EdTech: The Online Learning Boom [B1]

L'EdTech, abbreviazione di "educational technology", sostiene di aumentare l'accessibilità, la personalizzazione e l'interattività dell'istruzione. Ma non mancano di certo le controversie.

The concept of using technology as a learning **tool** has a history **spanning** over a century. Educational films and mechanical **devices** known as 'teaching machines' that asked simple multiple choice questions, were the first **tool**s to put technology in classrooms. Gradually, television and computers complemented academic books. The founding of the UK's Open University in 1969 was a **turning point**. By the late 20th century, the internet expanded access to information, and online courses and digital learning resources became more common.

DIGITAL AGE

By the 2000s, personal computers, projectors and interactive **whiteboards** had infiltrated classrooms, promising a future of more interactive and multimedia-driven learning. The e-learning platform Moodle, an open-source learning management system (LMS), was introduced in 2002, potentially breaking down geographic barriers.

PERSONALISED

The 2010s brought massive open online courses (MOOCs): Coursera and edX, Udemy, Skillshare and LinkedIn Learning **boasted** 'quality education' from top universities. Mobile **devices** and high-speed internet **further** democratised learning, and the focus **shifted** to personalised experiences, with platforms adapting content to what were perceived to be individual student needs.

EDUCATION GAP

Of course, for anyone who has **engaged with** EdTech, you'll recognise how difficult and distracting it is to try to learn in this way. Online learning requires motivation and focus, and both students and teachers need the skills and support to use new technologies. EdTech may even **widen** education **gaps**: many poorer students, particularly in the Global South, **lack** a **reliable** electricity **supply**, **let alone** access to **devices** and high-speed internet. Software and **ongoing** maintenance are costly for many schools to adopt and sustain.

COVID BOOM

The recent pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote learning **tool**s, with platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom becoming essential to **keep up** with classes. Public money, particularly in the US but also in India, was thrown at EdTech, developed, controversially, by private companies. This has created EdTech unicorns, such as Speak, an American language-learning app, or Physics Wallah, an Indian tutoring platform. These **privately-held** startups are valued at over a $1 billion.

DATA PRIVACY

The 2020s has brought artificial intelligence that powers intelligent tutoring and real-time feedback, as well as promising enhanced virtual or augmented reality experiences. With it come concerns about how much the machine is learning about students; data privacy, cyber threats and the ethical use of AI are all serious issues. Still, the EdTech market, currently valued at \(340 billion, is projected to reach \)605 billion by 2027. There are now fourteen EdTech unicorns — and their number is growing. Time will tell whether EdTech is the future of education, or the end of effective learning — at least for humans!

Glossary

- **spanning** = attraversare, coprire
- **engaged with** = entrare in contatto
- **reliable** = affidabile
- **supply** = fornitura, approvvigionamento
- **privately-held** = in mano a investitori privati
- **tool** = strumento
- **whiteboards** = lavagne
- **boasted** = vantare
- **further** = ulteriormente
- **shifted** = spostarsi, cambiare
- **ongoing** = costante
- **keep up** = stare al passo
- **devices** = dispositivi
- **let alone** = figurarsi, senza contare
- **widen** = ampliare
- **gaps** = lacune
- **lack** = mancare
- **turning point** = punto di svolta