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HOME LIFE

# More technology at schools doesn't lead to better education, data finds



SHUTTERSTOCK

By **Ami Albernaz** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 05, 2015

Laptops, tablets, and similar devices are ever more prevalent in today's classrooms. Yet greater availability and use of technology at school doesn't necessarily lead to better educational outcomes, a recent report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development shows.

The report, which included data on nearly 60 countries, examined students' computer use at home and in school as well as their performance on written and digital tests. It found that while students who use computers moderately at school have somewhat better outcomes than those who don't use them at all, those who use them very frequently tend to do significantly worse, even after accounting for students' and schools' socioeconomic status.

The findings come at a time when adoption of technology in classrooms is steadily growing. In 2014, shipments of desktops, laptops, and tablets to schools and higher education institutions in the US totaled 13.2 million, 33 percent more than the previous year, according to market research firm IDC. Among the 34 OECD countries, 72 percent of 15-year-olds said they used a desktop, laptop, or tablet in school in 2012 (the year the report data was collected).

While the amount of technology available to students at school was positively linked to their test performance, the authors noted this could be a function of more available educational resources overall. When they accounted for variations in per capita income across countries and past performance on the same tests, they found that countries that invested less in introducing technology in schools actually improved faster, on average, than countries that invested more.

Helping kids build strong conceptual skills in reading and math “will do more to create equal opportunities in a digital world” than expanding or subsidizing access to high-tech tools, the authors argue. Investments in computers compete with other priorities, they noted, such as hiring more teachers.

“There is clearly a gap between the expectations that justified these [technology] investments, and the impact that they had on students’ learning,” report author Francesco Avvisati, an analyst at the OECD, said in an e-mail. “The link between more computers and better learning is not a direct one. . . . We need to get this right, urgently.”

Technology undoubtedly holds great potential for enriching education, the report noted, including expanding opportunities for collaboration and connecting learning to real-life challenges. Parents feel largely positive about technology’s promise; in a survey of parents of third- to 12th-graders this year by the business and economics news program Marketplace, 71 percent said that technology has improved the overall quality of their children’s education.

Parents can play an important role in helping kids benefit from technology by helping them assess the quality of online information and set boundaries around use, said Yalda Uhls, a child psychologist and author of the book “Media Moms and Digital Dads: A Fact-Not-Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age.”

“Children have grown up with technology and are adept at using it in many ways, but they need help figuring out what information they can trust and how credible sources are,” Uhls said. “Parents can also help kids manage the

distractions of technology; for example, they can advise kids to turn off the sound on their phone for 30 minutes while they're working on a paper.”

Parents can also advocate for thoughtful approaches to implementing technology in classrooms, she added. “Parents can say, If we're going to put this money into technology, we need to be sure teachers have the tools and training they need to use it effectively.”

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