



Summary of Session: Implementing digital technology in education. What are the risks and benefits?

Oxford Internet Institute

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<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2023/Agenda/Session/389>

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- Risks and benefits of using digital technology in education were discussed from the tech sector, academia and country-comparative perspective.
- It was emphasized that the learning takes place in different cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts. The local specificities must not be ignored when implementing technologies.
- It is important to have the users (students, teachers, parents, schools) at the core, when developing EdTech, and to involve users as producers.
- Much EdTech are produced by actors in the Global North, who may not be familiar with the context in the Global South, however their products are used also in the Global South.
- While technology has potential to provide access to high quality pedagogical content to a large population, data privacy and algorithmic biases were identified as one of the major issues.
- These issues can be alleviated when EdTech are designed as public good rather than having commercial goals as the priority.

Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date (5-8 bullets)

- Improving education access and quality has been a goal of the WSIS Action Lines. While this is a crucial effort, there are new emerging challenges that should be considered.
- One of the challenges is that most EdTech are produced by global players, who may not be familiar with the local needs. EdTech producers and designers may not share similar socio-economic, cultural, and political backgrounds with the users, which impedes effective usage



of EdTech. Hence, it is crucial that EdTech have a user-centric approach (bottom up rather than top down).

- Another issue is that with the large-scale rollout of EdTech, there is a structural shift in power. Increasingly it is the EdTech companies determine the metrics, the dashboards to measure students' and teachers' performances – in other words, EdTech companies are increasingly determining 'what counts' and what has value. Yet, educational values should be determined democratically, depending on the local needs.
- As most EdTech are provided by for profit companies, there is an increasing commercialization of education, which may not be aligned with the public values.
- Further, the public sector increasingly depends on the services provided by private companies, and there has been an increasing hollowing out of the public service system.
- Lastly, we need to discuss about who owns and controls the vast amount of data produced by students and teachers (EdTech users), and how is the data being used.

Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments (3-5 bullet points))

- Different stakeholders in EdTech have different perspectives, values, interests, and agenda, it is therefore important to have these interests aligned. However, different stakeholders have largely remained in their own silos and echo chambers. This session has invited three speakers and brought together EdTech sector, represented by Google, large international organisation, represented by OECD, and academia, represented by Oxford University, enabling exchange between three major stakeholder groups, breaking the silos. The audience also comes from a diverse range of sectors.
- This session has offered the opportunity for the speakers as well as the audience to connect and to understand each other's perspectives. There has been already follow ups with five academics, two EdTech companies, three government/international organisations, and two thinktanks.
- The Google and OECD representatives reported the takeaways from the session to their organisations, shaping the future visions.

Actionable plan (2-5 points)



- Maintaining and further strengthening the connections between different stakeholders. I have already planned a visit to the OECD in May 2023 to discuss further steps and share academic findings with the OECD.
- I will expand the current EdTech usage index (Shi and Stephany 2022), which tracks the usages of EdTech since 2019 in the UK, to a global usage index. The index will be shared with colleagues in academia and in relevant sectors.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)

- While developing technology is important, we need to get away from technology deterministic thinking. Social problems may not always be solvable with technology, because often the issues arise due to structural problems. While technology may alleviate certain aspects, ultimately it depends on how a society is structured. While technology can be used to increase social equality, implementing technology in a highly stratified society with low social mobility, it may increase the social divide. Hence, my suggestion for the WSIS 2024 is to discuss the structural problems while also considering low tech 'solutions'.