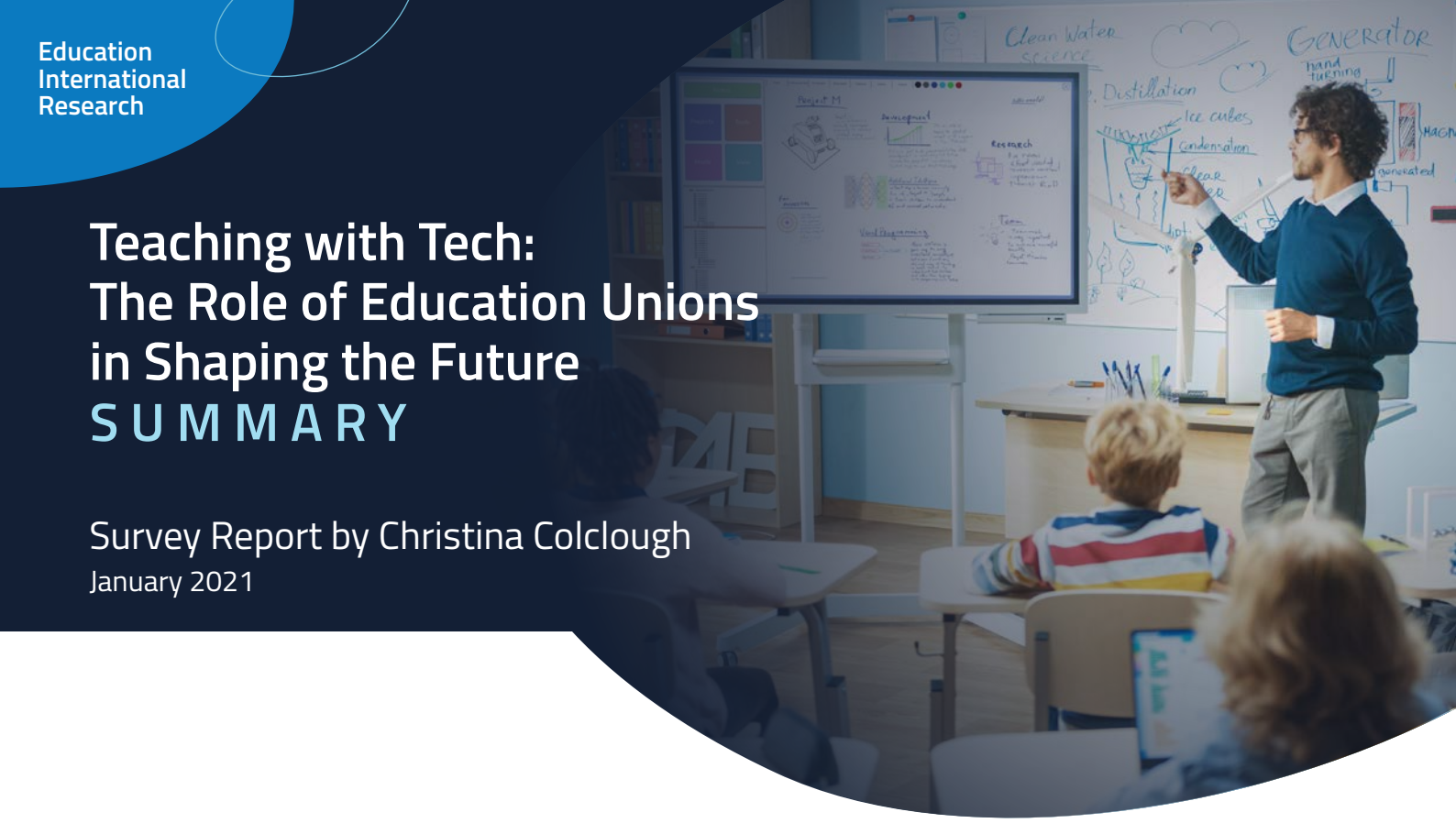
Education International Research

Teaching with Tech: The Role of Education Unions in Shaping the Future

SUMMARY



Survey Report by Christina Colclough

January 2021

During June, July and August of 2020, Education International conducted a survey with its member organisations across the world on the role digital technologies increasingly have in education and the future of work in education.

The survey, which was answered by 110 member organisations, covered 42 questions under the following eight headings:

1. **The impact of COVID-19**
2. **Access to digital tools**
3. **Digital competencies, training and support**
4. **Professional leadership and autonomy**
5. **Wellbeing**
6. **Governance of digital technologies**
7. **Data driven/artificial intelligence systems**
8. **Further developing EI's work on digital technologies**

This document provides a summary of the survey's key findings and the recommendations made by the report's author.

