



Higher Educations Institute ICT report

LOVE.DIST@NCE Project - ICT

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Learning in the higher education system requires mastery in a wide range of digital literacy skills. Lecturers and faculty members encounter significant gaps in these abilities among students. In many cases those gaps can be identified between different populations, which affect the success of unique populations in coping with academic tasks.

Online learning emphasizes gaps between students from different groups in the population, due to different aspects. The coronavirus pandemic and the rapid transition of the academic studies to online learning, has further sharpened these gaps which have often led to significant differences in the quality of learning and success.

MEITAL -The Inter-University Center for E-learning (IUCEL), is an inter-institutional unit that works to promote the use of teaching and learning technologies among institutions of higher education in Israel (universities and academic colleges). For decades, MEITAL has been collaborating with institutions of higher education in order to promote and improve the use of technology in the teaching and learning processes.

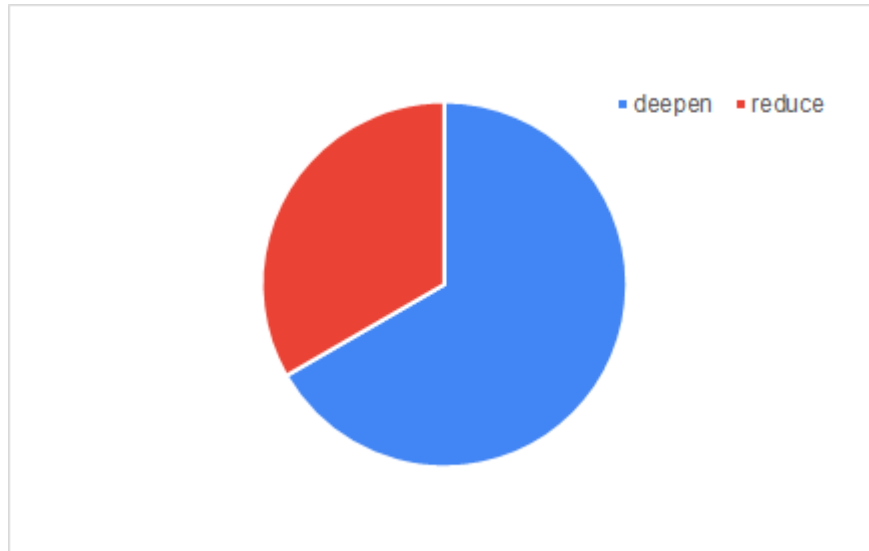
One of the projects in which MEITAL is a partner, is the international project LOVE@distance, which aims to characterize the place of technology among different groups and populations, and to find out from an institutional point of view, whether technology promotes or hinders the development of these groups.

Different challenges in online learning depend on multicultural and multilingual contexts, as well as address populations with special needs.

In the summer of 2020, we conducted a survey among lecturers and officials from the field of digital learning at 19 academic institutions in Israel. The survey examined attitudes and perceptions related to unique populations that are more sensitive to online learning than others. We examined the main challenges and the technological, logistical and pedagogical solutions offered in the institutions.



We asked: Do you think that online learning deepens or reduces existing social gaps?

