


Chapter 5

Examining Teachers’ Perspectives on Equitable Digital Education: A Case Study on Delivering High- Quality and Inclusive Learning Experiences in Special Education

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ABSTRACT

In an era of advancing digital education, ensuring equal access to high-quality learning experiences for students with special needs poses a significant challenge. This chapter investigates the teachers’ perspectives on the provision of inclusive, accessible, and exceptional digital education to these students. Drawing from qualitative analysis of interviews with teachers in a general education school, the study delves into the obstacles encountered when implementing digital technology. Themes such as limited resources, insufficient training, and the necessity for technical support emerged, shedding light on the need to overcome these barriers for effective classroom implementation. The special and general education teachers stress the importance of accessible tools, equitable technology access, navigating learning curves, integrating digital practices, and empowering students to use technology inclusively and proficiently.

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INTRODUCTION

In the realm of education, the pursuit of equitable digital education has emerged as a critical imperative. It encompasses the noble mission of providing equal access to high-quality digital learning opportunities for all students, transcending the boundaries of background, abilities, and socio-economic status (Milakovich & Wise 2019). This transformative vision seeks to bridge the digital divide that separates those who have access to technology from those who do not, ensuring that every student, regardless of their circumstances, has an equal chance to learn, grow, and thrive. For students with special needs, the significance of high-quality and accessible learning opportunities cannot be overstated. These students face unique challenges in traditional classroom settings, grappling with physical and cognitive disabilities, language barriers, and various learning difficulties (Shea, Hecker & Lalor 2019). Embracing the power of digital education can unlock a world of possibilities, offering them tailored and effective learning experiences, as well as access to assistive technology and resources that may be otherwise elusive within conventional classrooms (Escueta et al. 2017).

Yet, the pursuit of equitable digital education extends beyond the boundaries of special needs. It holds the key to fostering a more inclusive and just educational landscape, where equity and inclusivity become the pillars upon which every student's potential is nurtured (Rossi 2023). By ensuring that all students have access to the same opportunities, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, the way for their success in school and beyond could be paved. Moreover, equitable digital education carries the potential to bridge the chasm that separates disadvantaged and privileged students. In a world marked by social and economic disparities, students from marginalized communities or low-income households often face additional barriers in accessing digital education (Traxler et al. 2020). They may lack the necessary technology or struggle with reliable internet connectivity. By embracing the principles of equity, we have the power to level the playing field, empowering all students with the tools they need to succeed, irrespective of their circumstances.

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has cast a spotlight on the urgency of providing high-quality and accessible learning experiences for all students, including those with special needs. As schools transitioned to remote and hybrid learning models, students with special needs encountered additional hurdles in accessing and engaging with their education (Shaw & Shaw 2023). It became evident that individualized and accessible instruction was paramount to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Research conducted in the wake of the pandemic underscores the critical role of personalized learning experiences in improving the engagement and motivation of students with disabilities (Greenhow, Graham & Koehler 2022). These experiences leverage technology to offer tailored instruction, individualized

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