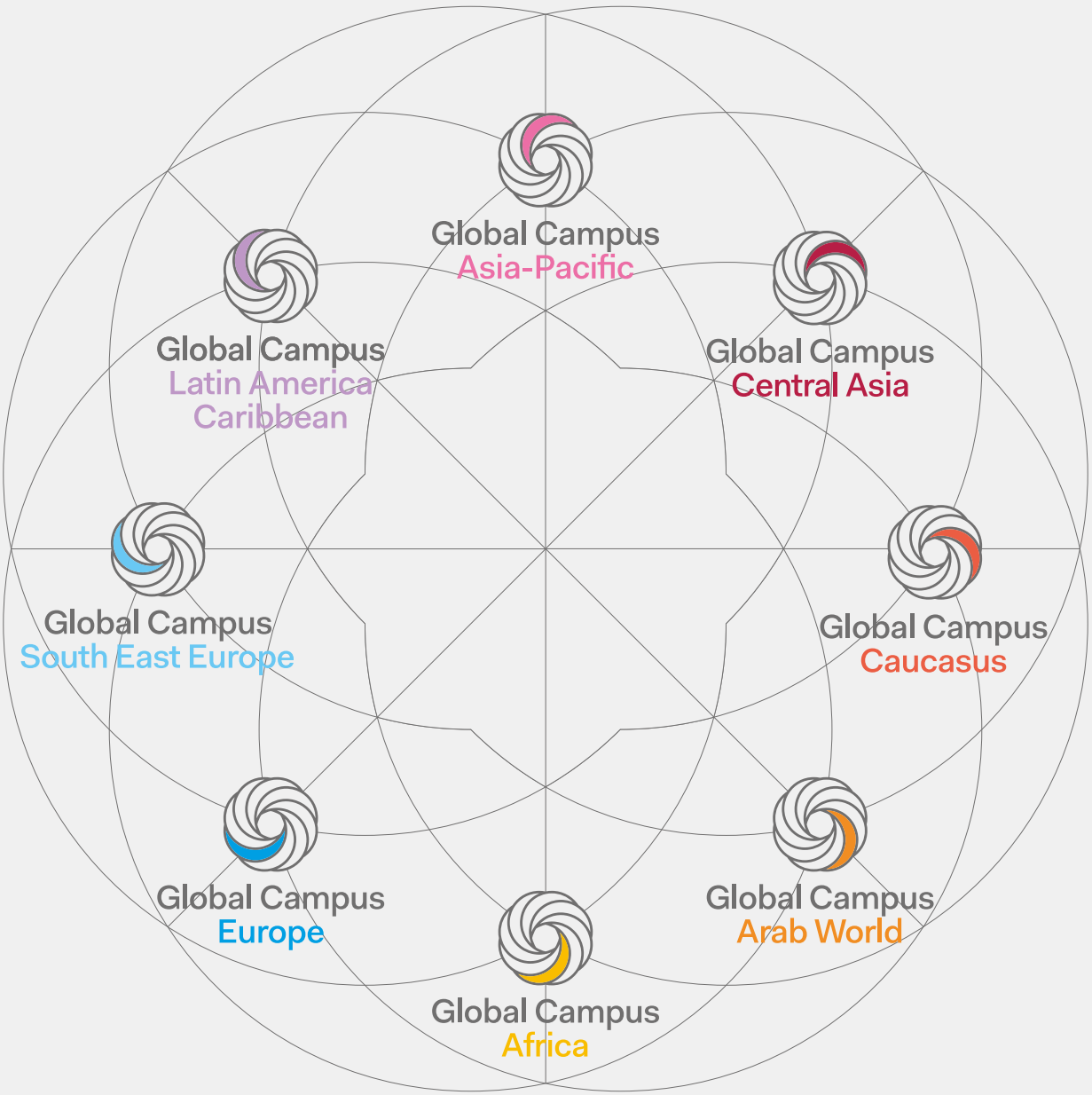
Global Campus
Asia-Pacific

Policy Briefs 2024

Jean Linis-Dinco

EdTech and the Right to Education: Policy Adaptations for Fair and Equal Learning in the Philippines and Cambodia

