



Castledown

 OPEN ACCESS

Technology in Language Teaching & Learning

ISSN 2652-1687

<https://www.castledown.com/journals/tltl/>

Technology in Language Teaching & Learning, 6(4), 102345 (2024)

<https://doi.org/10.29140/tltl.v6n4.102345>

From digital divide to digital inclusion: Challenges, perspectives and trends in the development of digital competences



Edited by Lukaz Tomczyk, Francisco D. Guillen-Gamez, Julio Ruiz-Palmero, Akhmad Habibi,
Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2023, 562 pp., 179.99 EUR, ISBN: 9819976448

FATEMEH RANJBARAN MADISEH 

Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman
f.madiseh@squ.edu.om

The development of digital competence has become a critical issue in addressing the growing digital divide, where access to technology alone is no longer enough to ensure meaningful participation in society. As technology becomes increasingly embedded in every aspect of life—shaping how we work, learn, communicate, and access services—those without the necessary digital skills face a widening gap in opportunity and social inclusion. The digital divide is no longer just about access to technology; it is also about the ability to effectively use that technology to navigate the complexities of modern society. Digital competence, therefore, is key to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic background, can participate fully in the digital economy and benefit from the opportunities it offers. Closing this divide requires more than providing access to devices and internet connectivity; it demands a concerted effort to equip people with the skills needed to engage with technology meaningfully, safely, and responsibly, ultimately fostering greater social equity and inclusion in the digital age.

From Digital Divide to Digital Inclusion: Challenges, Perspectives, and Trends in the Development of Digital Competences provides a robust analysis of the digital divide and its implications in a rapidly digitizing world, tackling both the theoretical and practical aspects of digital inclusion. The volume, a valuable addition to the field of digital literacy and social policy, explores the processes related to the dynamics of digital inclusion in the last two decades, showcasing studies from 24 countries located in six continents. What differentiates this volume from others focusing on the digital divide is the well-rounded systematic reviews carried out in various regions, which makes it a unique resource in the field. The authors provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by different groups in

Copyright: © 2024 Fatemeh Ranjbaran Madiseh. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. **Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within this paper.

accessing digital technologies and emphasizes the significance of developing digital competencies to foster inclusion. While effectively outlining the persistent barriers to digital inclusion, such as lack of access to high-speed internet, insufficient information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, and inadequate e-services, it reveals a multifaceted exploration of the dynamics surrounding such obstacles. These barriers are particularly pronounced in marginalized communities, which echoes findings from other research on global digital divides, such as those highlighted by the forefather of digital divide theory, Van Dijk (2020). While the authors argue that simply providing access to technology is insufficient, they emphasize a concerted effort to enhance users' abilities to utilize these technologies effectively.

The chapters of this volume discuss various educational strategies aimed at improving digital competences within disadvantaged groups. This aligns with Mark Warschauer's (2004) views of the digital divide as a binary gap (i.e., those with or without technology), understanding it as a complex and layered issue tied to broader social inequalities. The authors here also emphasize that social inclusion hinges on individuals' ability to engage meaningfully with technology rather than merely having access to it. The book's analysis of digital exclusion in relation to specific groups, such as the elderly, the unemployed, and people from rural areas, is particularly insightful. It highlights how the digital divide is not just about infrastructure but also about social inclusion and the capacity for diverse groups to participate meaningfully in a digital society.

This volume presents several notable strengths that contribute to its value in the field of education, social policy, and digital literacy. First of all, the book offers an extensive overview of digital inclusion and exclusion, addressing various dimensions such as access to technology, ICT literacy, and the benefits of e-services. This thorough exploration allows readers to understand the complexities surrounding digital competences in different regions of the world. Meanwhile, some practical educational solutions are put forth in Chapters 2 through 20, such as strategic issues in planning activities and analysing the digital divide with the purpose of establishing specific objectives for the use of ICTs so that society can understand, adopt, and make the best use of such technologies to minimize the level of digital exclusion. Another advantage is that it integrates perspectives from multiple disciplines, including pedagogy, sociology, and media studies. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the discussion and allows for a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing digital inclusion. In doing so, the authors draw on current research and case studies to support their arguments, providing a solid empirical foundation for their claims. This grounding in research enhances the credibility of the discussions and recommendations presented throughout the book. This reliance on data ensures that the proposed solutions are practical and evidence-based, making the book a reliable resource for academics and policymakers. The focus on educational solutions, especially for fostering digital competence among disadvantaged groups, is one of the key takeaways. The book offers clear guidelines on how to integrate digital literacy training into school curricula and lifelong learning programs, with specific recommendations tailored to the needs of various socioeconomic groups.

