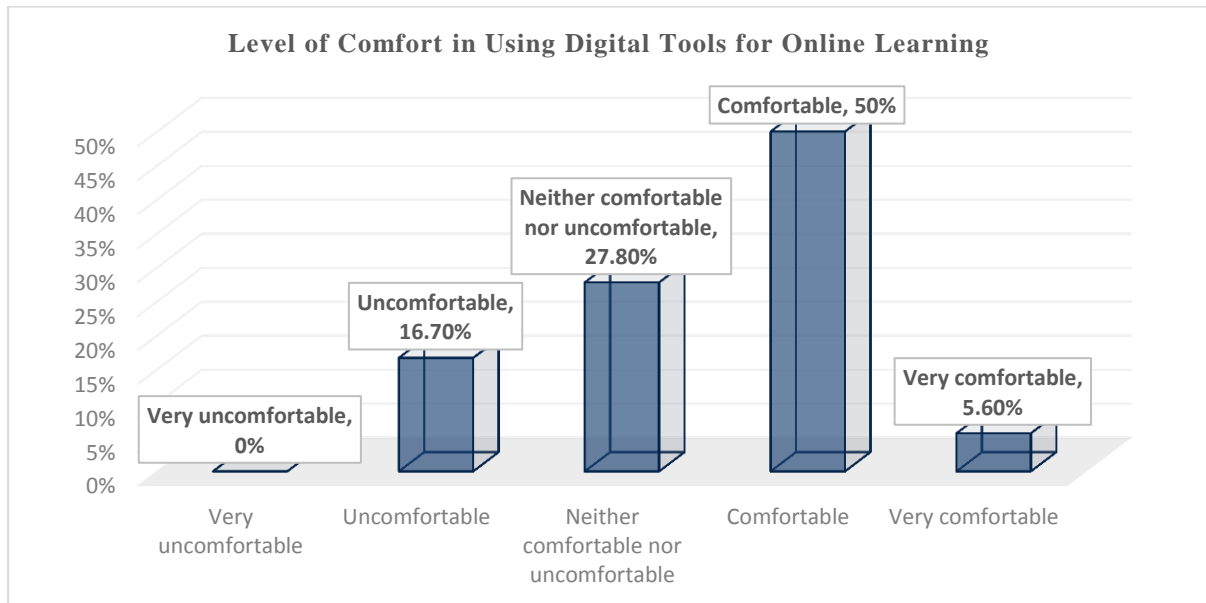


**Figure 5.** Students' Preferred Mode of Reading.

It indicates the students' attitude towards the adoption of ICT in education. They prefer the conventional method of reading and learning from book over newly emerging trend of e-learning. This substantiates to students being unfavorable towards the incorporation of ICT in education and lacks the attitudinal e-readiness.

**Level of Comfort in Using Digital Tools for Online Learning**

Hermawan in a study highlighted that 66.6% of the students expressed feeling comfortable using e-learning, as they can use digital tools or platforms anywhere anytime (Hermawan, 2021). Similarly, we found that more than half of the students (55.60%, n=10) responded to be comfortable using digital tools for learning purposes shows their e-readiness.



**Figure 6.** Level of Comfort in Using Digital Tools for Online Learning.

A fraction of students (27.80%, n=5) responded to be neutral as they neither feel comfortable nor uncomfortable in using digital tools for online learning where as 16.70% of them responded they feel uncomfortable.

**VII. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The study revealed that Low-cost Private Schools (LCPS) cater to 70%-85% of student enrolment in India. However, the definition of the same differs based on the fee structure and the demographics they serve. The data suggests that 16.3% of students enrolled are in the ₹ 0-200 monthly fee tier, 29.2% are paying between ₹ 201-500, whereas 25.3% are in the ₹ 501-1000 slab. Additionally, 13.5% are enrolled in the ₹ 1001-1500 category, while only 6.3% of the students are paying between ₹ 1501-2000. Notably, a total of 9.4% of enrolled students pay more than ₹ 2000 per month (Central Square Foundation, 2020; Centre for Civil Society, 2021). A report mentioned that students with good digital literacy are inclined to have more participation in online



