

Can podcasts improve educational inequalities?

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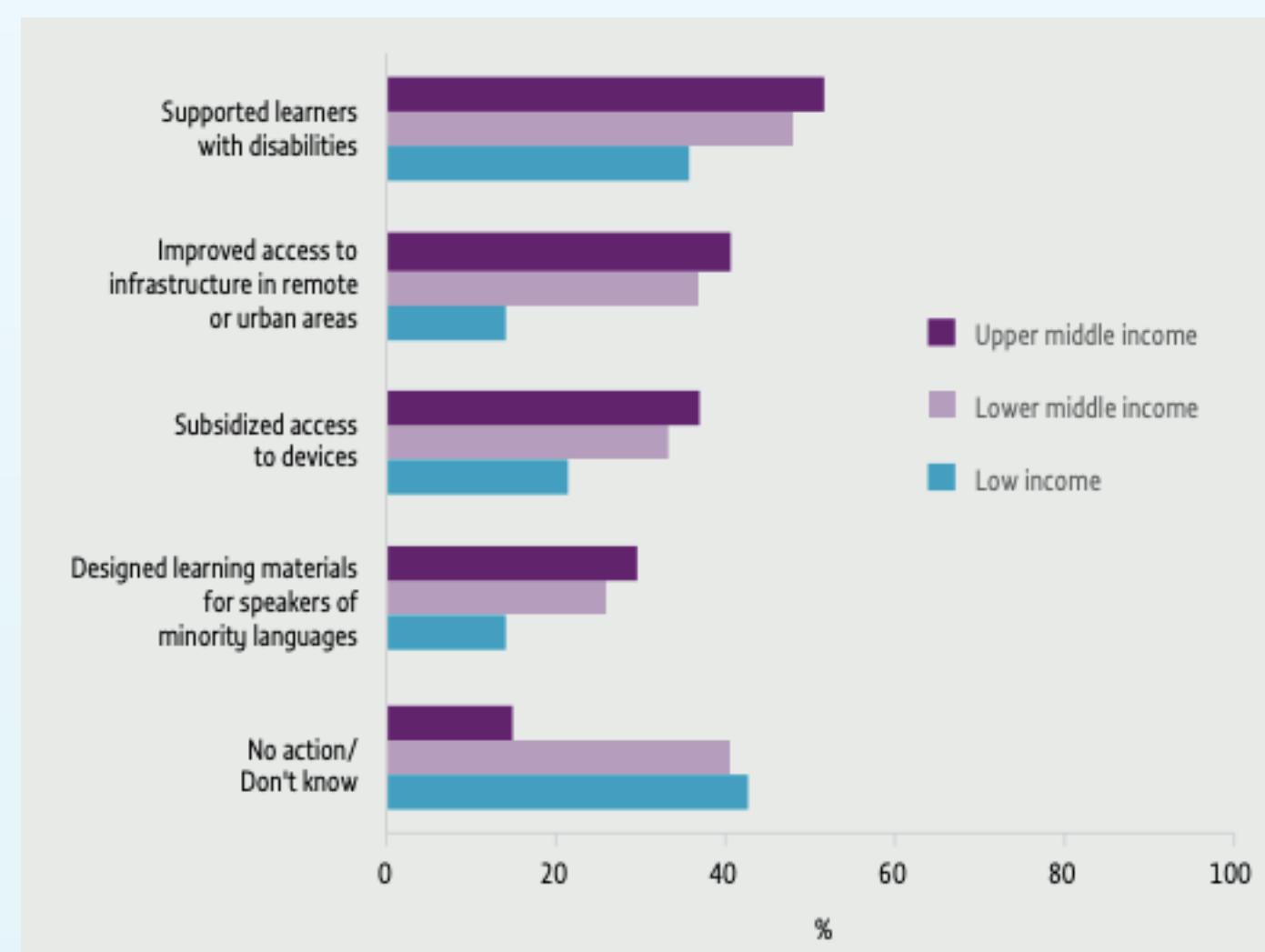
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Introduction

- Research in the field of technology often pictures technology as a straightforward means to educational equality, without realizing its potentiality in producing exclusions and inequalities (Gallagher & Knox, 2019).
- The problem of the **digital divide**, namely, the gap between groups with higher-socio-economic status (SES) and lower-SES in the opportunities to access the Internet and technologies (OECD, 2001), is more profoundly revealed under the Covid-19 pandemic.
- About 40% of lower- and middle-income countries have not been able to subsidise digital resources and to support students that are most at risk of exclusion during the pandemic.

