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Research Article

Enhancing Digital Literacy as an Imperative Necessity for Academic Excellence and Lifelong Learning

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Abstract: The paper aims to present the necessity of enhancing digital literacy for academic excellence, lifelong learning and growth among college students in Nagaland. It is conducted to discover their awareness of digital literacy, accessibility to digital tools, availability of facilities, and usage of e-resources and digital platforms for academic purposes among students in the state's capital Kohima and students in Phek district with less accessibility to advanced facilities. It is found that there is no stark difference between them. However, there are a few variations in aspects regarding their preference for using e-resources and digital platforms, hands-on experience with digital tools, and computer skills. It is ascertained that students exposed to more facilities and opportunities stand a better chance of learning, growing and excelling in life. Students are increasingly demanding to install more digital tools in the classrooms and incorporate them in curricular activities. Thus, the students feel that enhancing digital literacy is an imperative necessity for academic excellence, lifelong learning and growth in all aspects of life.

Keywords: Digital Literacy; Academic Excellence; Lifelong Learning; Growth; E-Resources; ICT Tools; Digital Platforms

1. Introduction

With the growth and development of technologies, there is an increasing need to promote digital literacy in the world. There is a pressing requirement for everyone to be literate in the use of digital tools and other digital platforms. Digital literacy can be referred to as the ability to use and navigate technology effectively, and to employ digital tools "to find, evaluate, create and communicate information" [1(para. 4)]. Developing digital skills is essential for students to adapt to the evolving digital landscape and ever-developing digital platforms, to empower them with the knowledge to find and assess information found online and develop the skill to 'solve problems in technology-rich environments' [2]. Technology education is pivotal for staying competitive in the digital age and enhancing opportunities which are "crucial in helping students become lifelong learners" [3 (para. 1)] and equip them with the necessary skills for employment in the job market.

Just as Massimo Ragnedda introduces the concept of "digital capital" in his work, Conceptualizing Digital Capital as a new form of capital that interacts with existing social, economic, cultural, and political capitals, this study delves into discovering the digital power of the students and to show how digital capital can reinforce or mitigate existing social inequalities [4]. He expanded the concept of capitalism beyond its traditional economic definition by introducing the idea of different forms of "capital" that influence social dynamics and power structures, which include:

a) Economic Capital: Material wealth and financial resources which are directly convertible into money.
b) Cultural Capital: Knowledge, skills, education, and cultural assets that can provide social advantages. This can exist in three forms: i) Embodied: Personal traits like manners or tastes shaped by upbringing, ii) Objectified: Physical objects like books or art that signify cultural knowledge, and iii) Institutionalised: Academic qualifications or credentials.
c) Social Capital: Networks and relationships that provide access to resources and opportunities [5-6].

Bourdieu argued that these forms of capital are interconnected and often serve to reinforce social hierarchies. For instance, cultural and social capital can be seen as "disguised" forms of economic capital, as they often stem from or lead to material wealth. He did not explicitly develop a "digital capital theory"; however, his theoretical framework has been extended by contemporary scholars to analyse the digital realm. This adaptation is often referred to as "digital sociology" or "digital capital", where Bourdieu's ideas are applied to understand the impact of digital technologies on social structures and inequalities.

Using Bourdieu's framework, digital capital can be seen as a new form of capital that interacts with his original categories:

a) Economic Capital: Access to digital tools and technologies often requires financial resources, linking it to economic capital.
b) Cultural Capital: Digital literacy and the ability to navigate online spaces effectively can be considered a modern extension of cultural capital.
c) Social Capital: Online networks and connections, such as those on social media platforms, contribute to one's social capital [5,7].

This concept is particularly relevant in discussions about the "digital divide", which highlights inequalities in access to and benefits from digital technologies. Scholars argue that digital capital plays a crucial role in reproducing or challenging social inequalities in the digital era. Researchers often examine the "digital divide", highlighting disparities in digital access and usage across different social groups. Bourdieu's emphasis on the interplay between resources and social positioning provides a valuable lens for understanding these issues in the digital age [7].

Another eminent person in the field is Jan A.G.M. van Dijk who explores the concept of the digital divide—the gap between those with access to digital technology and those without—and how it continues to widen in high-tech societies [8]. He defines the digital divide as the gap between individuals who have access to digital technologies, such as computers and the internet, and those who do not. His work emphasises that the digital divide is not just about physical access to technology but also includes disparities in digital skills, usage, and outcomes. He identifies three levels of the digital divide: (i) Access Divide: The first level focuses on physical access to digital technologies, such as owning devices and having internet connectivity. (ii) Skills Divide: The second level highlights differences in digital literacy and the ability to effectively use technology. (iii) Usage Divide: The third level examines how individuals use digital technologies and the benefits they derive from them, including social, economic, and cultural outcomes. He argues that digital inequality often reinforces existing social inequalities, as those with more resources such as education, income, and social connections are better positioned to overcome these divides [9]. His research also explores

solutions to mitigate the digital divide, emphasising the need for policies that address both social and digital inequalities simultaneously.

