



Towards equity-focused approaches to EdTech: *Understanding the relationship between digital technologies, equity, teaching and learning in secondary schools.*

Invitation to participate in research with the University of Oxford

ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

We are witnessing a period of rapid socio-economic and technological change: new patterns of post-pandemic social and digital exclusion; an array of digital technologies that are progressively embedded in school administration, pedagogy and practice; the rise of AI including generative and large scale language models such as ChatGPT; and the ever increasing power of algorithmic digital technologies to shape young people's relationships and identities, both inside and outside of the classroom.

This project aims to understand how these changes impact the realities of teaching and learning in secondary schools across England, by gathering rich, ethnographic data about the ways technology is embedded in school practices, and how this relates to ideas about equity and educational opportunities.

There is a lot of hope that the use of technology in schools can reduce educational and social inequalities for young people; and these hopes have intensified since the pandemic. However, very little is known about how technology is actually used for learning and teaching, the everyday realities for schools and teachers, and if technology does make things fairer for all students or not.

Specifically, the project will:

- Seek to understand how varied digital technologies are used inside and outside the classroom;
- Examine how the use of such EdTech systems changes or maintains existing relationships and practices between teachers and students;
- Interrogate the inbuilt biases and underpinning values promoted by such technologies; and
- Explore how access to EdTech and its uses varies across contexts and circumstances.

WHAT WOULD BE INVOLVED?

A member of our research team would conduct ethnographic research in your school for one term. The structure of the research would be designed in partnership to suit each school, but would be likely to involve:

- Collecting information (likely via a one-day visit prior to the start of term) about the different technologies (hardware, software and data systems) in use across the school.
- 10 teacher interviews
- 5 SMT/administrative interviews
- 25 pupil interviews
- 2 workshops with pupils (10-15 per workshop)
- Classroom observation by arrangement.

OPPORTUNITIES

By taking part in this project, there would be opportunities to:

- Gain a rich understanding of school-wide, technology-related practices
- Contribute to an important research initiative involving schools, policy makers and technology companies across the UK to inform government policy and the development of technological systems for schools in the future.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What kinds of technology are you interested in? We are interested in all of the software and hardware being used in the school: for teaching and learning, for registration, for planning, for assessment, for communications with parents and guardians etc. While our core focus is what happens in the classroom, we are interested in everything digital, including informal uses of technologies by young people (e.g. via TikTok or WhatsApp) that often comes into school and can lead to benefits but also challenges.

Are you evaluating teachers as part of the project? No. The purpose of this research is to understand how technology is being used in schools and how we can develop better technology to enhance educational and social equity. While we are interested in the experiences of teachers and pupils, our focus is on improving EdTech policy and the design of EdTech.

Can you provide a sense of the logistics? All members of the research team have experience of working in education and carrying out qualitative research in a range of settings. It is very important to us that the research fits around the everyday life of the school and does not interrupt in any way the everyday running of the school. At the beginning of the term we would need to send a communication to all parents and guardians and let all staff know about the study. We will write and print all letters, and can offer an information event or any other activity that the school feels is appropriate. After this, all formal classroom observation and interviews would take place with the agreement of the individuals involved and be on the basis of further permissions and informed consent obtained over the course of the project. The researcher in the school would be responsible for co-ordinating this and to fit within the school's practices and policies.

What about safeguarding? All members of the research team have DBS checks. All our research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford and we have completed the necessary Data Protection Assessments. All aspects of the research – from informing participants and their families, to collecting and storing data, to reporting our findings have been reviewed as part of these processes to ensure they conform to all legal and ethical requirements. If we discover a safeguarding issue (e.g. a case of cyberbullying) through student interviews, we would report this to the school (and students will be notified that this is possible prior to taking part in the study).

Will we have access to project data? Not in its raw form. However, we will provide summary reports relevant to each school to provide insights into school wide practices and from the project more broadly.

What are likely project outputs? We anticipate these will include: journal articles, a book, presentations at conferences and workshops, digital vignettes, blog posts, open educational resources for EdTech developers, policy briefs, a teachers' toolkit for participating schools and a findings summary report for each participating school.

How will the school be presented in publications and other project outputs? In all outputs we will take care to anonymise the school and all the participants as far as we can. Pseudonyms would be used at all times. We are likely to need to provide some general information for context such as the characteristics of the local area (e.g. region, rural/urban) and the nature of the school (e.g. type, size, proportion of EAL pupils). When reporting any specific data from interviews or classroom observations we would ideally like to include year group, subject being taught and some individual characteristics (e.g. broad occupational role and some student demographics). In all cases, we would be aiming to provide enough detail so that we can make analytical generalisations to other schools and contexts, but not so much that any school or individual can be identified by the data. The specifics of this would be agreed with participating schools and participating individuals. All of these processes would be in strict accordance with GDPR and national ethical codes.

What can you offer us? During the researcher's time at the school, we would to directly contribute in whatever way was appropriate and most useful. The researcher could perhaps run after school club on technology, work as a TA, or help to supervise break times. We would envisage this kind of contribution could be for up to 10 hours a week on a voluntary basis. We would also share a summary of the findings with you. This would take a format that was most appropriate and valuable to your school. For example, a summary report, a teachers' toolkit, and / or a CPD event. We also hope that there would be indirect benefits from collaborating on this project, providing the school and teachers with an opportunity to reflect on technology use in teaching and learning, and students the chance to participate in a research project.