Supported by


Global Campus
Asia-Pacific
Global Campus
Latin America
Caribbean
Global Campus
Central Asia
Global Campus
South East Europe
Global Campus
Caucasus
Global Campus
Europe
Global Campus
Arab World
Global Campus
Africa

Global Campus of Human Rights

This policy brief is part of the **6th edition of the Global Campus Policy Observatory**, which revolves around the research project on **'The digitalisation of education systems and its impact on human rights, with particular attention to the right to education'**, which was conceptualized and is led by GC Research Manager Dr. Chiara Altafin and which involves a team of seven policy analysts selected among alumni of GC regional programmes, namely Reda Benkhadra (GC Africa), Olga Lucía Camacho Gutierrez (GC Latin America and the Caribbean), Dr. Desara Dushi (GC Europe), Dr. Jean Linis-Dinco (GC Asia-Pacific), Goharik Tigranyan (GC Caucasus), Aida Traidi (GC Arab World), and Dr. Gergana Tzvetkova (GC South East Europe). Research outputs include workshop presentations, policy briefs, advocacy plans, and digital tools (infographics, webinars) developed in cooperation with the GC E-Learning Department.

This policy brief is written by **Jean Linis-Dinco**, who holds a PhD in Cybersecurity (2023) from the University of New South Wales-Canberra, and a Master's in Human Rights and Democratisation in Asia Pacific (APMA) (2017) from Mahidol University, Thailand. She is a member of the ASEAN Regional Coalition to #StopDigitalDictatorship. She is currently an active member of the Incident Response Working Group of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT).
Contact: jean@jeandinco.id.au

This policy brief is produced with the financial assistance of the European Union and as part of the Global Campus of Human Rights. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union or of the Global Campus of Human Rights.

This policy brief is realized with the support of the Unit for Analysis, Policy Planning, Statistics and Historical Documentation - Directorate General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in accordance with Article 23 – bis of the Decree of the President of the Italian Republic 18/1967. The views expressed in this policy brief are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Table of Contents

EdTech and the Right to Education: Policy Adaptations for Fair and Equal Learning in the Philippines and Cambodia

Jean Linis-Dinco [1]

Executive summary

This policy brief explores the challenges and opportunities regarding the adoption of education technology (EdTech) in the Philippines and Cambodia, and how it relates to the right to education. Without careful consideration of the importance of human rights to the integration of technology into the education sector, the use of technology may further widen the digital divide in the two countries. Drawing on a political economy framework (Pellini et al. 2021), this brief proposes solutions that not only consider the complexities of domestic politics, structural and systemic factors and the diverse needs of stakeholders but also examines the practicality of each solution within a local context. This policy brief argues for the need to go beyond techno-solutionism or the belief that technology alone can solve social and political problems. Instead, it advocates for an approach that tackles underlying problems rather than applying temporary fixes based on the agenda of current sitting political parties. Recommendations range from legal and social reforms promoting equitable access to digital infrastructure to fostering the development of inclusive and culturally relevant EdTech content. Specifically, it urges governments to review existing legislation to ensure equitable integration of technology, strengthen protections for marginalised groups including Indigenous peoples and invest in teacher training and development.

1 The author thanks Dr. Chiara Altafin, Research Manager at the Global Campus of Human Rights in Venice, Dr. Mike Hayes, Academic Director of the APMA programme and Lecturer at the Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studie of Mahidol University, Bangkok, and Marianne Joy Vital, Doctoral Researcher in Social Policy at the University of Oxford and expert in education, for their valuable and constructive feedback as received in the context of the GC Policy Observatory workshop 'The digitalisation of education systems and its impact on human rights, with particular attention to the right to education', held in Venice on 26 March 2024.

Introduction

The **Philippines** and **Cambodia** are among the weakest in mathematics, sciences and reading globally in 2022, according to new findings through the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (OECD 2023). In countries with low literacy rates, the introduction of EdTech interventions may present benefits that could address issues associated with learning deficiencies at primary school levels (Rodriguez-Segura 2022). EdTech is more a methodology than a form of learning. It uses digital technologies such as machine-learning based personalised learning (Luan & Tsai 2021), augmented reality (Iqbal, Mangina & Campbell 2022) and asynchronous learning (Amiti 2020) among others to improve learning and teaching. These technologies have particularly positive effects to students' learning experiences as shown in various studies (Essa, Celik & Human-Hendricks 2023; Haleem et al. 2022; Jones 2020). However, as with any other technological advancements, the benefits are not distributed evenly throughout the population.