It must be noted that no scholarly work on the study of digital literacy in the two districts is available. However, a close understanding of the scenario can be seen through some notable works carried out in the Indian context. In the work, "Digital Literacy in India: Benefits and Challenges", Kaushal, Singh and Devi examine the impact of digital literacy initiatives like the Digital India campaign and the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan. Their work highlights the benefits of digital literacy, such as improved academic outcomes and access to global knowledge, while also addressing challenges like poor infrastructure and the digital divide [10]. They highlighted how the government is trying to boost digital literacy in India through various schemes so that the citizens can have better access to e-learning resources. Similarly, in "Digital Divide and Digital Literacy: A Study with Reference to India", Krupamani examines the disparities in digital access and literacy across different socio-economic groups in India. The work discusses the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in bridging the digital divide and emphasises the need for inclusive digital transformation, highlighting the initiatives taken by the government of India to bridge the gap and remove the digital divide [11].

Through the works of scholars like these, it can be seen that enhancing digital literacy is a necessity for learning and growth among people. They have discussed the need to build digital capital and learn the skills to operate in numerous digital platforms whether people live in urban or rural areas. The need to enhance digital literacy is believed to remain relevant now and in the future. The present study is also an attempt to present the current status of digital literacy in the state of Nagaland and to understand the challenges faced by college students, especially those who live in the rural parts of the state. In this paper, the effort is made to analyse the digital divide or gap that is seen between urban and rural students in Nagaland, especially in their social mobility, education, and lifelong learning with a deeper analysis of the college students in Kohima district, the capital of the state which is urban as well as the college students in Phek district which is comparatively rural in location and situation. Thus, the present study is relevant, and its outcome could help people to be more aware of digital literacy and build skills in various digital tools and platforms.

2. Background of the Study

In this study, two districts of Nagaland are considered for research and findings. The research is conducted on college students in Kohima district and Phek district to analyse the level of digital literacy and their proficiency in the use of digital tools on different platforms. Students are randomly selected from these two districts to understand the ease of use of various digital tools among students studying in Kohima, the state's capital and students from Phek, which is comparatively less developed in all spheres.

Kohima is the capital of Nagaland. It is a hilly district with a scenic, beautiful landscape which is "home of the Angami Nagas" [12 (para. 1)] as the majority tribe and other tribes of Nagaland cohabiting the land, being the capital wherein people flock for education, work and job opportunities. When Nagaland attained its statehood on 1st December 1963, Kohima was named as the capital of the state [13]. It is the most populous district of the state with a

population of 2,67,988 according to the 2011 census [14]. There are more educational institutions and offices in Kohima in comparison to other districts in the state.

Phek is a district situated 120 km away from Kohima. It was carved out as a full-fledged district of the erstwhile Kohima district on 19th December 1973. The name of the district is derived from the word Phekrekedze which means "watchtower". The language groups of Phek are Chokri, Kuzhami, Pochuri, Poula and Sema among many languages spoken by the people [15].

3. Objectives of the Study

The present study is intended to determine the level of digital literacy awareness among students and their knowledge of the use of digital tools for academic excellence, learning and growth. It is a study on the status of students studying in Kohima, the state's capital of Nagaland and others who are in Phek district which is similar to many districts with lesser advantages. This paper aims to discover whether there is a lifelong learning gap between students who are in the capital and those who study in other districts with limited availability of facilities and opportunities for the use of digital tools and platforms.

4. Methodology

It is a quantitative study and the data collection is carried out with the use of questionnaires. It is done through a random sampling method whereby 170 students from different colleges in the districts of Kohima and Phek were taken as respondents in answering the questionnaire. A total of 85 students from each district were considered for the collection of data. The responses were gathered and compiled using Google Forms. Respondents were randomly selected from different departments in the colleges within the two districts.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

The data collected from the students are analysed through the Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet. They are presented in graphs and charts for easy comprehension of the results. The figures will be described in gist according to the sequence arranged to check the level of digital literacy of the college students, their skill in the use of e-resources for learning, preference in the employment of digital tools, and the accessibility to facilities and opportunities in using technologies and digital platforms. The analysis of the data is presented based on the four key points of the study discussed below:

a) Digital Literacy Awareness and Skills in the Use of Digital Tools

The first part of the data presents the digital literacy awareness level of the students as well as indicates the possession of knowledge and skills in the use of digital tools and platforms for academic learning. The following graphs and charts reveal the similarities and differences in the knowledge and use of digital technologies between students of colleges in Kohima and Phek districts. The respondents from both districts stated that they became aware of digital literacy mostly from 'social media, website and friends' besides other sources given in the

options as ‘newspapers, family, teachers, TV, and others’. It reflects their regular engagement with digital devices.

