

DIGITAL DIVIDE

by:

Pepito B. Hernandez

Teacher II, Roosevelt National High School

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on normal life as it spread throughout the world, putting a large number of people at risk. The world tends to come to a halt, and everyone was under great stress about how to deal with a given crisis, including the school's faculty and students, who were experiencing compromised learning environments as a result of the status quo. The system of education needed to create opportunities and new paradigms to facilitate learning. However, the sudden shift to remote learning unfortunately intensified the principle of digital divide.

A Digital Divide is a concept pertaining to the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communication technology and those that do not. This principle encompasses the technical and financial ability to utilize available technology, as well as access to the internet. This concept has been put into consideration since the closure of schools resulted in distance learning exposing huge inequalities in access to technology, such as between rich and poor, rural and urban, girls and boys, etc., as the learning setup required electricity, reliable internet connection, devices, and other technologies needed for the new way of teaching. However, the implementation of distance learning showed that only learners from households with greater levels of connectivity and higher levels of parental education and engagement had better chances of accessing the remote learning approach.

Meanwhile, those learners who were at the "bottom of the pyramid of education" were being left out and were most unlikely to benefit from the implemented way of learning. Thus, inequalities become more prevalent. Generally, these students did not

have adequate learning resources such as mobile phones, laptops, printers, and other gadgets that were being demanded by the setup due to financial-related concerns. They might also be in a poor learning environment due to possible problems present in their respective households, making them unable to comfortably participate in the remote learning. Not only did it emphasize the concept of the digital divide, but the aforementioned circumstances and deprivations forced other students to drop out.

In developing countries like the Philippines, the above difficulties faced by the students belonging to the bottom of the pyramid were also manifested since a number of out-of-school youth arose amid the pandemic considering they could not attend online classes, forcing them to drop out of school. Aside from the gadgets and other needed technologies to pursue online classes, there were instances where some learners had to climb mountains and cross rivers to obtain signal just to attend online classes and access their modules. This proved that even though the temporary solution was to facilitate learning, it has been compromised due to these factors, which also jeopardized students' place conducive for learning.

Indeed, the above provide contextual pieces of evidence on how the digital divide intensified during the implementation of remote learning due to the multifaceted challenges that confront students in developing countries amidst a pandemic. These circumstances could serve as one of the foundations for future educational process and intervention development. Implementation should also be sensitive to the marginalized groups to address digital disparities regardless of locations and financial backgrounds. If the status quo persists, then it would be another challenge for the sector of education to reach those less fortunate and what possible help they could offer to ameliorate their status. After all, we aim for a quality education but with no one being left behind.

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