Quality education (SDG 4) remains an urgent concern globally with only one in six countries foreseen to meet the goal and achieve universal access to quality education by 2030 (UN-DESA 2023). In this context, the role of international agreements and regional commitments becomes pivotal, especially for nations like the Philippines and Cambodia, which are bound by global treaties and regional declarations aimed at enhancing and protecting the universal right to education. The right to education is enshrined in numerous international treaties binding both the Philippines and Cambodia, including Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR 1966), Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD 1965), Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD 2006) and Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989). Cambodia and the Philippines ratified the above treaties over ten years ago but have made little headway in meeting their legal obligations to provide quality education. Despite the lack of a binding treaty, aggravated by the principle of non-interference, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also adopted the Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems (ASEAN 2022), which is a roadmap seeking to incorporate digital technologies inside the classrooms and in administrative processes within the educational system. Also, the ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025 sought to develop and enhance regional capacity in promoting education through improved coordination and knowledge management.

All these ambitious visions confronted a stark reality exacerbated by numerous global events including the COVID-19 pandemic. This intensified the existing deep educational divide in low-income countries (Adams et al. 2023; UNDP n.d.). Educational institutions resorted to using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Teams, which was challenging for most families whose access to technology and resources were limited. This inequality meant that higher-income families could adjust easily whilst most children from working class families were left without any alternatives (Smith, Alegre & Rigby 2021).

Problem description

The Philippines and Cambodia recently adopted EdTech in the classroom, aligning with their broader vision to innovate and enhance educational experiences. Projects including the Philippines' 21 last mile schools in several provinces to address their education needs through technology tried to make learning accessible to students during COVID-19 (Sorongon & Castillo 2023). Similarly, Cambodia has adopted blended learning as an answer to school closures brought by COVID-19 (Sim & Em 2023). Nonetheless, these initiatives were proven to be challenging due to the high rate of digital divide in the countries.

Digital divide is the primary challenge in EdTech adaptation in lower-income countries. In the Philippines, the uneven distribution of technological resources that favours urban dwellers over students living in remote, rural places illustrates how EdTech challenges are not solely educational but also deeply political and social. In Cambodia, the situation is roughly similar. The weak investment in critical

infrastructures such as broadband internet, fibre optic technology and mobile equipment in far-flung areas in both countries means that students face greater challenges in staying connected and up to date. This has resulted in public school primary students having to put in extra work to overcome systemic barriers imposed by prioritisation of profit in urban-centric development. Even within rural communities, this divide is further exacerbated as only children from affluent families can afford the technical resources needed to stay up with their peers in the city.

Philippines

Most of the problem lies in underspending on education. Spending per student has dropped from PHP 22,979 ($413) in 2017 to PHP 19,943 ($359) in 2021, which ranks among the lowest internationally. Compared to the average spending of $102,612 by countries in the 2022 PISA, this is nine times less. As a percentage of GDP, the country falls short of the recommended 4-6%. Currently, it sits at 3.6% (Angelo 2024). About 2.8 million students lack access to online connectivity, with a disproportionate number of students residing in rural regions of the Philippines (Santos 2020). Although access is a significant factor to consider when evaluating the digital divide in a country, the problem goes much deeper than that. Digital divide also pertains to the quality of educational materials, its relevance to local context and teachers' mastery of the topic.

A study conducted by the World Bank found Filipino teachers have the most ineffective pedagogy methods in Southeast Asia (Afkar et al. 2023). The problem surrounding teachers' mastery of content runs deep within the structures of the educational system in the Philippines. In elementary schools, a single teacher is expected to handle multiple core subjects including science, mathematics, English and Filipino. Not only does this approach put a significant burden on the teachers as they are expected to maintain a high level of expertise in the subjects, but it also has drastic effects on the quality of knowledge being passed on to the students.