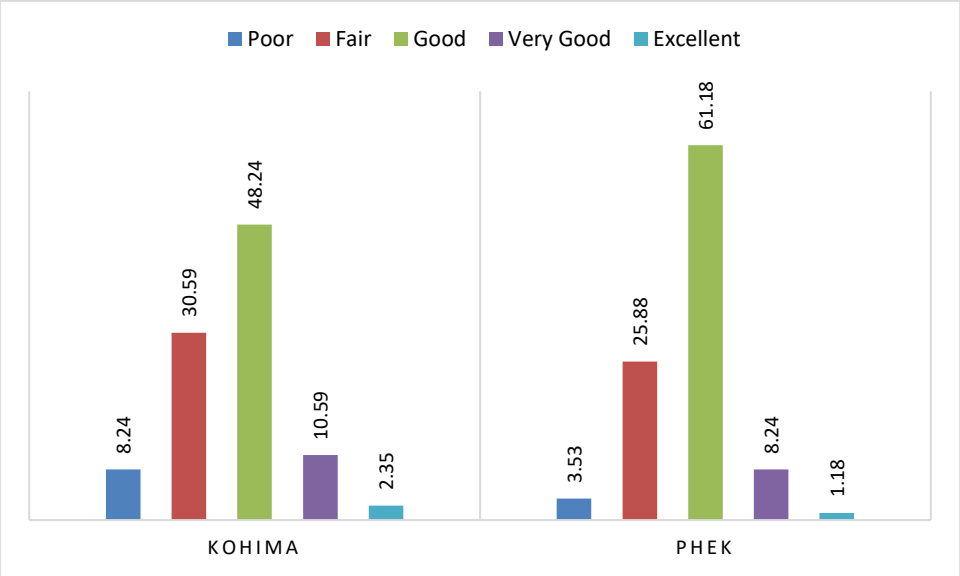

Figure 1. Self-Rating in Digital Literacy

In the matter of self-rating in digital literacy, both groups of students gave the highest number of responses in the category ‘good’ as indicated in Figure 1 presented in the chart. In both districts, students learned to use the computer mostly from their ‘teachers, self, and friends’ apart from ‘books, videos, family, and others’. Although they are similar in their responses in many aspects, there are some noticeable differences in the responses to some questions regarding the knowledge of computers and other digital platforms. In Kohima, 62.4% of the respondents know the names of the different parts of the computer whereas only 47.1% of the respondents in Phek know them.

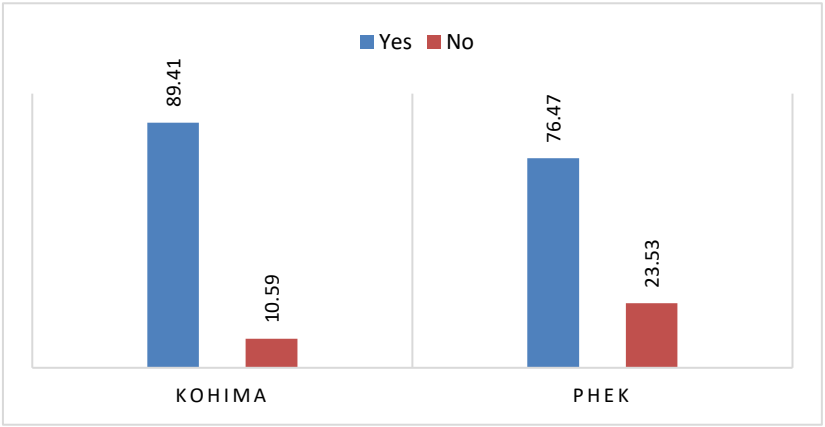

Figure 2. Knowledge of Turning Computer *On* and *Off*

In continuation with assessment on their digital literacy and skill in the use of technologies, it is observed that student in Kohima has a higher percentage as shown in Figure 2 with possession of the knowledge of turning the computer on and off than the students in

Phek. This is because students in Kohima have easier access to the use of computers at home or in the schools which is not the same case in Phek.

