



Digital Divide in Education

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Why in News

Recently, the **Supreme Court** (SC) warned that the **Digital Divide caused by online classes will defeat the fundamental right** of every poor child to study in mainstream schools.

- SC lamented how the **Right to Education** of little children now **depends on who can afford “gadgets”** for online classes and who cannot.
- During the course of the **Covid-19 pandemic**, as schools increasingly turned to online education the digital divide produced stark consequences.

Key Points

- **Digital Divide:**
 - The digital divide refers to the **gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information** and communications technology and those that don't have access.

It is the **gap that exists between individuals who have access to modern information and communication technology and those who lack access.**
 - Digital divides exist between **developed and developing countries**, urban and rural populations, young and educated versus older and less-educated individuals, and men and women.
 - In India the **urban-rural divide** is the single biggest factor in the digital divide.

- **Pre-Pandemic Divide:**

- Students from the urban area and rich families were learning the concepts of science with the help of modern technology and other e-learning platforms while schools in rural areas and poor families were lacking in basic infrastructure facilities like **toilets, proper classrooms and drinking water.**
- The condition of **female children in rural India was even worse than the male child**, it was seen that many girls were dropping out of schools as the **menstruation cycle** starts as schools **do not have basic facilities like toilets, primary care in schools.**
- In some areas, students had to walk for **10-12 Kms to avail basic education.**

- **Post-Pandemic Divide:**

- In **urban areas and rich families** where students and teachers are acquainted with digital education and due to comparatively high income, families can **easily afford digital devices for education** as well as they can afford various e-learning platforms.
- The situation is the opposite in rural areas and poor families. In most cases, **smartphones are owned by earning members**, thus students are finding lots of difficulties in attending online lectures. Those who can afford smartphones are facing network issues.
- In some cases, **teachers are unfamiliar with online education technology.**

- **Consequences:**
 - **The Disadvantaged Bear the Brunt:**
 - Children belonging to the **Economically Weaker Sections** [EWS]/Disadvantaged Groups [DG] had to suffer the consequence of not **having to fully pursue their education** or worse still drop out because of the lack of access to Internet and computer.
 - They even run the **danger of being drawn into child labour or worse, child trafficking.**
 - **Unfair Competitive Edge:**
 - The poor will remain void of crucial information presented online concerning academia, and thus they will always lag, and this may be summed up by **poor performance.**
 - Hence superior students who can access the internet have an unfair **competitive edge over their less privileged counterparts.**
 - **Disparity in Learning:**
 - The people in **lower socio-economic classes are disadvantaged and have to undergo long hours of cumbersome studies** in meeting the objectives of the course.
 - While the rich can easily access schooling materials online and work on their programs in a flash.
 - **Decreased Productivity Among the Poor:**

Most underdeveloped countries or the rural areas tend to **produce half-baked graduates because of inadequate training** due to limited research abilities as connectivity to the internet is limited besides having low cadre training equipment.
- **Constitutional Provisions for Right To Education:**
 - Originally **Part IV of Indian Constitution**, Article 45 and Article 39 (f) of **DPSP (Directive Principles of State Policy)**, had a provision for state funded as well as equitable and accessible education.
 - The **86th Constitutional Amendment in 2002**, provided Right to Education as a fundamental right in **Part-III of the Constitution.**
 - It inserted **Article 21A** which made Right to Education a fundamental right for children between 6-14 years.
 - It provided for a follow-up legislation **Right to Education Act 2009.**
- **Related Initiatives:**
 - **National Education Policy, 2020.**
 - **Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA).**
 - **PM eVidya.**
 - **Swayam Prabha TV Channel**
 - **SWAYAM portal**

Way Forward

- Even though schools are now reopening gradually due to the receding curve of the pandemic, the **“need to provide adequate computer-based equipment together with access to online facilities for children is of utmost importance”**.
- Priority should be given to the less advantaged students who do not have access to e-learning.
- Genuine **efforts must be invested to ensure every child gets good quality equitable education** as a fundamental right.
- **A solution has to be devised at all levels of the Government, State and Centre**, to ensure that adequate facilities are made available to children across social strata so that access to education is not denied to those who lack resources.

Source: TH