



LEARNING BRIEF

Technology in education: Opportunities or risks? A critical debate towards the launching of the 2023 Global Monitoring Report

This Learning Brief was compiled by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) following the webinar held on the 30th of June 2023 entitled “Technology in education: Opportunities or risks? A critical debate towards the launching of the 2023 Global Monitoring Report”. The content presented in this Learning Brief is a compilation of risks, challenges, opportunities and recommendations that were raised by panellists and participants that are associated with the adoption of technology in the education sector in various parts of the world.

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About the webinar

Since 2021, the Global Campaign for Education has put a interest on the provision of education through technology following the abrupt uptake of EdTech solutions to minimise the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education. With support from the European Union (EU) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through Enabel and the GIZ-BACKUP Initiative, GCE started a project 'Harnessing Education Technology as a Response to COVID-19' to support the uptake of digital solutions and provide evidence of their potential and limitations in Africa. This webinar was organised within the framework of this project.

The learning event successfully provided a platform on which GCE members, partners and stakeholders learned about the objectives of the focus of Global Monitoring Report 2023 in education technology and its preparation process, built a space for reflection on the opportunities, limitations, challenges, and risks associated with technology applied to education, especially digital learning, and artificial intelligence. Finally, the webinar generated interest in the Global Monitoring Report as an advocacy tool for GCE members and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in general.

The webinar brought together a variety of speakers and experts on technology and education including Mr. Manos Antoninis-Director of the Global Monitoring Report (GMR), Mr. Benedicto Kondowe-Executive Director of the Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) of Malawi, Ms. Amanda Levido from the Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Prescolaire (OMEP)-Australia and Ms. Laura Giannecchini-Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educaci3n (CLADE) Institutional Development Coordinator. The event was moderated by Mr. Wolfgang Leumer-GCE Senior Program Manager.

Brief analysis and 2023 GEM Report

The scientific and technological progress registered in the last decades is undeniable, in practically all areas of human endeavour. Thanks to these advances, it has been possible to substantially improve the quality-of-life worldwide. In the specific field of education, technological development and the expansion of digital opportunities have brought about 'new' teaching and learning dynamics that demand the development of new skills in all education actors, including teachers, students, and parents. However, there are some tensions in aligning the expansion of digital education and the State's obligation to secure the right to education for all, especially how the digitalisation of education is exacerbating inequalities within and beyond the school, and how the lack of regulation of private actors' engagement in the provision of digitalisation of education promotes old and emerging forms of commercialisation and privatisation of education.

The 2023 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report will be launched on the 26th July 2023 and will analyse the use of technology in education around the world under the lenses of relevance, equity, scalability, and sustainability. The report argues that education systems should always ensure that learners' best interests are placed at the centre and that digital technologies are used to support an education based on human interaction, rather than aiming at substituting it. It includes a series of recommendations to ensure that countries are asking the right questions when deciding what technology to choose in education bearing in mind that technology is neither the "great problem" nor the "great solution" to education.

Risks and challenges associated with technology and education: the case of Malawi, Australia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Region

As Coalitions working with vast networks of CSOs in their respective countries and regions, CSEC, OMEP and CLADE have managed to identify, record and disseminate a number of risks and challenges associated with technology and education. Populations without access to internet connectivity are mostly concentrated in lower-income households and in rural areas. Variables such as race and ethnicity, gender and age reveal that historically marginalized groups continue to have less access to the internet and technological devices. Specific significant challenges in Malawi, the LAC region and to some extent (rural) Australia are outlined below:

- ◆ Insufficient infrastructure and poor internet connectivity pose significant challenges to implementing EdTech solutions effectively. The lack of reliable electricity supply and internet connectivity hinders the accessibility and usage of digital learning tools and platforms.
- ◆ There is a significant digital divide with limited access to technology and internet connectivity in rural and low-income areas. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack access to the necessary devices and connectivity to benefit from EdTech resources, exacerbating existing educational inequalities. This divide exacerbates educational inequalities and restricts the potential impact of EdTech.
- ◆ The regions in which all the Coalitions work in are linguistically diverse with multiple languages spoken. Unfortunately, most EdTech platforms and content are primarily available in English, which is not the first language for many learners. This language barrier can limit accessibility and effective utilization of EdTech resources.
- ◆ Many EdTech platforms and resources available in the market may not be localized or tailored to the specific needs and context of students and teachers. The lack of localized content can make it challenging to create engaging and relevant learning experiences for students.
- ◆ A high rate of illiteracy persists, now compounded by digital illiteracy. The use of digital technologies is restricted, especially among girls, women, PWDs and hard-to-reach-learners. New EdTech is not neutral and online education by itself does not improve teaching and learning processes, nor does it promote inclusion or democratization.
- ◆ Growing involvement and influence of large technology corporations in education remains a barrier and setback which mostly leads to the privatisation and increase in cost of EdTech.
- ◆ The storage of and extraction of students', teachers' and other education workers' data on online platforms is another concern. Through social media and surfing platforms, it is possible to capture and manipulate an astonishing amount of information about learners' behaviour, tastes, beliefs, political opinions, among others, and it is not clear how this data is being used and for what purposes. Data, which was previously provided in smaller quantities to the State in exchange for policies elaborated based on the public interest, now benefit companies interested in maximizing their profits.
- ◆ Teachers often lack the necessary skills and training to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching practices.