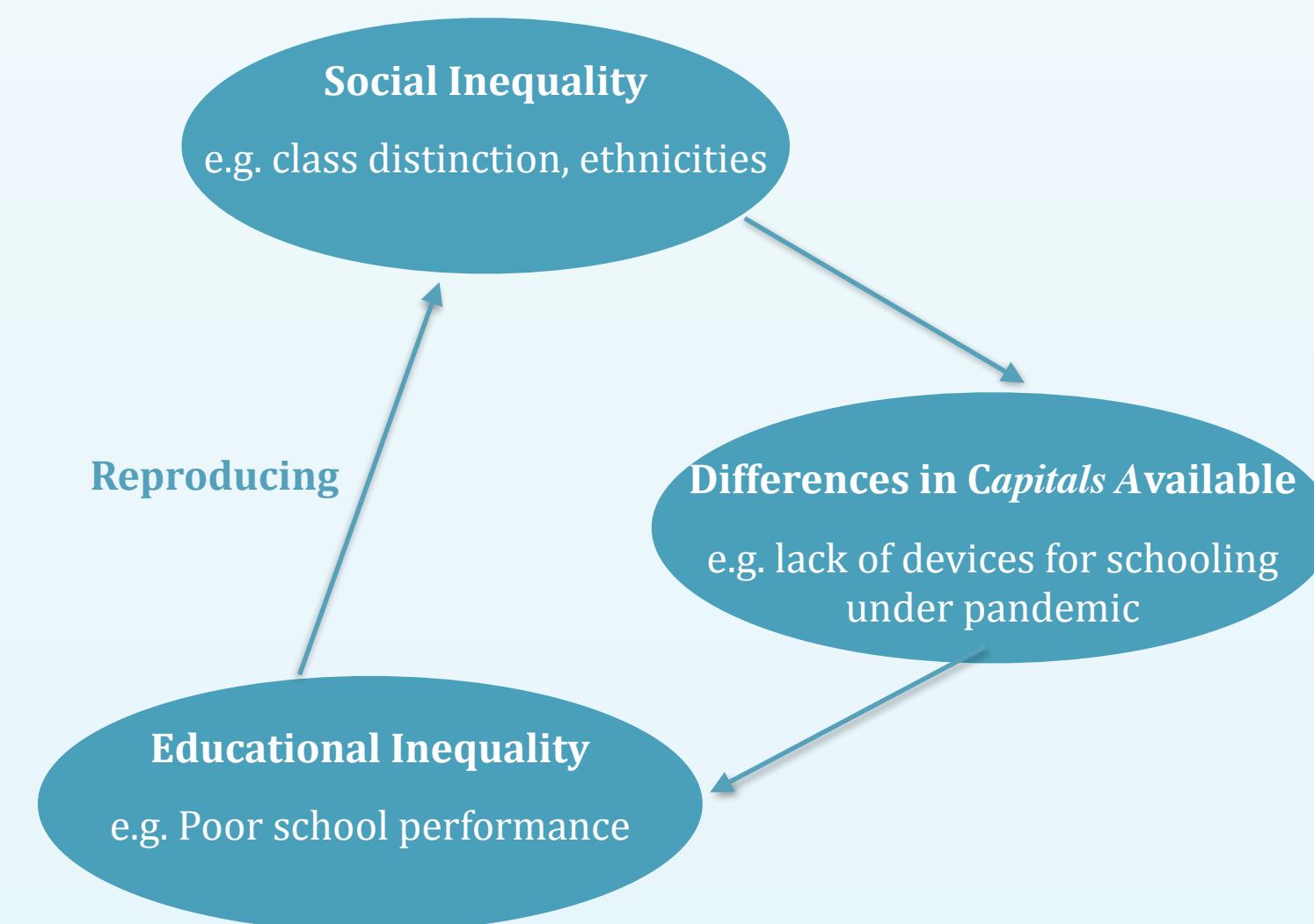


Source: UNESCO, 2020

- Podcasts, as an audio-centric form of digital media that is available to be downloaded and played online, has the potential for day-to-day knowledge dissemination (Ferrer, Shaw, & Lorenzetti, 2021).
- Being increasingly used as teaching tools and incorporated in the field of sociology (Prince, 2020), podcasts could potentially offer alternative solutions to educational inequalities.

Theoretical Framework

- Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Capital and Class Distinction:** Social inequality is reproduced from schooling when different *capitals*, including social, cultural and economic, are differently accessed by students from a different social class (Barrett & Martina, 2012).
- Extending Bourdieu's notion of class distinction to different ethnic, gender, regional groups and groups with special needs, to make the theory more all-encompassing for more population.



Methods

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two students from both working- (James) and middle-class (Arthur) families.
- A group podcast was produced.

