

The Gender Digital Divide in Education: The Case of Students from Rural Area from Republic of Moldova

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Abstract : The inter-causal relationship between social inequalities and the digital divide raises the relation issue of gender and information and communication technologies (ICT) - a key element in achieving sustainable development. In preparing generations as future digital citizens and for active socio-economic participation, ICT plays a key role in respecting gender equality. Although several studies over the years have shown that gender plays an important role in digital exclusion, in recent years, many studies with a focus on economically developed or developing countries identify an improvement in these aspects and a gap narrowing. By measuring students' digital competencies level, this paper aims to identify and analyse the existing gender digital inequalities among students. Our analyses are based on a sample of 1526 middle school students residing in rural areas from Republic of Moldova (54.2% girls, mean age 14,00, SD = 1.02). During the online survey they filled in a questionnaire adapted from the (yDSI) "The Youth Digital Skills Indicator". The instrument measures the level of five digital competence areas indicated in The European Digital Competence Framework (DigiCom 2.3.). Our results, based on t-test, indicate that depending on gender, there are no statistically significant differences regarding the levels of digital skills in 3 areas: Information navigation and processing; Communication and interaction; Problem solving. However, were identified significant differences in the level of digital skills in the area of "Digital content creation" [$t(1425) = 4.20, p = .000$] and "Safety" [$t(1421) = 2.49, p = .000$], with higher scores recorded by girls. Our results contradicts the general stereotype regarding the low level of digital competence among girls, in our sample girls scores being on par with boys and even bigger in knowledge related to digital content creation and online safety skills. Additional investigations related to boys competence on digital safety are necessary as the implication of their low scores on this dimension may suggest boys exposure to digital threats.

Keywords : digital divide, education, gender digital divide, digital literacy, remote learning

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