

## THE EDTECH HUB

Research and Innovation to fulfil the potential of EdTech

≡ MENU

# INTRODUCING THE EDTECH HUB'S PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES

Posted on 16th October 2019 by Sara Hennessy

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*Education is on the brink of being transformed through learning technologies; however, it has been on that brink for some decades now.*

*DIANA LAURILLARD, 2008*

Our first [blog post](#) introduced the EdTech Hub as having three main, interconnected spheres of activity: research, innovation and engagement. This blog spotlights the research work. We're keen to share what we're doing and get feedback as we go along. Constructive input from the global community is immensely valuable.

Our priority is to identify the most — and least! — effective and culturally appropriate uses of EdTech for promoting better learning outcomes for children and young people in low-income countries. Our main aim is to make the evidence we are gathering and generating accessible, robust and actionable by researchers and decision-makers (including policymakers and donors). Ultimately we hope to significantly improve the educational experiences of many learners and to guide others within the sector.

This means we'll be undertaking and commissioning research on interventions with the potential to scale — *at a systems level*. It also means we don't start with any

assumptions about the promise of part above and beyond other approaches. V programmes as well as high-tech interv



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prevalence of ownership as well as limitations. And we explore the factors constraining and enabling implementation and equity.

### Research team

The three Research directors include myself, Sara Hennessy, based at the **REAL Centre** at the University of Cambridge (UoC), David Hollow of **Jigsaw Consult**, and Björn Haßler of **Open Development & Education**. We have a fantastic team of researchers (listed on the **UoC Hub web page**) with a wealth of complementary experience and expertise of different research methodologies, country settings and technology applications in education that we can draw on. We'll all introduce ourselves in more detail in future blog posts. We're thrilled to be working together on this exciting programme.

### Our approach

Now that I've introduced our research vision as a Hub, let's focus in on the activities within the research sphere. Our remit is to explore the potential for using EdTech to make a contribution towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. Quite obviously, tech alone cannot solve the global learning crisis. We also know there are many systemic constraints on EdTech use that the Hub cannot overcome on its own or within the lifespan of the programme (see recent **UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Reports**). That said, we *are* confident of illuminating ways of making progress and **guiding future large-scale investments in EdTech in low-income environments** towards more fruitful initiatives and equitable uses. The sad fact is that most initiatives to date have failed to be impactful, sustainable or scalable. (We'll elaborate on the underlying reasons in a future output.)

We will be looking at the field through a **critical lens**, since technology alone has no agency or transformational "impact" on learning. The most popular developments in the field are not necessarily the most promising. For instance, placing thousands of mobile devices in the hands of learners may be a marvellous ideal in theory but may not prove cost-effective. Likewise, apps can be educational but alone have significant limitations. The evidence base itself is weak, often based on small-scale, biased, instrumental evaluations. Therefore, we will draw on the growing body of literature taking a similarly critical approach, including highlighting unintended consequences of use, for example:

Selwyn, N. (2016) Minding our language: why education and technology is full of bull\*\*\*\* ... and what might be done about it. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 41(3), 437-443.

Closely related is our focus on **support** marginalised in many EdTech initiatives



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constitutes a major obstacle to learning in under-resourced contexts. **Pedagogy** for effective, purposeful and active interaction with EdTech is all-important, as is a sense of ownership.

Finally, we hold a "situated" perspective, shunning terms like "best practice". After all, who decides what is best, best for whom, in what circumstances and contexts, for what kinds of learners...? The process of identifying and developing effective practices must take careful account of relevant **context-specific factors**.

*What are we actually doing now/soon?*

### **Taking stock of the field** by

- Analysing problems with existing initiatives and evidence;
- Comprehensive survey of methodologies for systematic reviews and developing our own approach, parameters and keywords;
- Conducting a systematic review of literature underpinning our research focus: trialing manual searches then automated ones;
- Mapping and reflecting on EdTech projects/programmes in LICs.

**Establishing our scope:** primary and secondary school-level learning (formal, informal) and teacher education (pre- and in-service). An *equity agenda* is important here. We prioritise the most marginalised learners – including out of school, rural and remote, displaced and refugees, girls and those with disabilities.

**Developing a methodological framework** based on systematic, rigorous and systems-focussed mixed-methods research.

**Formulating our country-based protocols.** That is, how we will select research countries and teams.

**Engaging the sector** with a view to sharing our evidence, tools and methods and learning from other researchers and practitioners.

*More info / Get in touch*

Each of the above activities will produce an output to be shared soon. Follow our work in this blog space and on social media (@GlobalEdTechHub).

Information about the EdTech Hub and our outputs can be found on this site at <https://edtechhub.org>.

To register your interest in the Hub's work



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