



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN EDUCATION

The phrase “digital divide” is often used as shorthand for a shortage of devices, but in education the gap is more accurately described as unequal access to learning opportunities mediated by technology. Two students may both be “online”, yet one studies with a quiet room, a reliable laptop, and an adult who can help interpret instructions, while the other relies on a shared phone, unstable connectivity, and limited support. In this sense, the divide is not only about possession; it is about whether technology can be used continuously, effectively, and independently for learning. As digital platforms become more common, the minimum conditions for full participation rise, and the boundary between “connected” and “excluded” becomes less about a single tool and more about the surrounding environment.

Access starts with hardware, but hardware has a quality dimension that is frequently overlooked. Device availability matters, yet suitability matters too. A smartphone can receive messages and open links, but it is poorly designed for long writing tasks, managing multiple documents, or switching between complex applications during lessons. When schools set assignments that assume keyboard input, larger screens, and stable multitasking, students using only phones face a built-in disadvantage even if they technically have a device. Shared access compounds the problem. In households with several children, a single usable device becomes a scheduling constraint, forcing learners to rotate access or complete work at inconvenient times. Even where schools loan equipment, the reliability of access is shaped by charging routines, maintenance, repairs, and replacement cycles—practical details that determine whether participation is steady or repeatedly interrupted.

Connectivity creates a second layer of inequality because internet access is not a single, uniform condition. Many families depend on mobile connections rather than fixed broadband, and data caps can make video lessons, interactive platforms, and large downloads expensive to use. Students may ration participation, turning off cameras, avoiding live sessions, or skipping resource-heavy materials to conserve data. Stability is equally important. Frequent dropouts fragment learning, discourage students from speaking up in real time, and make it harder for teachers to check understanding. Rural areas may face limited infrastructure, but unstable service also affects some urban learners when housing is temporary, signals are weak inside crowded buildings, or



payments are irregular. As a result, the statement “they have internet” can conceal large differences in what learners can actually do online.

Home conditions shape learning outcomes as strongly as hardware and connectivity. Digital learning requires more self-regulation because the classroom structure is weaker, and distractions compete more directly with study time. A quiet place to work, predictable routines, and adult supervision can determine whether students persist or disengage. Adult support is not only emotional; it is often technical. When parents or caregivers have limited digital skills, minor obstacles—finding a login, uploading a file, or navigating a platform—can quickly become missed tasks and mounting frustration. For students who are already struggling academically, repeated technical interruptions can feel like repeated failure. Conversely, when an adult can troubleshoot basic issues and help interpret instructions, the same platform becomes a usable pathway rather than a barrier.

Schools also contribute to the divide through differences in staff readiness and instructional design. Moving a worksheet online is not the same as designing teaching for a digital environment. Effective remote instruction requires attention to pacing, clear sequencing, and deliberate interaction, especially when learning becomes partly asynchronous and students work at different times. Feedback must be timely enough to guide improvement, and teachers need methods to check understanding without relying on physical cues. These skills do not automatically appear when software is introduced. Teacher training therefore becomes central: without it, digital tools can increase busywork, fragment communication across platforms, and reduce meaningful learning, particularly for students who benefit from structured guidance and frequent correction.

Platform design and assessment practices can widen or narrow gaps depending on how they interact with learners’ constraints. Learning systems vary in usability, language support, accessibility features, and compatibility with older devices. Some tools assume constant high-speed internet and modern hardware, effectively excluding those who most need support. Schools also differ in how coherently they organise platforms. A patchwork of apps, passwords, and notification channels can overwhelm families, while a consistent system lowers friction and reduces missed work. Assessment intensifies these differences. Online tests can deliver rapid marking, but they raise fairness concerns when students face unequal bandwidth, device performance, or home conditions. Proctoring software may require webcams and stable connections and can create privacy problems in crowded households. In response, many teachers have increased open-book tasks and project-based work, but these formats still depend on clear guidance and feedback, which are often hardest to deliver when communication is fragmented.



Policy responses increasingly recognise that closing the divide is not a single purchase but a package of supports. Devices and connections are necessary, but alone they rarely solve the deeper problems of suitability, stability, skills, and learning design. Needs-based funding can prioritise schools serving low-income communities, while partnerships with local providers can improve broadband access and reduce household costs. Long-term planning also matters: maintenance, repair capacity, technical support staff, and ongoing training determine whether early gains persist. Evidence from emergency remote learning periods suggests that when multiple supports are combined—hardware, connectivity, training, and coherent systems—learning loss can be reduced. When access is partial, however, the minimum requirements rise faster than support, and gaps often widen. The digital divide is therefore a moving target, best addressed by treating technology as part of a wider learning system rather than as a standalone solution.

Questions 1–4

Select the correct answer.

1 The writer argues that the “digital divide” is best defined as

- A** a short-term lack of devices that can be solved mainly by distributing hardware.
- B** unequal access to learning opportunities shaped by technology and home circumstances.
- C** a decline in students’ motivation to learn when lessons move online.
- D** a problem limited to areas where broadband infrastructure does not exist.

2 Which situation is identified as creating a practical obstacle to regular study?

- A** a student owning a laptop that can manage multiple documents.
- B** a school adopting a single platform so families use one set of logins.
- C** teachers receiving training in pacing and feedback for remote lessons.
- D** several children needing to share one device for lessons and assignments.

3 What may lead students to turn off cameras or avoid live online sessions?

- A** The need to conserve limited mobile data.
- B** Access to stable fixed broadband without usage limits.
- C** Teacher training in remote lesson design.
- D** Adult assistance with navigating digital platforms.

4 Why can limited digital skills among adults hinder students’ learning?

- A** They prevent schools from lending equipment to families.
- B** They make fixed broadband unavailable in rural areas.



C Minor technical obstacles can lead to missed tasks and frustration.

D They require students to use several devices simultaneously.

Questions 5–8

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

5 The passage treats possession of an internet-enabled device as sufficient for equal participation in digital learning.

6 Some households rely on mobile data rather than fixed broadband, and usage limits can make online lessons costly.

7 The passage indicates that online testing can raise concerns about fairness when students' access conditions differ.

8 The passage provides a precise global figure for how many students lack reliable internet access.

Questions 9–13

Complete the notes below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Key factors shaping the digital divide

- Assignments involving several documents and complex applications may require stable **9**
- To conserve mobile data, some students may **10** participation in online learning.
- Minor platform problems may become missed tasks when parents or **11** have limited digital skills.
- Effective remote instruction requires clear **12** and deliberate interaction.
- Funding that prioritises disadvantaged schools is described as **13** funding.

Answer Key

1. B
2. D



3. A
4. C
5. FALSE
6. TRUE
7. TRUE
8. NOT GIVEN
9. multitasking
10. ration
11. caregivers
12. sequencing
13. needs-based