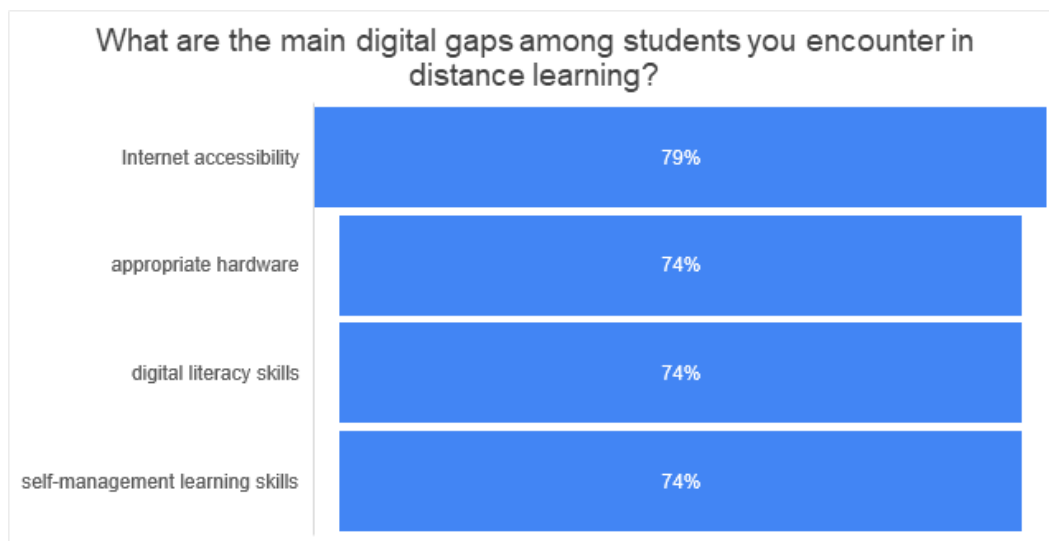


52% of respondents said that online learning deepens the gap.

26% claimed that it reduces.

All respondents without exception were aware of the need to characterize unique populations that are more sensitive to online learning than others.

We asked what are the main causes of disparities and what are the difficulties which students cope with in online learning?





The vast majority of respondents to the survey claimed that the most significant digital gaps are: **Internet accessibility**, lack of appropriate hardware for example: **laptops, cameras, microphones** as well as gaps between students in **digital literacy skills and SML** (self-management learning).

In addition, significant challenges has been found in **coping with learning materials** which are not adapted to the digital space. About **10%** of the respondents referred to multicultural factors, for example: gaps and difficulties in **language**, difficulties arising from **beliefs** and **cultures** that **conflict** with distance learning needs, and difficulties related to physical needs such as: accessibility for the visually and / or hearing impaired, physical disabilities of various types, lack of appropriate learning rooms.

The second part of the survey examined the solutions proposed in the academic institutions to deal with these challenges.

The first and simplest assistance provided in some of the institutions was the supply of technological equipment to underprivileged populations in order to provide them a basic infrastructure that enables accessibility and use of online learning materials. Institutions lend students laptops and appropriate technological aids for lecturers as well.

When it comes to monitoring students who have difficulty managing the learning processes and dealing with online learning requirements, creative and diverse solutions have been found.

The general conclusion was that the institution must be active in identifying the difficulties even among students who do not apply for help for various reasons. A well-known and permanent address is required at the institution, whose role is to coordinate the issue and provide technological solutions and advice.

For each course, a learning coordinator must be appointed whose job is to ensure that all students meet the required learning pace, to locate those who discover difficulties and to mediate the learning for them individually or in small groups.

In some institutions, students have been offered free courses in digital literacy skills.

In some of the academic institutions, there are teaching- and -learning centers whose main role is to provide various solutions for students and academic staff, for example: For students from underprivileged populations, digital skills development workshops are held. Guidelines and tools are given for planning and managing the time. In addition, they offer solutions related to teaching methods, for example: Workshops and individual counseling to lecturers to assist them in organizing and redesigning the course contents and assignments so they will suit the online learning in terms of the scope and workload of the student, and in



terms of adapting the contents and activities to synchronous and asynchronous online learning.

In addition, accessibility adjustments are made for students with special needs.

Solutions are offered to make the learning materials accessible by using technology: recording and transcription technologies, reading software, typing software, and technologies that may assist the student during the learning process. All accessibility adjustments for students with special needs are in collaboration and consultation with the Israel Accessibility Association.

In conclusion, online learning sharpens the gaps that exist between different populations in Israeli society.

Academic institutions that will be able to accommodate differences between students, bring the issue to the attention of stakeholders - lecturers, functionaries and the academic institution as a whole, adapt teaching and learning to all population groups - will succeed in taking advantage of these gaps and take advantage of online learning.