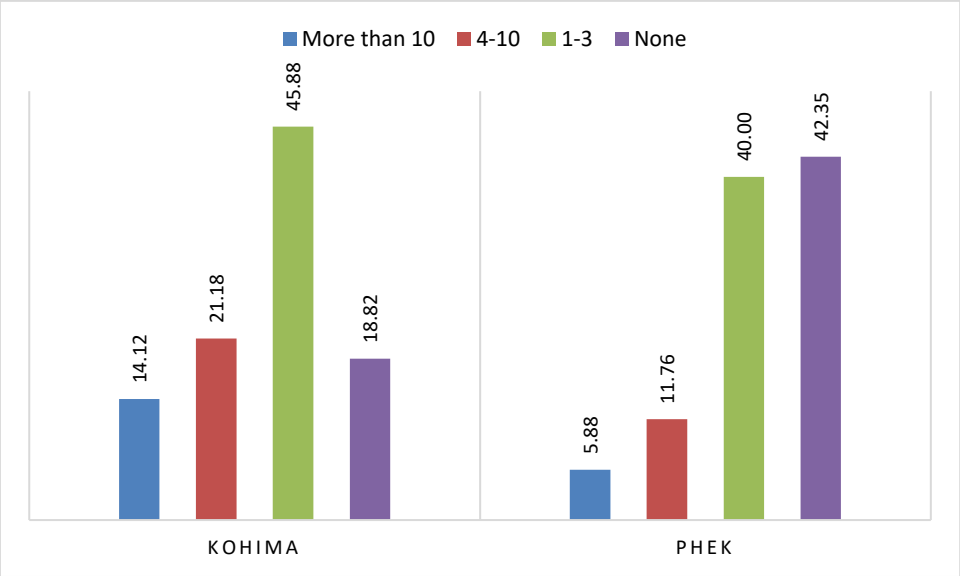

Figure 3. Knowledge of Shortcut Keys in Computer

The use of computers is crucial in the process of learning in this digital age. Knowing the computer is a requirement in the field of job and employment. It is necessary for students to have basic computer knowledge to work on assignments or prepare PowerPoint presentations. From the observation of Figure 3, it is seen that most of the students know shortcut keys in the computer to make their work easier and faster. At the same time, is it not so encouraging to see that 18.82% of respondents from Kohima and 42.35% of respondents from Phek do not know any shortcut key in the computer.

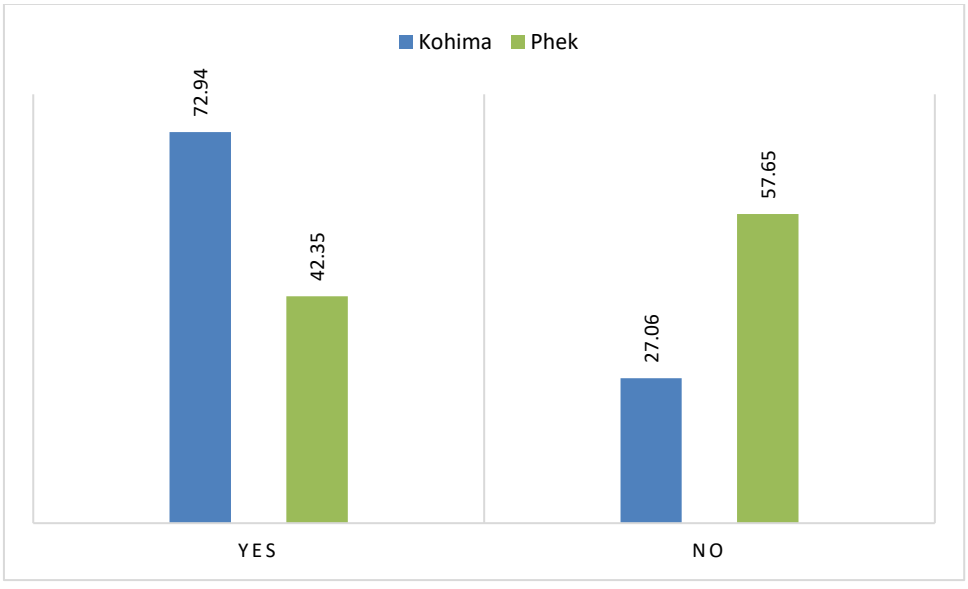

Figure 4. Knowledge of Copying Files to Disk or Drive

Another difference can be observed in their knowledge of copying files to disk or drive with the use of the computer or other digital devices. As indicated in Figure 4, a vast majority

of the respondents from Kohima can copy files to disk or drive or another device whereas more than half with 57.65% of the respondents from Phek do not possess the knowledge of copying files to disk or drive.

