

The Digital Leap: Digital Education Policy for a Post-Pandemic World

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Introduction

The digital transformation of education has become a key topic of policy discussions worldwide, significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As traditional education systems struggled to adapt to remote learning, the urgent need for a robust digital education framework became more apparent than ever. This article will explore the evolution of digital education and the recent regulations shaping its landscape, and offer policy recommendations to ensure its effective implementation.

Background

Digital education has evolved significantly over the past few decades. The initial phases saw the integration of basic computer literacy programs into curricula.¹ However, the advent of the internet and rapid technological advancements have revolutionised how education is delivered. Online learning platforms, digital classrooms, and educational apps have become integral to modern education systems. The pandemic further highlighted the necessity for digital readiness as schools worldwide shifted to remote learning almost overnight. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of home connectivity, revealing persistent socio-economic divides in digital access (Crick 2021). Although digital tools have the potential to personalize and enhance learning experiences, ensuring equitable access and effective integration into pedagogy remains a critical challenge.²

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the integration of digital tools in education has the potential to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments. Their report emphasizes that while digital technologies can enhance learning outcomes, disparities in access to technology must be addressed to avoid exacerbating existing educational inequalities.

Moreover, recently the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) analysis (2023) highlighted significant disparities and evolving strategies in digital education across its Member States (OECD 2023, 5–9). While access to digital technologies in schools has become extensive, with nearly one computer available per 15-year-old student, quality and usage remain inconsistent. Many national digital education strategies emphasize the need for basic information and communication technologies infrastructure, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and blockchain, which are integral to modern educational frameworks because they not only facilitate enhanced personalized learning and adaptive teaching methodologies but also optimize data-driven decision-making processes. However, digital

¹ Global Education Monitoring Report Team. 2023. Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023: Technology in Education: A Tool on Whose Terms? Paris: UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54676/UZQV8501>.

² Tom Crick, Covid-19 and Digital Education: a Catalyst For Change?, ITNOW, Volume 63, Issue 1, Spring 2021, Pages 16–17, <https://doi.org/10.1093/itnow/bwab005>

education strategies frequently lack detailed implementation, governance, and funding mechanisms, which are necessary for their success and sustainability.³

Recent Regulations

Several recent initiatives and regulations aim to support and enhance digital education. The European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) is a pivotal framework that outlines strategic priorities and specific actions to foster high-performing digital education ecosystems.⁴ The plan includes several critical components aimed at strengthening digital education across Europe. These include structured dialogues with Member States to address gaps in connectivity and equipment, enhance digital skills in educational institutions, and establish guidelines for digital pedagogy. The plan also promotes blended learning approaches, drawing lessons from the pandemic to ensure high-quality, inclusive education. Additionally, it offers funding opportunities for digital infrastructure, such as gigabit and 5G connectivity, focusing on disadvantaged groups and students with disabilities.⁵

In addition to European initiatives, the OECD has actively promoted policies supporting digital education. Their framework for digital education policies highlights the importance of a coordinated approach, emphasizing collaboration between governments, educational institutions, and the private sector to create a conducive environment for digital learning (OECD 2023, 5–7). The OECD advocates for regular updates and a coordinated approach to digital education strategies to align with technological advancements and policy goals, ensuring a more inclusive and high-quality educational experience for all students.⁶

Policy Recommendations

Several policy suggestions can be taken into consideration in order to implement digital education successfully:

First of all, governments must prioritise providing all students with dependable internet access, and the digital tools they need to close the digital divide. This includes subsidies for low-income households and focused investments in underprivileged areas. A critical step in this approach is the European Commission's measures to boost digital tools and connectivity for education.

³ OECD. "Policies for the Digital Transformation of School Education: Proposed analytical framework and methodology" (2023) [https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/EDPC/SR\(2023\)2/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/EDPC/SR(2023)2/en/pdf).

⁴ European Commission. "Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)." https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en.

⁵European Commission. "Digital Education"

⁶OECD. "Policies for the Digital Transformation of School Education: Proposed analytical framework and methodology" (2023) [https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/EDPC/SR\(2023\)2/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/EDPC/SR(2023)2/en/pdf).

Second, support and training for teachers are crucial. Educators require continual professional development to successfully incorporate digital resources into their teaching techniques.⁷ Initiatives to upskill teachers in digital pedagogy and programs like the Erasmus Teacher Academies are essential. The SELFIE tool for instructors, developed by the European Commission, provides a framework for self-evaluation to assist educators in improving.

Additionally, all parties involved in the education ecosystem should make advancing digital literacy a top goal. All educational levels should incorporate digital literacy. This entails creating standardized rules to assist schools in promoting digital literacy and thwarting misinformation, as well as upgrading curricula to incorporate digital skills and competencies. The OECD recommends a comprehensive strategy for digital literacy that involves all parties involved in the educational environment.

Furthermore, ethical standards for using AI and data must be developed as its application in education grows. Several rules are required to guarantee data privacy and the appropriate application of AI technologies. The European Commission's development of these guidelines is a positive move.

Finally, inclusive digital learning environments are essential for egalitarian education.⁸ The main goal of policy should be creating inclusive digital learning environments that meet the requirements of all students—including those from underprivileged backgrounds and those with disabilities. This involves creating accessible digital content and offering assistive technology. UNESCO emphasizes the significance of inclusion in digital education policies.⁹

Conclusion

The digital transformation of education presents both challenges and opportunities. By addressing the digital divide, supporting educators, and fostering digital literacy, policymakers can ensure that digital education enhances learning outcomes and promotes equity. The coordinated efforts at national and international levels, as seen in the European Commission and OECD initiatives, are vital for creating a resilient and inclusive digital education ecosystem. The future of education lies in our ability to adapt to and harness the power of digital technologies, ensuring that no student is left behind.

⁷ UNESCO. "Need to Know: Digital Education." UNESCO. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education/need-know>.

⁸ UNESCO. "Need to Know: Digital Education." UNESCO. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education/need-know>.

⁹ Global Education Monitoring Report Team. 2023. Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023: Technology in Education: A Tool on Whose Terms? Paris: UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54676/UZQV8501>.

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