Opportunities presented by EdTech in Malawi, Australia, and the LAC Region

In essence, EdTech (Educational Technology) offers several opportunities for learners and teachers in various parts of the globe. By leveraging technology to enhance learning and education, education Coalitions, partners and stakeholders can address various challenges and improve educational outcomes. Recently, the UNGA-TES in 2022 gave primacy to digital education as one of the priorities to recover pandemic-related learning losses and reboot commitments to SDG 4. African leaders also held a high-level event where the African Union's Declaration on Transforming Education in Africa was adopted. These commitments to EdTech will undoubtedly give impetus and momentum to the much-needed recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic-related learning losses and reboot commitments to SDG 4.

Although technology alone cannot achieve our education goals, it can be a catalytic component of education reforms that will prepare children, young people, as well as adults, to lead needed transformations. This can be achieved by:

- ✦ Bridging the education gap by providing access to quality education for individuals who are unable to attend traditional schools. Through online platforms, learning management systems, and mobile applications, students in remote areas can access educational resources and participate in virtual classes.
- ✦ Focusing on enhancing digital literacy skills among students, teachers, and the wider community. By providing training on using technology effectively, individuals can acquire essential digital skills that are increasingly necessary in today's job market.
- ✦ Offering opportunities for teacher training and professional development. Online courses, webinars, and digital resources can enhance teachers' pedagogical skills and subject knowledge, enabling them to deliver high-quality instruction and keep up with new educational practices.
- ✦ Encouraging innovation and collaboration among educators, students, and educational institutions. It enables the sharing of best practices, collaborative projects, and interactive learning experiences, fostering a more dynamic and engaging educational ecosystem.
- ✦ Bridging the knowledge gap by providing access to up-to-date information, digital libraries, and educational resources. This empowers students to explore diverse topics, access educational materials beyond their textbooks, and stay informed about global trends and developments.

Combined, these opportunities can mitigate the enduring challenges in the education sector through high pupil-to-qualified teacher ratios, high pupil-to-classroom ratios and address high repetition rates. Fewer resources would be required to provide a uniform quality of education to learners. For example, one teacher could reach a far greater number than is, as of now possible. Repeaters could relearn without exhausting resources for learning and classroom congestion would be better managed by the use of technology to teach, rather than a reliance on interpersonal lessons.

Recommendations from the discussions

Webinar panellists and participants proffered the following recommendations to mitigate the negative effects of EdTech on the right to education:

- ◆ The Global Monitoring Report should be utilised as an advocacy tool for GCE members and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in general as it embodies adequate information, guidelines and interventions in relation to EdTech.
- ◆ Adequate training programs and professional development opportunities are essential to empower teachers to utilize EdTech tools and platforms effectively. Support all teachers to teach, use and deal with technology.
- ◆ Investing in infrastructure, providing reliable internet connectivity, promoting digital literacy among teachers and students, and ensuring equitable access to technology for all learners is essential.
- ◆ Ensure that all learners have access to technology resources, but protect them from the risks of technology such as cyberbullying, sex predators, scams, discrimination and marginalisation (digital divide).
- ◆ EdTech platforms and content should be primarily available in local languages with an option of English so that language barriers do not limit accessibility and effective utilization of EdTech resources.
- ◆ Developing partnerships among government, educational institutions, private sector, and Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) can play a vital role in supporting and scaling up EdTech initiatives in various countries.
- ◆ It is urgently required to invite the actors in the educational spaces to reflect on the technical and political implications of digitization in education, deepening the discussions on its limits and potential to overcome inequalities and guarantee the digital sovereignty of the peoples.

Resources

- Sign up to receive a copy of the 2023 GEM report: [here](#).

GLOBAL EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT

2023

Technology in
education:

A TOOL ON WHOSE TERMS?