The Uneven Rise of EdTech

EdTech – education technology – is a fast-growing industry. Not everywhere, however. A recent COVID-19 UNICEF report reveals that at least 463 million students have been cut off from education as they have no means to access remote schooling or remote schooling cannot be offered. At the same time, the global EdTech market size is expected to grow by 18% per year reaching a 2027 market size of USD 285.2 billion. Digital divides and inequalities abound.

EdTech is hailed by proponents for holding the potential to fundamentally adapt education to the 21st century and to so-called personalised learning. Yet these tools and systems rely on data extraction, analyses and sophisticated algorithms that are commercialising education, turning students and educators into a myriad of data points that in turn are bought and sold across the world.

But where does this leave the human rights and privacy rights of educators and learners

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alike? Who has the responsibility to check whether these tools are exacerbating or bridging inequalities? Are they reaching out to rich areas or poor, urban environments or rural? Are educators with their wealth of knowledge, pedagogy and experience involved in the assessment of these technologies and their impact on learners? Will educators' jobs change? Become more intensified, demanding?

Digital technologies are not born evil. They are not born good either. It is up to those designing, deploying, and governing them to ensure they are put to a fair, inclusive use. The survey conducted by Education International in June, July and August of 2020 aimed to shed light on these key issues.

Main Findings

The survey revealed a number of striking findings that, combined, paint a picture of an increasing digitalisation of education, yet one that is unevenly distributed, and one that unless addressed will have long-term implications on educators and learners alike.

COVID-19: The tale of a lack of consultation

It is clear from the responses to these questions that there has been an increase in the use of digital technologies in education since the pandemic, albeit with some regional differences as shown in the figure.

However, consultation with teacher representatives on the introduction of these technologies has been insufficient. 29% of member organisations indicated that they had been consulted on a few aspects in relation to the introduction of new technologies. 45% had not been consulted at all. Only 26% of respondents reported that they were consulted on all or many aspects in relation to the introduction of digital technologies.

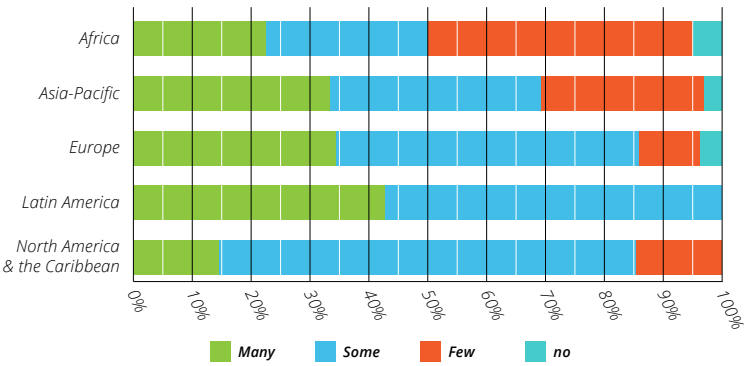

Figure 4. **Regional comparison of whether digital technologies have been introduced due to COVID-19**

Access to Digital Tools

This section confirmed that digital divides exist between world regions and, within countries, between rich and poorer areas and between urban and rural geographies. The survey has also indicated that inequalities exist for minority groups, although there was little evidence of a gender divide.

Most alarming was that almost 70% of learners in rural areas in Africa and 23% in Latin America had no access to digital tools and therefore we can assume during the pandemic had limited access to education.

Similarly across the world, learners from poorer regions had much less access to digital tools in general than learners in richer areas.

Digital Competencies, Training and Support

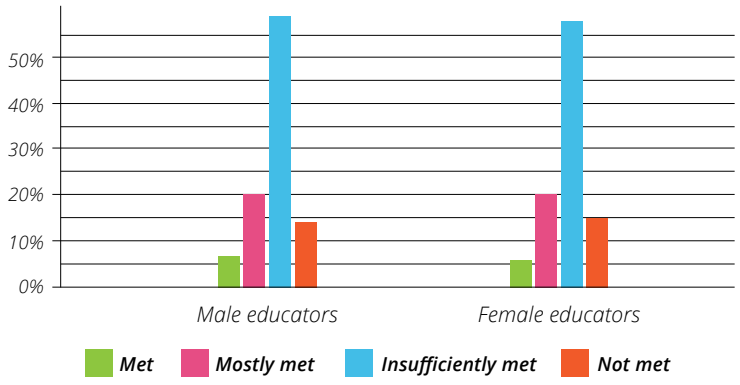

Figure 24. **Global aggregate for whether male and female teachers' training needs are met**

These sub questions focussed on educators' digital competencies. What is clear from the results is that teachers' training needs are mostly not sufficiently met.

