Country: Australia

Committee: UNESCO

Topic: Reducing Inequalities in Digital Education

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Australia, located in Oceania land 7,682,300 sq. km, water 58,920 sq. km and in total 7,741,220 sq. km. The country has maritime borders with East Timor, Indonesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and the islands of New Caledonia.

Inequalities in Digital Education is a critically important and ongoing national challenge in Australia. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic mainly because not all Australian children had and still have reliable access to technology. The issue, commonly framed as the "Digital Divide" in education, goes beyond just having a computer; it involves ensuring all students have equitable access to the full benefits of digital learning. Research by the Australian Network for Quality Digital Education and the comprehensive Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) highlights that reducing inequality requires addressing multiple factors:

-        One in five (20.6%) Australians are digitally excluded or highly excluded (ADII 2025). Students in schools with high levels of disadvantage are more likely to digital resources at home compared to those in richer schools.

-        Low income households only rely on mobile-only internet access (around 1 in 10 Australians) which is not enough for online classes. Low-income families also spend a high amount of their income on data and connectivity.

Evidence suggests that Digital Ability gaps between digitally included and digitally excluded Australians recorded in recent years have begun to narrow. In 2025, we see an increase in Digital Ability for Australians aged 75 and over (rising from 23.3 in 2023 to 41.5 in 2025) and Australians who did not complete secondary school (rising from 38.5 in 2023 to 54.4 in 2025). This is likely a result of people in these groups becoming internet users for the first time and efforts to support digital skills and literacy. Despite improvements, there are still considerable gaps in Digital Ability.

Australia's approach to reducing inequalities in digital education is multi faced, targeting the three core dimensions of the digital divide: Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability. Some of Australia's ideas are:

-        School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI)

A Federal Government program that provides a free National Broadband Network (NBN) service to eligible families with school-aged children who currently do not have a home internet connection.

-        State-Based Connectivity and Device Programs like Targeted NGO Programs (e.g., The Smith Family, Good Things Foundation Australia): These organisations run programs like the Digital Learning Essentials program which provides reliable laptops, internet access and technical support.

Australia's goal is to have a national standard that ensures all Australian students have the minimum required tools, skills, and support to benefit from digital learning because all students deserve good education both digital and normal face to face education.

Resources:

https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/

https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/