



The Digital Divide in Education and Students' Home Use of ICT

Allan H.K. Yuen, Jae Park
The University of Hong Kong (China)
hkyuen@hku.hk

The digital divide is a widely acknowledged global problem in the information age. The Hong Kong Government has recently launched a five-year “i Learn at home” program in 2011 to assist students from low-income families to purchase computers and pay for broadband services so that they can learn through the Internet at home. However, more recent discourses increasingly argue that the digital divide is not only about availability of networks and gadgets, but also about having or not having information. It calls for a refocus of the problem of the digital divide from a mere availability of computers and Internet network access to high order information literacy skills and education. Numerous studies indicate that the digital divide is a complex and dynamic phenomenon and the issue has been examined from a broader perspective. Given the many thousands of books and studies that have been dedicated to exploring the promises and potential of using information and communication technology (ICT) in education, the issue of the digital divide in this context deserves special attention. Students are now living with a sophisticated range of new and rapidly changing ICT tools. Thus, the digital divide in education, as an ongoing concern, should not be constructed only as an issue of technical or resource support. Unpacking the social, cultural and contextual dynamics of how students use ICT in and outside school, particularly home use of ICT, is important. This paper presents findings of a survey of 468 junior secondary students in Hong Kong. In the survey questionnaire, students were asked to report their ICT use in and outside school and perception on various issues related to contextual and family factors. The results of regression analysis indicate that students' use ICT for learning or entertainment at home are significantly related to the variables of students' use of ICT in school, students' Internet literacy, formation of family rules, using ICT in public areas, parental permission, and parental monitoring. The results, obtained by means of ANOVA model, indicate that the variables of parents' education have effect on the variables of students' use of ICT in school, students' Internet literacy, family cohesion, and parental participation and encouragement in students' ICT use at home. Implications to the issues of digital divide in education are discussed. The study presented in this paper is a part of a Public Policy Research project entitled “Educational Inequality and ICT Use in Schools: Bridging the Digital Divide” funded by the Research Grants Council.