



Generative AI, ChatGPT

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The AI Divide: How Technology Gaps Deepen Social Inequality

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an integral part of daily life, but a growing divide is emerging between those who can use it effectively and those who cannot. This AI divide is widening inequalities across various sectors. To bridge this gap, greater public awareness and proactive action are needed.

AI Divide Between Corporations Widens, Fueling a Productivity Crisis

The AI utilization gap among companies is widening, driven by differences in investment capacity. According to a report published by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy this year, the AI adoption rate among large corporations in South Korea stands at approximately 65.1 percent, while that of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remains much lower at 35.6 percent. Large

corporations actively invest in AI-related infrastructure and offer various financial support and training programs to their employees. In contrast, SME workers often face difficulties accessing AI subscription services due to high expenses.

Workers are also experiencing this divide firsthand. A survey conducted by the workplace community application Blind and *Dong-A Ilbo* revealed that 78.4 percent of respondents believe company size and individual income levels strongly affect AI skills, highlighting the link to social inequality.

The critical issue is that this divide may ultimately deepen productivity disparities. Professor Kim Hyeon-cheol from Korea University's Dept. of Computer Science warned, "Those who effectively utilize AI maximize productivity and efficiency, creating greater value, whereas those who do not are increasingly likely to be marginalized in the labor market."

The Deepening Regional and Individual AI Divide

The divide is also visible at the regional level. According to

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a 2024 report by the National Information Society Agency (NIA), more than 80 percent of AI-related companies and infrastructure are concentrated in the Seoul metropolitan area. This concentration limits AI company growth and job creation in non-metropolitan regions, worsening economic disparities between areas. The migration of talent to Seoul is accelerating, while residents in other regions face limited access to AI education and

technology, widening the gap in social opportunities.

Even at the individual level, the AI divide is growing rapidly. Recently, large information technology companies have launched premium subscription services, such as SuperGrok Heavy for \$300 per month and Chat GPT Pro for \$200 per month, offering advanced AI features. However, economically disadvantaged groups, including low-income individuals, those with limited technology access, and the elderly, have fewer opportunities to experience such services. According to the NIA's 2024 Digital Information Divide statistics, about 51 percent of the general population has used AI services, compared to only 30.7 percent of vulnerable groups, creating a gap of more than 20 percentage points. Kim pointed out that this gap will cause long-term problems that make social mobility even more difficult.

How to Resolve the AI Divide?

Bridging the AI divide requires strengthening national

infrastructure and investing in technology. The government has designated key AI infrastructure facilities, including the Ulsan AI Data Center and the Gwangju National AI Data Center, as central hubs in this effort. In addition, it is also advancing projects led by the Ministry of Science and ICT (MSIT) to expand micro data centers using domestically developed AI semiconductors.

These efforts aim to boost the competitiveness of the AI industry and create a foundation for narrowing the gap between regions, companies, and individuals. Improving access to AI education is also a priority. According to MSIT, AI experience centers are planned in all 17 provinces, allowing children and teenagers to engage with AI from an early age. This initiative seeks to reduce regional disparities in education and technology and help future generations develop equal AI competencies.

However, experts cautioned that government efforts alone are insufficient. Kim stressed, "The government alone cannot solve the AI divide. Meaningful change can only be achieved through cooperation with private companies and civil society." He added that, "Private companies should take responsibility by providing AI education programs and mentoring, as well as fostering a culture of responsible AI development. Meanwhile, civil society must actively engage in leading AI education campaigns centered around local communities and train volunteers to support digitally vulnerable groups."

Prof. Lee Kyung-jun from Kyung Hee University's Dept. of Big Data Analytics warned that the recent suspension of mandatory AI digital textbooks in schools could make access to AI education increasingly reliant on private tutoring. He said, "Students from relatively stable economic backgrounds can access AI through private education, but low-income students may face relatively limited opportunities to experience AI." He also added, "It is important to implement inclusive policies that ensure all students can enjoy equal access to AI education, regardless of their economic background."

The AI gap is more than a technological issue; it is deepening economic and social inequalities. Closing the AI divide is a challenge that society must address collectively. Collaboration among government, businesses, and the education sector will be essential to expand AI education and infrastructure for all.