Furthermore, students whose native language differs from that of the instructional materials may encounter an additional barrier posed by the materials utilised in EdTech. An example of this can be seen in the Philippines where 183 languages exist but are not taught in academic institutions. Frequently, Filipino, the country's official language derived primarily from Tagalog, is employed as the predominant language in academic environments even though the majority of the population does not consider this as the mother tongue. In 2012, the core subject 'mother tongue' was introduced by the Department of Education as a component of the new K-12 Basic Education Programme's Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) implementation. However, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, mother tongue will no longer be a separate subject in Philippine schools (Hernando-Malipot 2023). This situation underscores the need for the government to not only reconsider this policy change but also to enhance legal frameworks like the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA). Lastly, the removal of the mother tongue as a separate subject from the curriculum will not only alienate students from non-Tagalog speaking backgrounds but will also undermine their right to receive an education in a language they understand.

Cambodia

Only 23% of students have access to an information and communication technology (ICT) device and stable internet connection in Cambodia (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Education Sector Working Group 2021). This issue has also pervaded educators, as their access to stable and fast internet connectivity is limited and rarely subsidised (Heng & Sol 2021). While the Cambodian Education Law of 2007 was a step towards reforming education, it does not specifically address the nuances of integrating technology into learning environments. Alongside with the accessibility issue, the Cambodian education system also faces problems related to the professional capabilities of teachers to teach.

In regions where the professional development of teachers is lacking, it is more likely for teachers to struggle to use digital tools effectively, regardless of its availability. Rural, disadvantaged and public schools are more likely to have fewer qualified teachers than private schools in the city area (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport 2018). Education is critically underfunded, as revealed by the Education Budget Brief of the Supreme National Economic Council of Cambodia (Sotheareach 2023). In fact, the share of GDP allocated to education dipped from 3.38% in 2020 to just 2.62% in 2022, falling way behind the benchmark public education expenditure of 4% of GDP.

On top of this, the large student-teacher ratio limits the ability of teachers to provide individualised attention and effectively integrate technology into their teaching. This situation in Cambodia serves as a clear illustration of how the digital divide encompasses not only the accessibility of technology,

but also the competency to utilise it efficiently in educational environments. These issues cannot be solved by the introduction of EdTech alone. Similar to the Philippines, students in Cambodia face a mismatch between their native languages and the language of instructional materials. The Multilingual Educational National Action Plan (MENAP) aimed to address this issue. By 2018, over 5,090 students had been granted access to multilingual education through the implementation of the MENAP (Noorlander 2022). Nevertheless, the execution of the programme has encountered numerous deficiencies, such as insufficient technical resources, insufficient political determination and a dearth of input from stakeholders, including speakers of non-dominant languages engaged in non-dominant language initiatives (Ball & Smith 2021).

Notably, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's (UNCRC's) Concluding Observations on the periodic reports of Cambodia raised alarm about the poor quality of education and high dropout rates, particularly among girls and children belonging to minority groups (UNCRC 2022b). The integration of children with disabilities alongside non-disabled children in Cambodian law, while well-intentioned, raises several challenges, as poised by the same committee. The lack of protection from discrimination leads to unintentional exclusion of children with disabilities stemming from a deficiency in tailored educational approaches, specialised training for educators and the necessary resources.

Rationale for action

The Philippines and Cambodia face tremendous challenges as discussed in the previous section. The goal of this policy paper is not to vilify EdTech, but to highlight its transformative potential for improving educational experiences and outcomes. This potential can only be maximised if implemented correctly and inclusively. If so, EdTech may present transformative prospects for improving students' educational experiences and outcomes. It may democratise access to educational resources and personalise an individual's experience to learning. What is good about personalised learning is how it avoids the 'one-size-fits-all' or standardised testing common in countries like the Philippines and Cambodia. Standardised tests often do not cater to the varied learning styles and cultural backgrounds of students, thus leading to a policy failure. The use of technology in education can enable teaching at a level that is appropriate for each student's learning style and pace, as opposed to grouping them all into one class. Personalised learning may also reduce the high teacher-student ratio which makes it difficult for teachers to address individual student's needs for their journey. These are the promises of EdTech that we want to envision in the Philippines and Cambodia, yet constant policy failures have proven that the way there is not as straightforward as initially thought.

