Chapter 9
Accsess to Digital Learning Resources

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the issue of inequality in access to digital learning on multiple levels. It is a literature-based study that focuses particularly on the COVID-19 period and includes both global and Turkey-specific perspectives. Socioeconomic status, geographic location (rural vs. urban), teacher digital competence, and parental support are identified as major factors that directly shape students' digital learning experiences. The analysis emphasizes that providing technical infrastructure alone is not sufficient; the depth of participation, the quality of pedagogical practices, and the presence of inclusive policies are equally important. The chapter argues that holistic approaches, combining technological, educational, and social aspects, are needed to ensure more equitable and sustainable digital learning opportunities. In the Turkish context, historical models such as the Village Institutes and more recent policy shifts are also discussed to show possible ways to reduce digital inequities and strengthen educational equity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital learning is a process that leverages technology to deliver the same kind of support that students receive when learning through a tutor at an educational institution. This learning is facilitated through different e-learning devices like computers, tablets, mobile phones, e-books, internet based courses, interactive applications and artificial intelligence based learning systems. It takes in any kind of learning that is either technology-supported or which uses technology to contribute to the learning experience. But not all are equally able to access these digital learning approaches, which has in turn spawned what the digital education divide. The digital divide can be described as a gap between students in their access to digital devices and resources, digital literacy, and ability to effectively use digital tools (Gulzar et al., 2024).

These disparities were brought to light during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote learning became an urgent need. Students who did not have a computer or a good internet connection at home experienced serious challenges when it came to learning digital skills, and this was reflected in their academic achievement (Wei et al., 2011). Challenges of access to digital learning resources are particularly experienced by rural based students or by students in schools placed in rural communities. Capaz challenges such as inadequate facilities, poor internet access, lack of digital device and undependable electricity supply in rural high schools (Pettalongi et al., 2024; Madida et al., 2019; Pradana & Josiah, 2024). Research also indicates that rural students indicate less accomplishment, satisfaction and engagement with digital learning than urban students (Hou et al., 2024).

Those who live in rural areas generally have a lower socioeconomic status than those who do so in urban areas. Consequently, there are obvious discrepancies of the use of digital learning devices between the underprivileged pupils in those students' access and the ones with higher social background. Lower-income students are at a disadvantage when it comes to high-speed internet access, digital devices, and quality educational content (Qaribilla et al., 2024). Such learners usually do not have conducive home study environments and this widens the performance gap in academics. While access to foundational technology may appear similar at times, students from low status backgrounds have difficulty employing these tools in ways that generate content or facilitate deep learning (McKenzie et al, 2014). Additionally, they are exposed to technology at a later stage and, as a result, they utilize it less extensively (Rodrigues & Biagi, 2017). Students in rural areas, compared to those in urban areas, are on the wrong side of the digital divide with regard to internet availability, device accessibility, and digital skills (Zhao et al., 2021; Hou et al., 2024).

The regions in which students live, along with their past deprivation from digital resources, influence the types of schools they attend. Access to digital learning tools