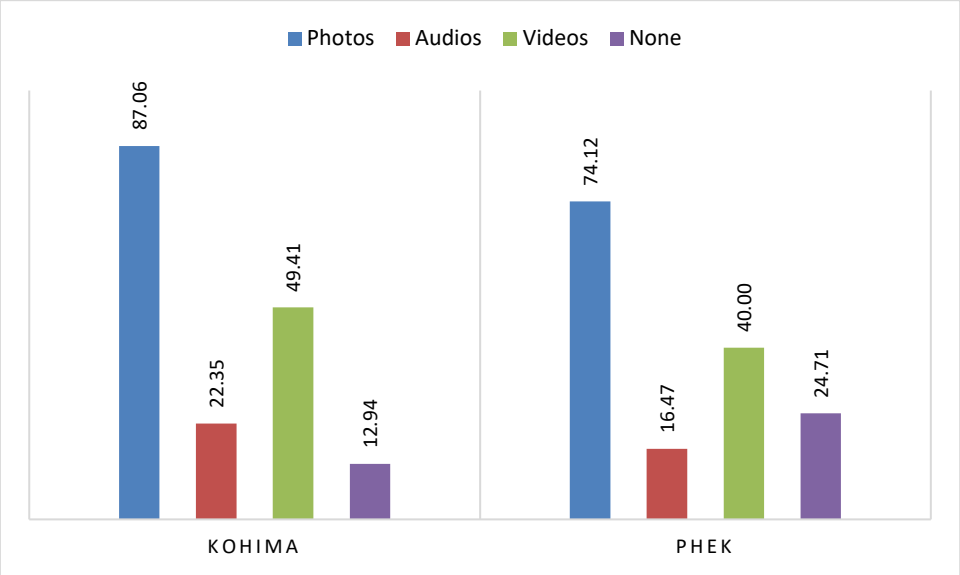

Figure 5. Possession of Skills in Editing. (N=85; Multiple Responses Allowed)

On having the skill to edit photos, audio and videos, most students from both districts claim to have the knowledge to edit photos. And a few of them have the skill of editing videos and audio. It must be taken into consideration that there are some respondents in both places with no skill in editing any of the three as mentioned in Figure 5 with a higher percentage in Phek district. Besides these skills, there are other skills and knowledge of the respondents which were self-rated, and they are presented in Table 1 for reference to know their performance in typing, using websites, spreadsheets, PowerPoint Presentation, email, database, video conferencing for academic purposes, mobile gaming, and computer gaming.

Table 1. Self-Rating in the Use of Different Digital Tools

Items	*Excellent*		*Good*		*Poor*	
	Kohima	**Phek**	**Kohima**	**Phek**	**Kohima**	**Phek**
Typing	10 (11.76%)	11 (12.94%)	65 (76.47%)	56 (65.88%)	10 (11.76%)	18 (21.18%)
Using Websites	9 (10.59%)	11 (12.94%)	56 (65.88%)	57 (67.06%)	20 (23.53%)	17 (20.00%)
Spreadsheet	2 (2.35%)	3 (3.53%)	37 (43.53%)	34 (40.00%)	46 (54.12%)	48 (56.47%)
PowerPoint Presentation	5 (5.88%)	4 (4.71%)	44 (51.76%)	31 (36.47%)	36 (42.35%)	50 (58.82%)
Email	6 (7.06%)	7 (8.24%)	53 (62.35%)	34 (40.00%)	26 (30.59%)	44 (51.76%)
Database	2 (2.35%)	4 (4.71%)	29 (34.12%)	21 (24.70%)	54 (63.53%)	60 (70.59%)
Video Conferencing for Academic Purposes	2 (2.35%)	3 (3.53%)	48 (56.47%)	34 (40.00%)	35 (41.18%)	48 (56.47%)
Mobile Gaming	27 (31.76%)	29 (34.12%)	33 (38.82%)	30 (35.29%)	25 (29.41%)	26 (30.59%)
Computer Gaming	12 (14.12%)	15 (17.65%)	32 (37.65%)	20 (23.53%)	41 (48.24%)	50 (58.82%)

