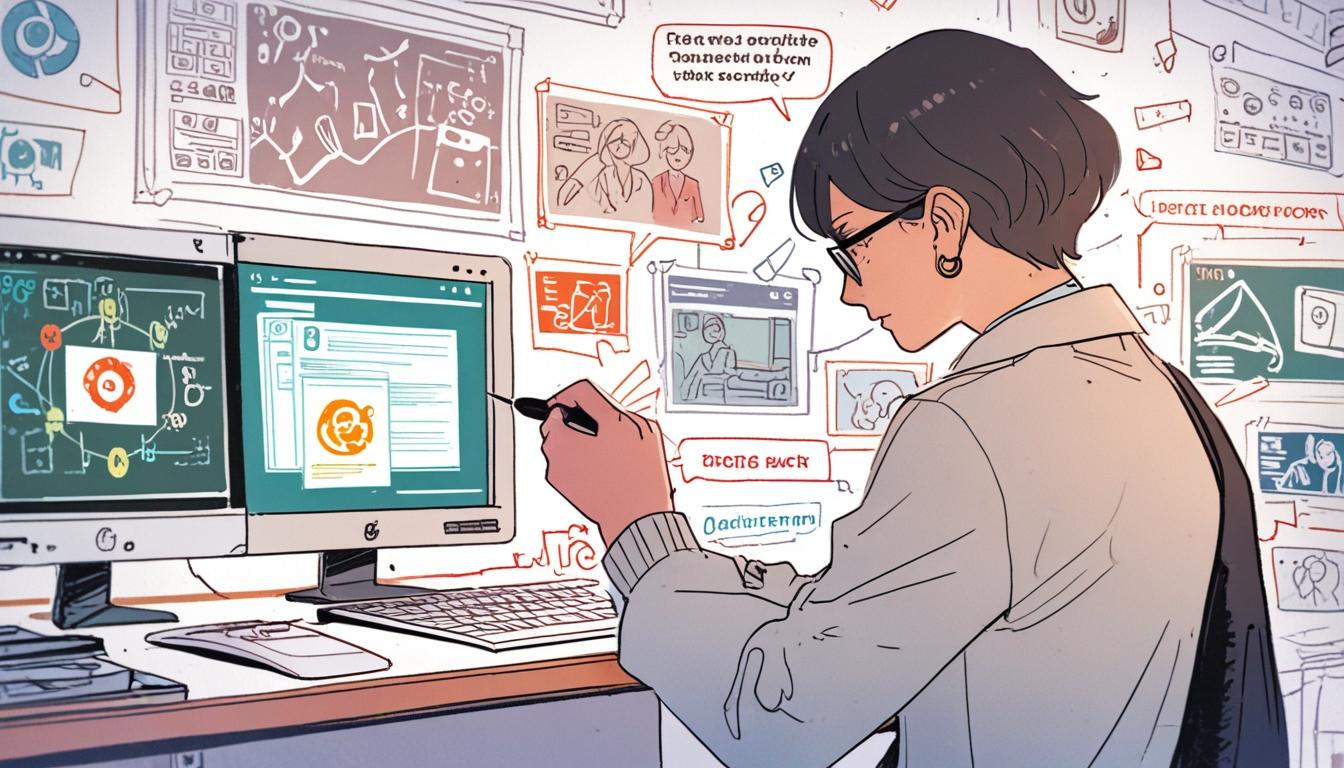
# Researchers call for reassessment of ed-tech use in classrooms over privacy concerns



An international consortium of researchers is calling for a fundamental reassessment of the use of digital technology in educational settings, citing concerns over student data privacy and wellbeing. The researchers warn that numerous classroom education tools currently employed are gathering student information in ways that remain largely opaque to schools and educators.

The team, which includes experts from the University of South Australia and the London School of Economics and Political Science, has highlighted how education technologies (ed-tech) often operate behind the scenes with little transparency about data usage. This lack of clarity makes it challenging for schools and teachers to fully understand the implications of the data collected about children.

Dr Jamie Manolev, a researcher at UniSA and contributing author to the recently published Handbook of Children and Screens, emphasised the issues stemming from the rapid proliferation of ed-tech. Speaking to Mirage News, Dr Manolev stated, "Edtech products have rapidly flooded classrooms worldwide, but this has outpaced regulation and research. As a result, many tools have been adopted without understanding their long-term educational or ethical impacts."

Dr Manolev further stressed the importance of educating both children and teachers about digital technologies. "Children shouldn't just be taught with technologies, but about them, which centres on the knowledge and competencies of each teacher, who should be supported to understand the inner workings of the programs they use," they explained.

While acknowledging the potential benefits of ed-tech — such as engaging students more effectively, supporting personalised learning, improving access, and making school processes more efficient — Dr Manolev pointed to the risk of tools being "data-hungry," collecting information through every interaction including lessons, assessments, communications, and ongoing monitoring. This data-centric approach raises concerns about reducing students to mere datapoints, potentially limiting their development and raising serious questions over privacy and student wellbeing.

The researchers also highlighted the challenges in ensuring equitable technology access. Despite ed-tech often being pitched as a means to level educational disparities, particularly for students in rural or remote areas, hindrances such as inadequate internet access, inherent data biases, and financial costs continue to prevent many students from benefiting equally.

Among the platforms scrutinised are widely used ed-tech tools like ClassDojo, GoGuardian, and Gaggle, which the researchers say frequently oversimplify student behaviour by reducing it to numerical scores that lack contextual understanding.

Dr Velislava Hillman of the London School of Economics and Political Science, the lead author of the chapter, called for enhanced support for teachers to comprehend how these digital tools operate. Speaking to Mirage News, Dr Hillman said, "We need to move beyond the idea that more tech is always better. The ed-tech sector is extremely fast, making it hard for teachers to keep up. And while teachers may try to engage in ongoing professional development, they need the time and support to be able to do so."

She also underscored the necessity of stronger regulatory frameworks. "Stronger regulation is essential to protect students and ensure that technology supports their learning without compromising their privacy or wellbeing. We must prioritise children's interests to safeguard their future in a safe and ethical way, in an increasingly digitised school environment."

The chapter authored by this international team appears in a landmark volume on childhood studies, contributing to rising calls worldwide for reforms in the deployment and comprehension of digital tools in schooling, including within Australian classrooms.

The multidisciplinary group of contributing authors comprises Dr Velislava Hillman (London School of Economics and Political Science), Dr Jamie Manolev (University of South Australia), Dr Samantha-Kaye Johnston (University of Oxford), Dr Priya C. Kumar (Pennsylvania State University), Dr Florence Martin (North Carolina State University), Assistant Professor Elana Zeide (University of Nebraska), Professor Dr Gergana Vladova (Humboldt University of Berlin), and Dr Rina Lai (University of Cambridge).

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