Looking at other countries in Southeast Asia, this trend is not unique to the two countries. For example, **Thailand** has implemented EdTech for teaching English as part of the National ICT for Education Master Plan (2004-2006) as standards of ICT to education (Suppasetseree & Nutprapha 2021). Whilst the policy seems good on paper, the implementation in different educational settings varied drastically. Many teachers struggled to effectively integrate EdTech into their classrooms due to various factors, including the slow pace it imposes on teaching, exacerbated by heavy teaching loads, outdated equipment, insufficient resources and a lack of guidance on how to use the technology.

In **Viet Nam**, the government proposed an education reform with the aim of fostering more innovative pedagogy techniques, but the implementation has been rigged with several challenges. This led to a significant gap between ICT-related policies and actual classroom practices, as highlighted by Vo (2019). Key issues found include a lack of clear ICT policies and guidelines at both national and institutional levels, which has resulted from ineffective leadership, improper allocation of ICT resources, inadequate professional development for teachers and ICT maintenance and support.

In **Indonesia**, as part of the Indonesia 2025 initiative, the government aims to integrate technology in education but faces challenges due to the country's archipelagic nature (Machmud, Widiyan & Ramadhani 2021). In a recent survey, around 118,000 out of 208,000 schools in Indonesia had internet connection in 2015, indicating that almost 90,000 schools lacked internet access. Remarkably, there are 17,000 schools that continue to face a shortage of electricity, particularly those located in far-flung areas and remote islands.

These examples are not unique. The policy failures in these ASEAN countries highlight a common pattern that has plagued the region. Clearly, there is a significant gap between policy intentions and actual implementation. Policy failures and gaps in integrating technology in education reflect deeper systemic issues. Not only did these shortcomings fail to leverage technology's full potential, but they also exacerbated educational inequalities. Looking closer, the policies seem to have been written in a vacuum, without consideration for the people they impact. The lack of proper consultation implies a mismatch between the policy and issues encountered in the real world. The emphasis here is on the word 'proper', as mere token consultations aimed at ticking boxes and meeting compliance and regulatory requirements are just obstructions.

The digital divide remains a stark reality in the Philippines and Cambodia, with several schools lacking basic internet connectivity or even electricity, especially in remote areas. Pushing for use of EdTech in classrooms without due diligence will overlook the need for content and delivery methods that are inclusive and accessible to all students, not just those who come from rich families and affluent political clans. Digital platforms and materials not designed with universal design principles in mind can marginalise students who do not fit the assumed 'standard' learner profile, undermining their right to a quality education that meets their specific needs.

Simply introducing technology is not enough. There has to be a comprehensive approach that includes infrastructure development, teacher training, policy alignment and continuous support. The push for the use of EdTech in classrooms must not create new forms of exclusion. This addiction to using technology to solve systemic issues can divert attention and resources from other critical aspects of education, such as teacher training, lack of teachers, curriculum development and the improvement of pedagogical methods. If digital education is seen as a substitute rather than a complement to traditional learning, there is a risk that the quality of education may decline, particularly if digital tools are used without adequate support for teachers and students.

Addressing these issues requires an approach that goes beyond a 'techno-solutionism' mindset. Techno-solutionism attempts to resolve intricate socio-political crises through the use of technology alone. Responses that neglect to move beyond the superficiality or allure of technological solutions dismiss the fundamental fact that systemic problems require more than a quick fix. Responses should involve resolving systemic inequalities that prevent children from lower-income families from starting their educational journey on an equal footing. There is no better time than now to shift towards a more equitable integration of technology in education that would prioritise collective welfare and equitable access to learning opportunities for all and not just the selected few who could afford it. No amount of technology can resolve the fundamental challenges of limited resources and the deep-seated societal issue of politicisation of education. For meaningful and sustainable improvement, investment in education needs to transcend political cycles, dynasties and false election promises.

