

Chapter 4

Digital Divide and Equity in Education Bridging Gaps to Ensure Inclusive Learning

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive learning is essential in education, promoting diversity recognition and equity, creating classrooms where every student feels valued. It transcends academics, preparing students for a globalized society, breaking down barriers, and fostering adaptability. The digital divide, causing disparities in technology access, intricately impacts students, educators, and entire education systems. Addressing this divide is crucial for an equitable educational environment, requiring collaborative efforts from governments, policymakers, educators, and technology providers. Bridging the gap empowers individuals, contributing to societal progress. Strategies involve investing in infrastructure, digital literacy programs, teacher training, community partnerships, device and internet access grants, inclusive curriculum, and flexible assessments. Tackling the digital divide is vital for inclusive learning, leading to a more equitable and sustainable society, providing equal opportunities for education and employment, and fostering global economic growth.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive learning holds paramount importance in contemporary education due to the increasing recognition of diversity and the imperative of equity. In today's interconnected world, classrooms reflect a rich tapestry of backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles (Cerna, et al. 2021). Inclusive learning addresses this diversity by fostering environments where every student, regardless of their background or characteristics, feels valued and supported (Schleicher, 2014; Shaeffer, 2019). The importance of inclusive learning extends beyond the classroom, preparing students for participation in a globalized society where collaboration across diverse perspectives is essential. Moreover, inclusive learning contributes to breaking down systemic barriers, promoting social justice, and preparing individuals to navigate an evolving landscape that demands adaptability and understanding (Cerna, et al. 2021). In an era marked by inclusivity as a societal value, inclusive learning is not just an educational philosophy; it is a cornerstone for creating equitable, enriching, and empowering educational experiences.

The growing reliance on technology for learning has brought attention to two important issues: the digital divide and equality in education. These issues were especially highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic (Naureen, 2023). Differences in digital literacy and access to technology lead to a significant educational disparity (Van et al., 2011). To achieve equity, we need to invest in digital literacy programs, accessible infrastructure, and content that is suited to diverse needs. Collaboration with communities, teacher training programs, and the development of inclusive curricula are also vital. Confronting the digital gap can contribute to the development of a more sustainable and equitable society, where education is a keystone of social mobility and equity.

The challenges of the digital divide must be addressed to ensure inclusive learning and social sustainability (Elahi, 2020). This chapter starts with an introduction to inclusive learning and its contribution in educational equity. It is followed by the concept of the digital divide, along with its various aspects and the strategies to bridge the challenges of digital divide. The chapter also introduces the impact of the digital divide on education and strategies to promote equity for inclusive learning and social sustainability.

INCLUSIVE LEARNING

A pedagogical strategy known as inclusive learning recognizes and values the individuality that every student offers to the learning process while attempting to accept and accommodate the variety of learners. Inclusive learning helps in provid-

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