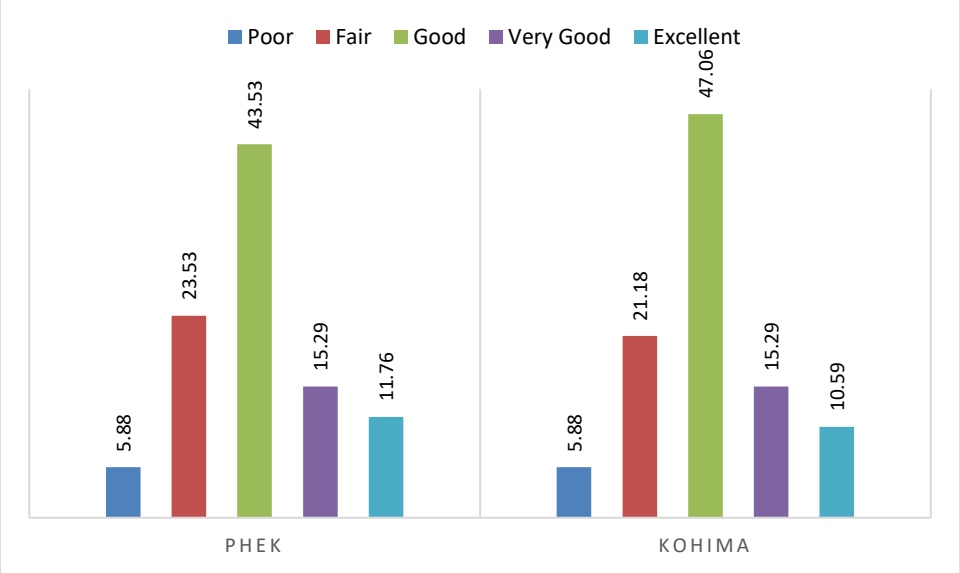

Figure 6. Self-Rating in Socio-Emotional Digital Skills

Socio-emotional digital skills are crucial in this digital age where almost everything occurs online on the internet and communication passes from one source to another swiftly. It refers to the ability to know what is said or posted on the internet and having the capacity to be respectful towards individuals and society on social media platforms. As shown in Figure 6, it is observed that most of the respondents possess 'good' socio-emotional digital skills like being respectful in their comments and chats on social media platforms. It reveals that they are literate about digital etiquette and know how to pass comments or chat on social media platforms with respect towards those who will read their writings and comments.

b) Use of e-Resources and Digital Platforms:

The use of e-resources and digital platforms provides the students with a broader learning space beyond the classroom, allowing them to participate in 'asynchronous activities' and 'self-directed learning' [16]. These tools can facilitate the learners to derive more knowledge from different sources in preparation of assignments and notes for studies, and for improving their language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. They serve as guides for them to expand their horizons of learning.

When asked about the various sources they use for the preparation of assignments, students from both districts responded similarly that they use the college library as well as the digital library while preparing their assignments. There is a remarkable difference in the response only regarding the use of other e-resources besides libraries as presented in Figure 7 with 37.6% of respondents from Kohima and 18.8% of respondents from Phek. This reflects the guidance they were given on learning to tap information and materials from various digital sources for academic excellence. Among many resources available to them, students from both districts use 'Google Classroom and WhatsApp' the most for learning besides ChatGPT, LitCharts, GradeSaver, SparkNotes, eGyanKosh and others. From their response, it is learned

that the vast majority of them do not subscribe to any e-resources for academic purposes neither in free nor paid subscription.

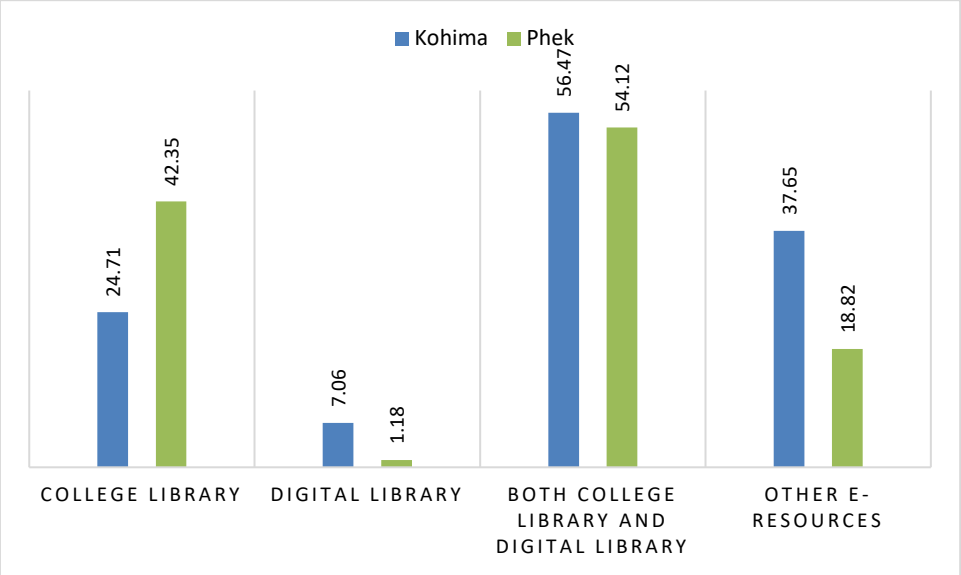

Figure 7. Sources Used for Preparation of Assignments. (N=85; Multiple Responses Allowed)