Another commendable feature is the emphasis on localized and personalized approaches to digital inclusion. By specifically addressing the challenges faced by marginalized communities, the book highlights critical issues related to equity and access in the digital age. This focus is essential for fostering inclusivity and ensuring that all individuals can benefit from digital advancements. The editors argue that national or global strategies for improving digital access often overlook the specific needs of local communities. They suggest that digital inclusion initiatives must be tailored to the unique social, economic, and cultural contexts of each community, and highlight successful localized programs as examples. These strengths collectively position this volume as a significant contribution to ongoing conversations about digital literacy and inclusion, making it a relevant resource for educators, researchers, and policymakers alike.

By tackling both the theoretical and practical aspects of digital inclusion, the book provides a robust academic analysis of the digital divide and its implications in a rapidly digitizing world. However, while it is a valuable addition to the field of digital literacy and social policy, it also presents certain limitations that merit a deeper examination.

While the book provides a thorough analysis of the current state of digital exclusion, it pays relatively less attention to the fast-evolving nature of digital technologies and how future technological advancements might further impact the digital divide. Technologies like artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and 5G networks are less discussed, even though these innovations are likely to create new layers of inequality. The digital divide is a moving target, and without addressing the next generation of technologies, the book's recommendations might quickly become outdated. A more future-focused analysis could have strengthened the book's relevance in the rapidly shifting digital landscape.

In addition, while this book is from a series focused on research and practice in education policy, and education is undoubtedly a critical factor in digital inclusion, future editions could give more attention to the role of market forces and government policy in the digital divide. The focus on digital literacy training is necessary but might lead readers to overlook other systemic issues, such as the affordability of digital services and devices, as well as the regulatory frameworks that govern digital access. Chapters on the exploration of how the digital divide affects customers experiencing vulnerability and service interactions in essential service settings, and defining human capabilities that result from service inclusion practices, as put forth by Fisk et al. (2023), could be a valuable addition to the volume. Future editions could provide a more balanced discussion by incorporating these elements alongside its strong educational focus. Furthermore, a more structured presentation of the different countries based on global regions could provide the reader with a more user-friendly interface, similar to *The Digital Divide* by Ragnedda and Muschert (2013), who divided their book chapters by region for very efficient and timely reading and comparison.

In conclusion, *From Digital Divide to Digital Inclusion* (2023) is an academically rigorous and comprehensive text that offers a valuable exploration of the challenges and solutions related to digital exclusion. Its empirical foundation and interdisciplinary perspective make it a key resource for educators, policymakers, and scholars. Despite its limitations, it remains a significant contribution to the discourse on digital literacy and social inclusion. The volume serves as a valuable resource for educators and policymakers alike. It effectively synthesizes current research on digital competences while advocating for inclusive practices. However, future editions or discussions could enhance their critique by exploring the limitations of current initiatives and the complexities involved in achieving true digital inclusivity. Overall, this book contributes significantly to the discourse on digital inclusion but invites further inquiry into practical implementations and the long-term impacts on marginalized communities.

References

- Fisk, R. P., Gallan, A. S., Joubert, A. M., Beekhuyzen, J., Cheung, L., & Russell-Bennett, R. (2023). Healing the digital divide with digital inclusion: enabling human capabilities. *Journal of Service Research*, 26(4), 542–559. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10946705221140148>
- Ragnedda, M., & Muschert, G. W. (2013). *The digital divide*. Routledge.
- Van Dijk, J. A. (2020). *The digital divide*. Polity.
- Warschauer, M. (2004). *Technology and social inclusion: Rethinking the digital divide*. MIT Press.