Policy options

The problems in the Philippine education sector calls for significant amendments to the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. These changes should specifically mandate the integration of technology in education, including training, infrastructure and equitable access to ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups in digital education platforms. These steps are also essential for dismantling the existing barriers that marginalise these groups and for promoting a more inclusive educational environment, as noted in the Concluding Observations of the UNCRC on the periodic reports of the Philippines (UNCRC 2022a). Continuous professional development in digital literacy and pedagogy for teachers, alongside protections for their rights in the digital age must also be taken into account. The Magna Carta for Teachers or RA 4670 (Republic of the Philippines 1966) can be updated to include integrating the use of EdTech during pre-service training for teachers at higher education institutions. Such integration ensures that foundational skills in content and pedagogy are learned in conjunction with emerging technologies. Training should extend beyond mere technical skills to encompass critical pedagogy that fosters critical thinking about societal structures, thereby empowering both teachers and students to understand and challenge the status quo. In cases like this, it is common for governments to use private companies

to solve the problems. This must not be considered as best practice. Relying on private enterprises to address these fundamental issues in public education reduces state accountability. When the state steps back from directly providing and managing education, it risks losing control over ensuring that educational standards are met and that every child's right to education is upheld. This approach often leads to solutions that prioritise profitability over pedagogical effectiveness and can exacerbate inequalities in access to technology. Private sector involvement focuses on areas that promise the highest returns on investment, which can leave marginalised and rural populations even further behind.

Similarly, Cambodia's ICT in education policy reflects an ambition to improve ICT infrastructure, digital content and teacher competencies. Yet, the policy's impact is limited by uneven access to technology, with rural students and teachers significantly disadvantaged, and by the ongoing issue of equipping educators with the skills necessary for digital teaching. The policy also falls short in addressing the inclusivity and equity of EdTech initiatives, particularly for marginalised groups such as students with disabilities and minority language speakers. Community-based approaches that leverage community learning centres equipped with internet and computers have shown promise in extending educational opportunities to out-of-school and marginalised youth, indicating a viable path for broader educational access. Yet, this is challenged by the Telecommunications Law, which adds another layer of complications by potentially restricting internet freedom and limiting access to educational resources online in community learning centres. This policy paper calls for the abolishment of the draconian Telecommunications Law. It needs to ensure that it supports rather than hinders the development of a digital learning ecosystem.

To effectively rectify the gaps and address these challenges in the Philippines and Cambodia, it is imperative to establish stringent standards to ensure that proposed solutions do not revert to the same challenges or worsen the current situation. Pellini et al. (2021) proposed the use of a **political economy analysis framework** to evaluate the adoption of EdTech policies. This framework calls for a better understanding of local politics and the context behind it by taking into account five core elements: specific issues, structural factors, rules of the game, stakeholders' power and opportunities. The most important concept laid down by the framework is understanding that the issue does not exist in a political vacuum. It does not look at 'lack of classroom material' as simply students having no access to such technology. Instead, it asks 'what mechanisms are in place that lead to the scarcity of classroom materials?' or 'how do political, economic and social factors influence the allocation of resources for educational materials?' These types of questions help reveal the interplay of factors that contribute to the complexity of the issue. As such, policy options should avoid looking at the education sector as one whole monolithic institution, particularly in light of regional socioeconomic disparities, varying infrastructure access, the public-private divide and, most significantly, the rural-urban divide.

The framework also considers structural factors, which include country-level structures for policy decision-making and evidence uptake. In the Philippines and Cambodia, education policy is predominantly centralised. Consequently, decision-making is made at the national level, often bypassing the direct input of those at the forefront of education – the teachers and local administrators. Not only does the top-down approach to policy making in the education sector result in policies that are detached from the practical realities of classrooms, it also allows the policy options to be diluted by power dynamics. Having one decision-making body means that the prioritisation of solutions is highly dependent on the priorities and interests of the sitting political party. Continuous dialogue and evaluation with various stakeholders are crucial to ensure that these policies do not merely exist on paper but are brought to life in classrooms. Furthermore, policies should be living entities that evolve with the changing needs and circumstances of the educational environment. With this being said, the roles of local government units and municipal councils in the Philippines and Cambodia should be strengthened to facilitate additional resources and enhance community engagement to ensure that policies are not only theoretical but are effectively implemented and adapted to local needs. This means that continuous dialogue, evaluation and adaptation with various stakeholders are crucial to ensure that these policies are brought to life in classrooms.