c) Preference in the Use of Digital Tools

Many respondents said that they usually download PDF books to read, but given the preference between hard copy and soft copy, the majority of students from both districts prefer to read using the hard copy. It is assumed that they prefer to read the hard copy but because of the availability of PDF books, they decide not to purchase the hard copy. They also use different digital tools to enhance their learning. In Phek, 74.1% of the respondents use a variety of 'Apps' for better learning of their subjects while a lesser number of respondents from Kohima with 67.1% use these digital tools for learning.

d) Accessibility to Gadgets and Availability of Facilities

Students need to have the basic digital tools to excel in their studies. The aid of technology can enhance their process of learning and performance in academics. The employment of these tools can ensure them the capability for lifelong learning. It is seen that students who actively use digital learning tools are likely to perform better academically than those who do not engage in digital platforms. Just as it has been mentioned in the introduction about digital divide or gap between those with access to digital technology and those without by Jan A.G.M. van Dijk, it is observed that there is a gap between students who have access to digital technologies, such as computers and the internet, and those who do not have easy access to digital technologies as it is reflected in their digital skills and usage of different digital tools.

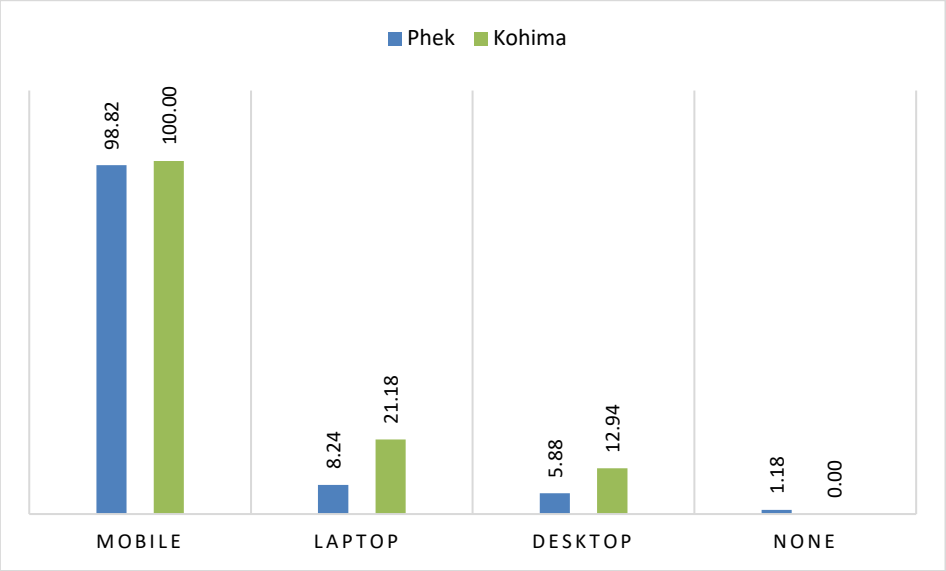

Figure 8. Possession of Personal Gadgets. (N=85; Multiple Responses Allowed)

Students must have accessibility to gadgets and availability of facilities to have better knowledge of digital tools for academic purposes. As indicated in Figure 8, almost all the respondents from both districts possess a personal mobile phone, but there is a higher number of respondents from Kohima having personal laptops and desktops as compared to the other. Hence, it is evident that college students in Kohima have better digital skills as mentioned above such as copying files, using shortcut keys in the computer, editing, and having more knowledge about the computer.

