



Digital Divide in Higher Education

Vipulkumar Pragajibhai Banker

Research Scholar, DLIS, Madhav University
and Librarian, Shanti Business School

Dr. Bharti L. Vaja

Associate Professor, Department of Library and Information Science,
Madhav University



Abstract: Digital Divide is the major problem in education of digital era. Digital information and resources are available but the variation has been found in use of information due to various reasons. Many time it is found that talented students did not perform well due to unavailability of information sources, in India this ratio is very high. Higher education is effected from digital divide. This study will focus on digital divide in higher education and the role and responsibility of libraries and library professionals to decrease the level of digital divide.

Keywords: Digital Divide, Digital Divide in Higher Education, ICT, Information Technology, Digital Library.

Introduction:

The word 'digital divide' focus on the fact that the two part of the world one is who have an access and another is who don't have an access of Digital Information and Digital Infrastructure. Digital divide happened between in cities and remote or rural areas, between the educated and the uneducated, between the economic classes and globally, between more and less industrially developed nations. The definition of digital divide would be change according to time and technology. Digital divide include infrastructure of digital Information and Communication Technology.

In general estimate there are near about some 500 million of the world's population, among them 65% to 70% population are from developing countries. Population of these countries are not getting digital resources and services for study, teaching, research and other information system. Actual digital divide exist between 1) well-developed/urban areas and under developed/rural/remote area, and 2) rich people and poor people. As per some believe, digital divide will close naturally over time; according to other believe there is nothing new in digital divide, it is already existed and will ever in one or other way. Digital divide reflect existing infrastructure and facilities. Just like many other countries, India is also affected by the digital divide.



Definition:

The American Library Association (ALA), Office for Information Technology Policy (2000) defines the digital divide as disparities based on economic, status, gender, race, physical abilities and geographic location between those who have or do not have access to information, the Internet and other information technologies and services. According to OECD, (2001) the term digital divide refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at the different socio-economic levels with regard to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their use of the Internet. It reflects differences among and within countries.

From the above definitions, the world can be divided into two sets of people who have and who do not have access to (information and Communication Technology) (ICT) or ability to use technologies, Internet, and other modern artifacts, such as telephone, television. Such differences are more prominent among rural and urban population, poor and rich people, and among developing and developed countries across the globe. Besides, digital divide exists based on race, gender, geography, economic status and physical ability; in skills, knowledge and ability to use information and other technologies. In a broader sense, the digital divide exists in global, regional, national, and state level.

Digital Divides in Higher Education:

In context of education system digital divide shown in Universities and Colleges, and targeted population are students, research scholars and faculty members. It is according to availability of sources and resources. There are major five type of digital divide.

- **Literate Vs illiterate Computer users:** Computer Literacy is very important in the recent time in the context of education. In education system students, research scholars and teachers have required computer literacy in their routing life. Most of them have gain knowledge of computer through their experience. Usually, the computer literate person can perform well in various activities in the comparison of computer illiterate person. The members from the university and colleges which is



existed in village or remote area, have less infrastructure and facilities in the comparison of the members from urban and developed area.

- **Skilled Vs unskilled internet users:** Now a days internet users are spread in all the corners, but the skill to surf internet it is subject to knowledge and training. One can say that convent educated students are performing well than non-convent educated, the users come from the urban and semi-urban found more skilled in the comparison with others.
- **Awareness Vs Unawareness about availability of information:** Awareness about information and information resources is the major issue for the information users. If the library made available information and very good resources, but users are unable to search, retrieve and use due to unawareness; in this case all resources are meaningless.
- **Technological rich Vs poor:** Socio-economic condition of the students is another barrier which forms a digital divide of device rich and device poor. Ever changing technology of the computers, IT and ICT demands lots of money to equip with the technology. The students from the upper middle and rich classes are capable to adopt latest technology and device such as broad band internet connection, laptops, PDAs, Smartphones etc. while the poor talented students are far from these.
- **Multilanguage as a barrier:** India is a country having a multicultural and multilingual population. Today a large percentage of information content on the Internet is in English, which is a barrier for the people, whose primary language is not English (Singh, 2007). English is the dominant language in the internet. Most contents of internet are available in English language but few are available on other languages and regional languages. Many students of the language studies are also suffering from the less e-content on his specific subject. Students with poor English knowledge face problems in keyword selection, searching, retrieving and even evaluating the search results in internet.



Example:

In the most recent time due to Covid – 19, there is pandemic situation in all over world. This situation will help us to clear the picture. Now a days some popular word related to education system such as online learning, virtual classroom, online test, video conferencing. Many online platforms are provide their service in the field of education. But we should have a question, not to others but we should ask this question to ourselves that how many students are getting the benefit of these facility. Every day we get the news through different news media, we can overserved that many institution has taken initiative online learning. Yes it is time demand, but with this how many students are getting this facilities and benefit and how?

