



# Digital Divide in Education

## 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 **86<sup>th</sup> 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](#)

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