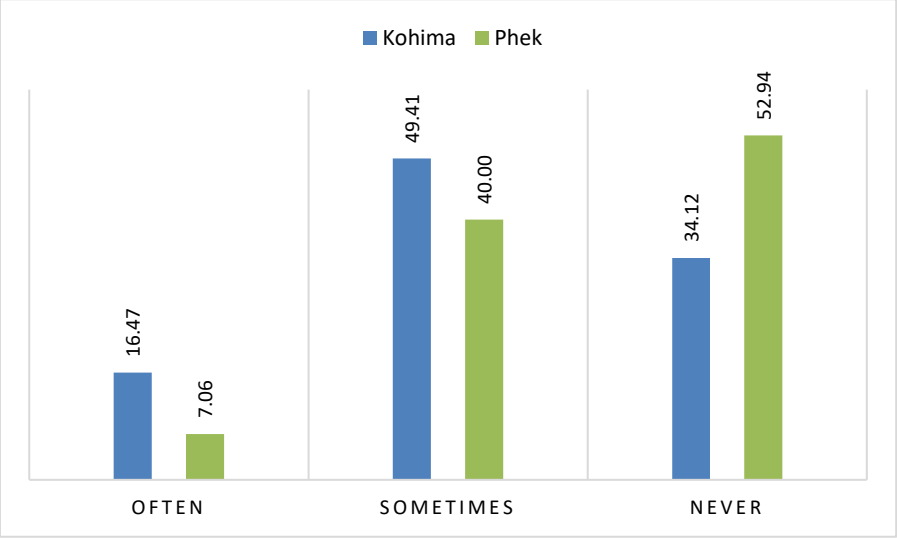

Figure 9. Use of Projector in the College.

Regarding having hands-on experience with the use of the projector which is essential in presentation, it is observed that there is a difference in the level of opportunities students receive from the colleges. As presented in Figure 9, it is seen that only a few of the students from both districts have had the experience of using a projector in the college. More than half with 52.94% of the respondents from Phek and a sizeable number of 34.12% of the respondents from Kohima has ‘never’ used the projector in the college for any presentation. The increase

in digital knowledge and skills is also impacted by the availability of facilities and gadgets provided by colleges for students to use and learn.

This study provides an understanding of their skill and knowledge of digital technology and their dexterity and preference towards e-resources. Keeping in mind that the digitalisation of India is a race well started and also a development still in progress, the source of its hindrance was also crucial to the point. For this, the respondents were asked why they think digitalisation is affected and why there is low digital literacy. They were provided with different options such as lack of interest, lack of gadgets, lack of trained teachers, lack of time, and lack of stable internet connectivity. From the options given, lack of gadgets (55.3%) and lack of stable internet connectivity (50.6%) were the two most selected factors from Kohima respondents while the respondents from Phek opted for lack of stable internet connectivity (48.2%), lack of interest and gadgets (45.9%) as the three most selected factors affecting their digitisation process. Though the numbers vary, the main takeaway from this finding is that both districts face the problem of fewer or sufficient gadgets and weak internet connectivity which hinders their learning ability.

6. Conclusions

Through this study, it is observed that students who have a greater exposition to digital devices and tools possess a higher level of digital literacy. From the analysis of the data, it is found that there is no stark difference between the college students in the capital of the state and those in Phek district because almost all the respondents from both districts have a personal smartphone with facilities to browse different websites and install a variety of learning applications, and some of them have their personal laptop or desktop. However, it must be stated that students who have greater access to digital technologies and avail opportunities in the college to have a hands-on experience fare better in developing digital knowledge and skills.

In accordance with the theoretical frameworks by renowned scholars and thinkers such as van Dijk who talked about “Digital Divide” [9], and the idea of “Digital Capital” [4-6] according to Ragnedda and Bourdieu, it is discovered that students who have greater accessibility to gadgets and availability of opportunities stand a better chance to advance in the use of digital tools for lifelong learning. To build their digital capital, they should make maximum use of the digital tools available, especially through the schemes and initiatives of the government of India, and build their digital capital so that they will be able to enhance their academic excellence and lifelong learning. They should be motivated to use digital platforms for learning and be taught to distinguish between fake and true information provided on websites or e-resources. It can be concluded that students wherever they may come from, it is necessary to enhance their knowledge in the use of computers and digital tools. They need to be motivated to balance their use of digital platforms for entertainment as well as education. Therefore, it can be stated that only when students learn to use digital tools for enhancing and widening their knowledge can they excel in life and gain skills for lifelong learning. Both groups of students in urban as well as in rural areas can enhance their learning when they know how to develop digital skills, access technological tools and explore various online networks provided by the government as well as other private agencies. To remove the digital divide, students need to make full use of the digital tools at hand and strive for more access to other

modern tools because digital literacy is an imperative necessity for academic excellence, lifelong learning and growth.

Multidisciplinary Domains

This research covers the domains: (a) Digital Literacy, (b) ICT Tools, (c) Lifelong Learning, and (d) E-resources.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Declaration on AI Usage

The authors declare that the article has been prepared without the use of AI tools.

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