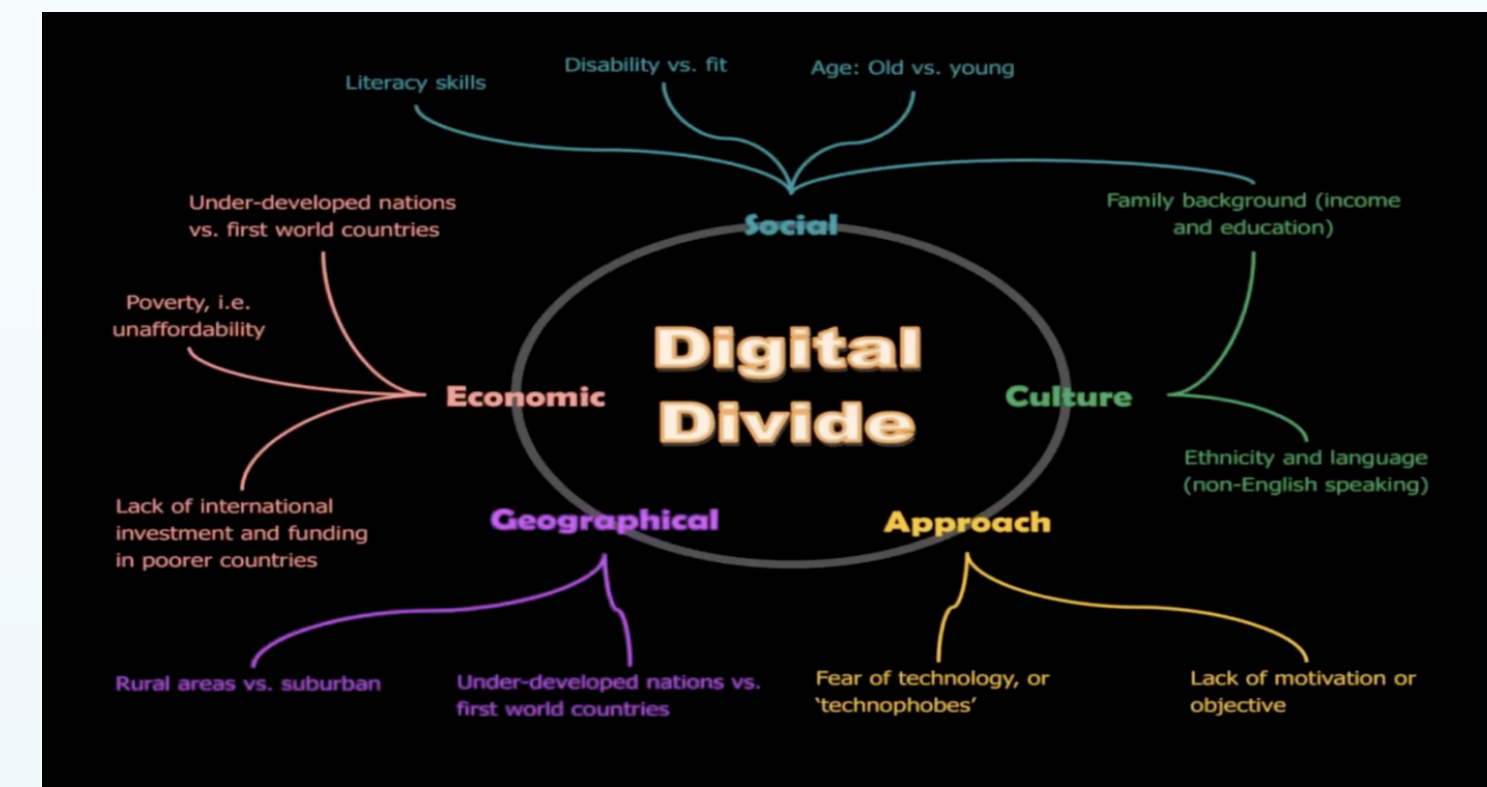


"We have one computer in the house that I need to share with two of my siblings, therefore we have to take turns. My parents are also very busy with their work so after lessons, I have no one to ask for help. I am already falling behind because I cannot always attend the classes on time, but this situation is made worse with the fact that there is no one I can reach out to, or libraries to go to. I am really worried about the outcome that this will bring about."
— James (Working-class Student)

"I have had a laptop from my parents and some remote private tutoring so that I do not really fall behind [on my studies]...[My teacher and tutor have a one-on-one Zoom session with me] at least twice a week to check if everything is going alright and to check that I am keeping up with my studies."
— Arthur (Middle-class Student)

Key Concepts

- Five Dimensions of Digital Divide:**



Source: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2020

- Four Levels of Digital Divide:** (Brehm, 2020)
 - 1) Access and connectivity;
 - 2) Readiness and skills;
 - 3) Digital use as cultural capital;
 - 4) Representativeness of particular groups within the field of technology.
- Inequalities** (Czerniewicz & Rother, 2018)
 - Vital Inequality:** e.g., **access**, success, openness
 - Resource Inequality:** e.g., **cultural, social, economic capital**
 - Existential Inequality:** e.g., dignity, respect, autonomy [**personal**]

Findings

- When tackling educational inequality, it is critical to consider not just the *access* but also the *social-cultural* and *personal* dimensions of uses of technologies.
- The "vital inequality" is shown through the two's unequal access to computer devices.
- The "resource inequality" is indicated when they are differently supported by schools and families in terms of the skills and uses of technologies.
- The "existential inequality" is pictured when James expressed a sense of inferiority while being left behind in learning.

Conclusion & Implications

- Podcast, as a traditional form of technologies, has the very potential to address the issue of educational inequalities through three dimensions — access, socio-cultural and emotional.
- Access:** A podcast is able to achieve this goal given its easy accessibility, low cost, adaptivity to audiences' different needs, and flexible playability when downloaded (Drew, 2017, p. 49; Kay, 2012; Prince, 2020).
- Socio-cultural Dimension:** Podcast are easily customizable, even for schools from the highest-poverty area, as teaching materials to enrich core learning contents since they require simple devices to record, edit and disseminate (Drew, 2017; Prince, 2020).
- Personal Dimension:** By engaging audiences emotionally through narratives and storytelling, podcasts help draw the attention of the relatively well-off listeners to social justice issues, such as inequalities.
- However, actors, including governments, podcast hosts and educators, have to face up to the profit-driven practices of podcasting, difficulty in incorporating podcasts in learning meaningfully and the ethical considerations in producing podcasts.

Acknowledgements

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