Is the Internet creating a ‘learning gap’ among students? Evidence from the Italian PISA data

# Details

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## Topics

* Learning
* Literacy and skills
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities
* Internet usage, practices and engagement

## Sample

29,284 15-year-old Italian students attending 991 different high schools in Italy. This is a sub-sample of the 2009 PISA survey sample.

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

The notion of a digital divide between Internet haves and have-nots has now evolved into the broader concept of digital inequality. Based on this framework, people get greater or fewer opportunities from Internet use according to their cultural, social and professional resources. However, empirical research has focused mainly on the description of Internet usage between different social groups, without testing whether these differences actually translate into social inequalities. In this study we use learning outcomes as a proxy for high-school students’ future social opportunities. Using the Italian dataset of the PISA 2009 survey we test whether students from advantaged social backgrounds gain more benefits from Internet use than their less privileged counterparts. The results show that using the Internet for schoolwork does not prove to have different impacts on students’ learning outcomes depending on their social background. The challenges of these results for theories of digital inequality are discussed.

# Outcome

The paper stated two hypotheses:
"Hypothesis 1: Students coming from families with higher cultural and socio-economic status will gain more benefits from their use of the Internet for schoolwork than their less privileged counterparts. [...]
Hypothesis 2: Students of schools with higher learning performances will gain more benefits from using the Internet for schoolwork. [...]" (Gui et al., 2014, p. 8)
The hypotheses are not confirmed by the analysis. As the authors claim:
"Through a descriptive analysis and two regression models we found that there is neither interaction between students’ socio-economic status and their Internet use for schoolwork in their impact on learning outcomes, nor is this interaction present when the type of school is considered as an indicator of students’ social position. Unlike Thiessen and Looker (2007), we found that neither male nor female students get more benefits in terms of reading performances when their families’ socio-economic condition or the type of school attended improves" (Gui et al., 2014, p. 19).