# Concerns rise over increasing use of ed tech in primary education amid mental health debate



In recent discussions around childhood education and mental health, significant concerns have been raised about the increasing use of digital technology in schools, particularly within the realm of "ed tech" — education technology. This trend, accelerating rapidly in the UK and beyond, highlights a growing paradox where parental efforts to limit children's screen time at home are seemingly counteracted by an expanding digital presence within classrooms.

The issue has gained prominence following the observations and research of American social psychologist Professor Jonathan Haidt, who visited London to discuss his bestselling book, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Haidt’s work explores the connection between social media, screen time, and the rising rates of mental health challenges among young people. He points to statistics revealing that 40 per cent of American two-year-olds already own their own tablets, a figure provoking startled reactions in audiences.

Ed tech is experiencing notable growth worldwide, with London recognised as Europe's leading city in the sector. In the UK, the industry is growing by approximately 5.5 per cent annually and is forecast to exceed a value of £9.5 billion by the following year. Advocates of ed tech promote it as a modern, efficient, and innovative approach to learning that enhances educational outcomes by integrating digital tools, interactive content, and artificial intelligence into school curricula. For some students, particularly those at postgraduate levels, technology may indeed offer benefits.

However, critical voices are raising alarms about the effects of ed tech in primary education. Observations from recent years illustrate a classroom environment where ten-year-olds submit essays online to be reviewed by peers using emojis, and five-year-olds learn to count through interactions with AI characters that celebrate correct answers with fireworks. Critics argue that such mechanisms may undermine deep learning and cognitive development, replacing traditional skills like reading and concentration with superficial engagement motivated by fleeting digital rewards.

A significant body of evidence supports these concerns. UNESCO’s extensive 700-page report *An Ed-Tech Tragedy?*, published in 2023, highlights correlations between the surge in ed tech use and declining global test scores in literacy, science, and mathematics since 2012. While direct causation remains under investigation, the trend suggests that digital tools may not be enhancing student performance as intended. The Karolinska Institute, a renowned Swedish medical research institution, asserts that digital tools may actually impair learning rather than improve it.

Teachers and school administrators often defend the use of ed tech as necessary preparation for a digital future, underscoring its appeal to students and potential to break complex concepts down more effectively than traditional textbooks. Yet, these claims are met with scepticism, especially when considering the broader consequences. The gamification of learning—featuring constant digital stimuli and interactive animations—has been compared to feeding children "junk food" for their brains, fostering dependency on rapid dopamine boosts rather than sustained intellectual effort.

Moreover, questions regarding the motivations behind rapid ed tech adoption have surfaced. Some suggest schools may be influenced by financial relationships with technology companies, akin to controversies seen in other sectors such as healthcare, where industry ties affect professional decisions. Such speculation points to a potential diversion of funds from enhancing teaching staff and educational environments toward digital platforms and software, raising accountability and priority concerns.

The conversation surrounding ed tech also touches on the fundamental goals of education. Beyond the acquisition of knowledge, schools are recognised as essential environments for teaching social skills, conflict resolution, resilience, and other key human interactions. These aspects of learning are difficult to replicate through technology and may be diminished by overreliance on digital tools.

Despite the lack of unified consensus, the growing presence of ed tech in classrooms is reshaping modern education. The Times reports that parents, educators, and researchers alike are actively debating the implications of increasing screen time during school hours, while continuing to balance the promises and pitfalls of digital learning for the youngest generations.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11587142/> - This article discusses the impact of digital devices on children's health, highlighting issues like prolonged inactivity and internet addiction linked to mental health problems. It supports concerns about excessive screen time in educational settings.
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3. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9273128/> - This systematic review covers both the positive and negative impacts of technology on children's health and development. It highlights the need for controlled technology use to support cognitive and social development.
4. <https://online.lynn.edu/resources/education/technology-impact-early-childhood-education> - This resource discusses the implications of technology in early childhood education, noting both the benefits and risks, including potential negative impacts on mental and emotional health.
5. <https://www.insightpsychological.ca/blog/archive/the-impacts-of-technology-on-children-and-their-mental-health/> - This blog post delves into the dual nature of technology's impact on children's mental health, covering both the positive effects of access to education and social connections, as well as negative effects like increased screen time.
6. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/faq/What-is-PISA-and-what-does-it-measure.htm> - Although not directly addressing ed tech, the OECD PISA framework emphasizes measuring educational outcomes like literacy and mathematics skills. This supports discussions about assessing the impact of digital tools on academic performance.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMiuAFBVV95cUxPMkJ6NFVZVU41MVJsSHdmRDdZaDJNU2pVbTlQc3ljckNncUhVVEp5d2RFcWdVV3hZMmFqSlpTVDVISUsxNW5PWGtHczRNQXVobzdqN0Vmc3B5THA2Y0VOLUFNdENwZ01HODRPbGR0MDNyRzBfU2QwNWxNd2FWUnFFdFNVVnJsOF9SaGpaQU9vQXltVWF6bTFnNWtvRTFSckJxNDRUN1dvNEdsOW9KbmF1Vk1FNmc5WkNI?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data