learning, resulting in a strong learning outcome (Ervianti, Sampelolo, & Pratama, 2023). The study uncovers that a majority of students in LCPS belonging to low-income households exhibit lower digital literacy, indicated by their lesser confidence in effectively utilizing digital tools for online learning (33.30% “Moderately effective”, 22.20% “Slightly effective” and 5.60% “Unsure”). Familiarity with LMS (Google Classroom) amounts to 61.1% “Not familiar at all” and 22.2% “A little familiar”. Moreover, 77.8% of respondents stated that they are either “Not proficient” or “Moderately proficient” in the basics of MS Word and PowerPoint. More than half of the students (55.60%) reported not knowing the functions of basic keyboard shortcut keys (e.g., Ctrl+C, Ctrl+V); additionally, 27.80% were unsure of the same. This implies that students may struggle with e-content that are non-compatible with smartphones and are intended to be accessed or navigated using computers. The students demonstrated inadequacy in troubleshooting simple technical issues while learning through digital tools. However, it is worth highlighting that they recognize different file formats (e.g., PDF, DOC, JPG, MP3) and admitted familiarity with instant messaging applications as learning tools (55.6% “Highly familiar”, 27.8% “Quite familiar”). Students indicated that their familiarity with file formats and instant messaging tools developed while attending online classes during the COVID-19 lockdown. Hence, it indicates the students in LCPS require upskilling in digital literacy to fully leverage the potential of digital learning tools. In order to better equip students in today’s digitally connected world, digital literacy becomes a ‘must-have’ skill for navigating through e-resources.

Amalia, Anggoro, & Eka stated that students were unprepared and were not e-ready for online learning, making it challenging for them to adapt to such a mode of learning; also, the level of e-readiness found to be suboptimal among the surveyed students (Amalia, Anggoro, & Eka, 2021; Ezabadi, Khalilirad, Farzaneh, & Marandi, 2021). Among the students in LCPS, it is found that they have access to mobile devices (Own = 61.1%, Shared = 38.9%) and broadband internet connection (Shared = 66.7%, No access = 27.8%) at home. However, they did not have access to a computer (61.1%). In a similar study, Basar, Mansor, Jamaludin, & Alias indicates that a fraction of students (6.1%, n=6) did not have access to internet connectivity at home. On the contrary, only a small number of students (29.3%) had access to computers whilst most of the students had their own mobile devices (77.8%, n=77) likely to use them for online learning (Basar, Mansor, Jamaludin, & Alias, 2021). In contrast, the respondents expressed that only a few students have undergone training to use ICT for educational purposes. With majority (88.90%) reported not having received any training in utilizing ICT for education, resulting in lower digital literacy among students. Students prefer to read and learn through the conventional method, i.e., physical books, over a digital screen, which provides a plethora of e-content. This reference implies that a behavioral change is needed towards the integration of ICT in education.

Henceforth, it is suggested that initiatives such as the National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM), Digital India Mission, and National Education Policy, 2020 emphasize on digital empowerment of students and people in general at an early stage equipping them with the necessary skills to utilize the contents available online, enhancing their e-readiness and digital literacy. Ezabadi, Khalilirad, Farzaneh, & Marandi suggest in their study that planners and policymakers need to pay immense attention to improve digital literacy and e-readiness (Ezabadi, Khalilirad, Farzaneh, & Marandi, 2021).

Notably, in-service teacher trainings are provided to school teachers to better equip them with the latest pedagogical curriculum and technologies. However, it is found to be lacking for students, as there is little to no training provided to students to leverage ICT for educational purposes. The study found that students did not even receive informal training (from family and friends) to exploit digital tools for learning.

Parental involvement is suggested to facilitate the students’ learning process through digital learning tools and platforms; however, it is also recommended to keep regulation on screen time as a longer duration of access to digital screen may cause stress and anxiety (Aksentijević, Ježić, & Zaninović, 2021).

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