There appears to be a discrepancy between the integration of digital technologies into teaching and the actual skills of the workers. COVID-19 and school closures have most certainly made that discrepancy clearer.

Wellbeing

The survey inquired into the impact of digital technologies on teachers' and ESP's wellbeing. Here educators' greatest concerns were: a. Workload intensification, b. Health concerns (technostress), and c. Work-life balance. Interestingly 27% of respondents said collective agreements covered wellbeing concerns, 29% said that legislation did and 32% said that wellbeing was not included in collective agreements, occupational health and safety provisions, pedagogical advice or guidance, nor legislation.

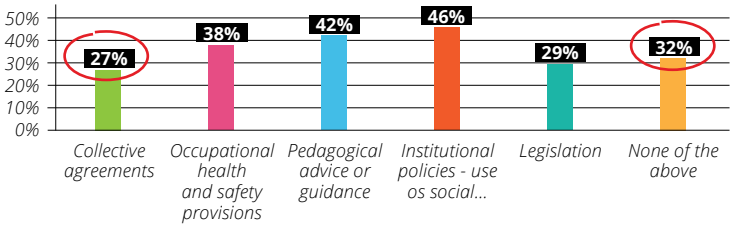

Figure 31. **Global aggregate for whether wellbeing concerns are addressed in policy instruments**

Governance of Digital Technologies

This section brought to light the relatively low level of consultation of unions by educational authorities on what, importantly, teacher's needs are concerning digital technologies. The survey revealed a lack of structures

Answer Choices	% responses	Nr responses
Yes	17.39%	16
No	53.26%	49
There are no structures/ processes for assessing technologies	*20.65%*	*19*
Don't know	2.17%	2
Other (please specify)	6.52%	6
	Answered	**92**

Table 14. **Global aggregate for whether unions are involved in the assessment of digital technologies**

and processes for the assessment of digital technologies, which can also explain the high average level of non-involvement (53%). Combined, these two questions demonstrated a growing need to address the lack of structures and processes to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of digital technologies but also to ensure recognition of the importance of teachers' perspectives in the implementation of digital technologies.

Data Driven / Artificial Intelligence Systems

The responses to the questions about data driven/artificial intelligence systems (AI) show that further research, training and knowledge building on the topic must be prioritised by unions. There is a pressing need for unions to further develop their understanding of the variety of new technologies used in education, and crucially, how and who has control over the data that is generated from them. Having a better understanding of the opportunities and risks around these new technologies will support unions to develop nuanced and detailed policy positions on their use.

Developing Education Union Work on Digital Technologies

The author recommends further action on the issues below:

Research & Information Material

Further research and information material on the following topics should be developed:

1. The nature of EdTech - what systems are being introduced, where, and how these will affect educators and learners. This should include horizon scanning for the next generation of education technologies and should be done in partnership with developers.
2. The changing nature of work in education - how are the skills and competency demands made of educators changing?
3. Model criteria for assessing advanced digital technologies according to educators, including on human rights, digital rights and collective wellbeing.
4. Digital divides - where, who and how they could be overcome. Investigating the correlations and causalities and providing good practice ways forward to sustainably bridge these divides.

Negotiation Models and Clauses

Through collective bargaining, unions should push for co-governance of digital technologies. New clauses should be introduced into collective agreements to increase unions' influence over the technologies used and to hold authorities and individual schools responsible and accountable for their implementation and assessment. Clauses should include union criteria for assessing digital technologies.

Campaigns/advocacy

Addressing policymakers, their members, and the general public, unions should plan a number of campaigns and advocacy activities.

1. Addressing the UN, UNESCO, ILO and OECD on the digital divides and ensuring the empowerment of all learners regardless of geography or socio-economic status.
2. Addressing the need for teachers to be given specific Continuous Professional Learning and Development (CPLD) support around blended learning pedagogies and the use of new technologies.
3. Addressing national and regional authorities on the necessity of including educators' unions in the pre-evaluation, implementation, and assessment of digital technologies in education. This is not only to protect educators' wellbeing and professionalism but also to be the guardians of human rights and privacy rights in education.
4. To establish unions as the physical and virtual hub for educators who are increasingly isolated, especially due to the pandemic.

The full survey report by Christina Colclough can be found here:
https://eiie.io/TeachWithTechEN

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