

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ADULT EDUCATION: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS AND EQUITY

Lars Arnold Ritter

University of Library Studies
and Information Technologies

Bulgaria

l.ritter@unibit.bg

ABSTRACT

The digital divide has increasingly turned out to be a big hindrance to academic equality and especially so in the case of adult learning. This divide includes the differences in access to digital infrastructure, literacy, and learner motivation and is disproportionately impacted by the disadvantaged adult learners. This study comprises a theoretical discussion of the digital divide issue in adult education among individuals that are structurally disadvantaged. It addresses the multidimensional nature of the gap, highlighting the marginalization of adults who do not have access to digital platforms and whose low levels of technology knowhow poses a barrier on the path to learning. The study also examines the role of motivational factors like perceived relevance and confidence of using digital technologies in the success of learners in taking up and utilizing digital learning opportunities. The study will combine different theoretical schools of thought on access, equity, and inclusion in order to ensure a deeper insight on the issues surrounding the digital divide in adult education institutions. The study highlights the necessity of specific interventions that can be developed to fill the gap due to the collision of the concept of infrastructure, digital competence, and motivation to enhance inclusive learning conditions. Finally, practical recommendations proposed to policymakers and educators in the study will encourage the adoption of the policies which are more than just an improvement of digital access, as the promotion of digital literacy and the involvement of learners are currently being much more prioritized. In this way, the study can be positioned within wider contexts of educational equity, with a focus on the importance of digital technologies that have become a source of new forms of education inequality as well as a leading capacity to reduce existing educational inequalities. The digital divide needs to be acknowledged and reduced to provide adult learners with more chances to be included in and socially mobile areas of the digitalized age of studying.

Keywords: Digital Divide, Adult Education, Digital Literacy, Educational Equity, Structural Disadvantage.