

Report on “Bridging the digital divide in the G20: skills for the new age” by Krish Chetty, Urvashi Aneja, Vidisha Mishra, Nozibele Gcora, and Jaya Josie for *Economics*.

In the following, I outline my feedback on the paper. I want to make clear that I am not an expert in policy making, so I will be evaluating the paper solely on its goals (set by itself) and based on its methodology.

The paper addresses the problem of the digital divide. My first major concern is the paper’s objective. The aim of the paper is very unclear and confusing. In the abstract, the authors write: “This paper considers a three-pronged digital skills strategy ...” But it remains unclear what the authors mean by “consider”. Do they want to develop such a strategy? If yes, it might be a substantial contribution. In the objectives section (section 2), the paper tries to link the agenda of the G20 to the digital divide. However, the argumentation is not convincing. The paper does not provide evidence that the digital divide is somehow related to the goals of the G20. The claim that the digital divide compares with the financial crisis of 2008 is unsubstantiated. Linking the goals of G20 and digital divide would be essential for this paper.

My second major concern is the method. The paper shows serious methodological shortcomings. In section 3 “approach”, the authors write that they use “a systematic review of international studies” and “in addition, relevant case studies are reviewed ... Case studies from Asia and Africa are reviewed” and “in addition a quantitative assessment was conducted of all new jobs advertised in South Africa’s premier recruitment website ...” The paper, however, does not keep its promise to be methodologically systematic. There is no description on the selection of the studies. Later only one case study, from South Africa, is discussed (instead of Asia and Africa as announced). This case study uses the job advertisement data, which was announced as a separate methodological step. This is inconsistent. The job data analysis could be interesting and might have some potential, but since the paper does not outline how the data was collected, the results are not very useful. The reader needs to know how the ads were selected and which timespan was used.

The results of Table 1 appear ad-hoc. After citing some prior publications, the paper says “In short, the key disciplines which emerge are mentioned in Table 1.” The link between this “result” (the table contents) and the prior literature should be much clearer. Similarly, the framework in Figure 2 emerges ad hoc and without any development. The framework is also much too generic. It also remains unclear what role academics play in it.

Minor issues:

Though most readers might be familiar with the digital divide, it would help to outline a definition very early in the paper.

In the first section, empirical results from prior studies are discussed. A strong voice in these results is that women do not see any value in ICT, but the rest of the paper argues for building ICT skills. How can skills help to overcome that (perceived) lack of purpose?