If we focus on real situation, my observation is that very small cluster of the students are getting these facilities and benefits. Behind this there are various reasons such as illiteracy, lack of skill, lack of awareness, initiatives taken by students as well as institutions and different barriers etc.

Role and Responsibilities of Academic Libraries:

In this digital age, academic libraries have major duty to decrease digital divide in higher education. To decrease level of digital divide, libraries need to provide required information, improve and increase the medium of information sharing, and provide respective training to their users for particular resources and gadgets in academic premises. Libraries need to provide learning oriented environment where users can demand and get their information very easily. Academic libraries need to adopt modern technology to provide better services with quality. The role of librarian as an information provider and trainer. Library professionals are playing the very important role in information collection, conservation, digitization, retrieval and dissemination. Role and responsibilities of academic libraries may change according to development of technology. For all these library professionals have various opportunity and challenges to provide information service and to satisfy users need. Library professionals need to ready according to users demand, for the same librarian need to update their self-according to contemporary technology. The use of IT, Internet and WWW is increasing day by day in academic libraries. There are a number of web-based



services and applications that demonstrate the foundations of the web 2.0 concept, and are already being used to a certain extent in education.

To bridge digital divide gap:

Infrastructure is the fundamental need to create the digital environment. It is very big stuff to create infrastructure for digital environment. To do the same, need to increase level of awareness in the common people, so they can understand the importance and benefits of digital environment. After that the demand and usage will increase. For providing digital and online services required fundamental need such as computers, internet, networking, Wi-Fi, intranet, application and different software etc. And another need is the awareness to use of all the components.

Education made the base of any person. The recommendation of National Knowledge Commission was all academic institution must set up an Institutional Repository to promote digital content, it may include research publications, thesis, dissertation, projects, institutional publications etc. Libraries go for effective resources sharing, through directly or through network and consortium. Libraries should implement modern information retrieval strategies to satisfy the users need. To reach the decrease the gap of digital divide, library should project as a cybrary. The aim of all, is to provide information services to end users. Cybrary is cyber library, where users can get the services of library as well as cyber zone. It is necessary in the contemporary time, and it can serve their services to the users beyond their physical boundaries. Libraries can provide OPAC, Web OPAC, m-OPAC, digital information services and analysis, technical assistance and guidance, multimedia workstations, open access e-resources, subject gateways, e-journals, e-books, institutional repository, online lectures, virtual classroom and computer lab etc. All these things make bridge between digital divide communities. This type of initiatives are very important in education system in the recent era.

Information literacy and computer literacy is fundamental need in the society. Information literacy aims that develop the skills in browsing, searching and retrieving the adequate



information from various web platforms. It will show the power of internet and related services in educations. Information literacy is the literacy about the different modes of information, retrieval of information, knowledge of availability of information, knowledge about audio-visual information, knowledge of the file format etc. Computer literacy includes the literacy and learning about the application of computers, knowledge of search strategy, search tactics and internet etc. Information literacy and computer literacy are the two aspects which are of immense value to bridge the digital divide.

Conclusion:

The change with technological development would continue time to time. In last 2 decade level of technical development found very high, especially in Information and Communication Technology. This change effected on various part of society, education is also one of them. In education system it has found with drastic change, due to technological development in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The digital divide is major issue in education system. Providing information and resources are not only solution but for the same training and awareness will help to decrease the level of digital divide, with this library and library professionals should involve in this movement to provide awareness program and training of resources, different gadgets and tools etc. The educational institute should conduct skill development workshop and seminar on web content evaluation, information searching, search strategy and different databases. The imbalanced in access of information resources, infrastructure, awareness and skill lead to happen digital divide globally.

References:

1. Gaur, R. C. (2003). Rethinking the Indian digital divide: The present state of digitization in Indian management libraries. *The International Information & Library Review*, 35(2-4), 189-203.
2. Rao, S. S. (2005). Bridging digital divide: Efforts in India. *Telematics and informatics*, 22(4), 361-375.



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596
www.MyVedant.com

An International Multidisciplinary Research E-Journal

3. Bansode, S. Y., & Patil, S. K. (2011). Bridging digital divide in India: Some initiatives. *Asia Pacific Journal of Library and Information Science*, 1(1), 58-68.
4. Noll, R. G., Older-Aguilar, D., Rosston, G. L., & Ross, R. R. (2000). The digital divide: definitions, measurement, and policy issues. In *Bridging the Digital Divide: California Public Affairs Forum*, Stanford University.
5. Singh, N. (2007). Bridging the digital divide in India: some challenges and opportunities.
6. Singh, S. (2010). Digital divide in India: Measurement, determinants and policy for addressing the challenges in bridging the digital divide. *International Journal of Innovation in the Digital Economy (IJIDE)*, 1(2), 1-24.
7. Singh, P. K. & Gangopadhyay, S. (2017). Digital Divide in Higher Education: Role of Academic Libraries to Bridge the Gap. *Vaichariki*, 7(4), 35-40. (ISSN: 2249-8907)



VIDHYAYANA