# Concerns rise over impact of education technology on children’s mental health and learning



In a recent reflection on the impact of education technology on children, concerns are mounting over the increasing reliance on digital tools within schools and the consequent effects on pupils' mental health, learning outcomes, and social development. The Times reports on these issues through the insights of American social psychologist Professor Jonathan Haidt, whose book, The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness, has brought considerable attention to the subject.

Professor Haidt’s work highlights the growing evidence linking the use of smartphones, tablets, and social media with rising rates of anxiety, distraction, and antisocial behaviour among young people. Despite widespread awareness of these issues, the proliferation of devices among very young children continues, with startling statistics such as 40% of two-year-olds in the United States already having their own tablets. The trend is shifting as children commonly receive smartphones at an even earlier age, raising comparisons to past public health missteps such as smoking in aeroplanes.

Parents have become increasingly wary of the unrestricted use of personal devices, pushing back on screen time at home. However, this has coincided with a dramatic expansion of “ed tech” – the integration of technological tools and platforms for learning – within schools. The UK has become a leading European hub for education technology companies, with the sector experiencing annual growth around 5.5%, projected to exceed £9.5 billion in value by next year.

The introduction of ed tech in schools means children often engage with digital assignments, peer assessments through emojis, and interactive learning aids featuring artificial intelligence characters. While proponents of ed tech argue it represents the future of efficient and engaging education, critics point out that its heavy use in early education may be counterproductive. A comprehensive 700-page UNESCO report titled An Ed-Tech Tragedy? documents global declines in literacy, science, and maths test scores since 2012, coinciding with increased technological use in classrooms.

Sweden’s Karolinska Institute, a leading medical research centre, commented in 2023 that “there’s clear scientific evidence that digital tools impair rather than enhance student learning.” Furthermore, the rise of ed tech has been linked to greater privatisation in education and profit generation for technology companies, who also collect extensive data on children.

Schools defend ed tech as a necessary adaptation for the digital age. Advocates argue that videos and interactive content can more effectively break down complex concepts compared to traditional textbooks. However, critics question whether the appeal of digitally-enhanced learning comes at the cost of essential skills such as sustained concentration, reading traditional texts, and social interaction.

The gamification of education through technology, accelerated by adaptations during the Covid-19 pandemic, is under scrutiny for delivering frequent small bursts of stimulation—such as rewards from emojis and AI fireworks—potentially distracting students from deeper engagement. This raises concerns about whether schools are prioritising shiny digital tools over experienced teachers and time-tested methods of learning.

Professor Haidt emphasises that schooling is not solely about academic knowledge but is also a vital environment for developing social skills, resilience, and human qualities that technology cannot replicate. The increased use of screens in classrooms, while attractive for its novelty and efficiency, may undermine these broader goals of education.

Schools and policymakers face ongoing debates about balancing technological innovation with the well-being and development of children. The growing prevalence of education technology in primary schools particularly challenges notions of how to best nurture the next generation in an era saturated with digital devices.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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