For both the Philippines and Cambodia, nationwide professional development programmes are essential to equip teachers with the necessary digital literacy and pedagogical skills for integrating technology into their teaching practices. Moreover, there is a critical need for policies mandating the creation and distribution of inclusive, culturally and linguistically diverse educational content. Such policies should also promote equity and inclusivity, ensuring that EdTech initiatives are accessible to students with disabilities and supportive of multilingual education for minority language speakers.

In the Philippines and Cambodia, education should

not be seen as a form of conformity to national norms. In fact, the concept of 'national' in a country so diverse in culture and customs can be politicised. Therefore, policies should be crafted as mosaic pieces that, when combined, form a comprehensive picture of inclusive and culturally responsive education. Education systems in both countries should recognise the rapidly changing market, technological advances, environmental degradation and expanding threats to peace and safety when formulating policies. In this light, the integration of EdTech into primary school curricula should not be a mere addition for the sake of adding it, but rather a strategic enhancement which focuses on areas where its impact can be most profound. Incorporating a child-centred digital inclusion policy that not only listens but also considers the voices of those at the education frontlines, particularly teachers and students, is important to ensure that policies remain relevant, impactful and grounded in the realities of those they aim to serve.

Policy recommendations

To promote a human right based EdTech landscape in the Philippines and Cambodia, the following recommendations are proposed for various key stakeholders. Four stakeholders are identified as holding key functions in making sure that the adoption of EdTech in the two countries would fulfil, promote and protect human rights, particularly for those living in the margins of the society.

The Government of the Philippines must:

- Increase its expenditure on education
  The Philippines must align the education spending within the 4-6% of GDP recommendation to ensure sufficient funding. Increased funding should go to public investment in digital infrastructure to guarantee that it serves public interests rather than private profits.

- Revise the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013
  Specific mandates for integrating technology in education that includes provisions for training, infrastructure and equitable access must be incorporated. Amendment should address the inclusion of marginalised groups in digital education platforms, ensuring accessibility for students with disabilities, women, LGBTIQ+, Indigenous peoples and those from remote areas.

- Adopt the Philippine Declaration on Internet Rights and Principles
  The government is well-positioned to adopt the declaration which was drafted by civil society and ICT policy groups, and which calls for equal access to the internet for all. By recognising this as a basic human right, the state can play a crucial role in ensuring that all its citizens have the ability to access the internet.

- Amend the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA)
  The government should strengthen provisions to ensure Indigenous communities' participation in creating and implementing education policies and ensure that their rights to cultural integrity and access to technology are upheld in any EdTech initiative. This would require that any educational or technological initiative impacting Indigenous communities undergoes a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process, ensuring their voluntary agreement based on a full understanding of the implications.

- Collaborate with civil society organisations
  The government must collaborate with local and regional civil society organisations (CSOs) when it comes to the assessment, implementation and development of EdTech resources, policy and infrastructure. The government must provide unconditional lottery seed funding for CSOs to be able to do this independently. The funding must be earmarked specifically for projects that aim to enhance the outcomes of EdTech. This ensures that CSOs have necessary resources to operate effectively without government interference.

- Expand the Magna Carta for Teachers (RA 4670) and RA 11713
  Ensure both legislations include provisions for continuous professional development in digital literacy and pedagogy, as well as protections for the rights of teachers in the digital age. Training for educators should not only cover technical skills but also include critical pedagogy that encourages critical thinking about societal structures, empowering students to understand and challenge the status quo.

- Safeguard public interest in the educational sector
  Policies must require a thorough evaluation of all EdTech providers and businesses to confirm that their services and products address the genuine educational needs and contribute to solving existing issues rather than merely seeking profit from public funds. The government should also promote collective licensing agreements for digital resources and software.

- Repeal the Labour Export Policy
  The government should invest in public school instructors by ensuring that their salaries are commensurate with their efforts and the current rate of inflation. This will help slow down the brain drain that the country is currently facing in which teachers are leaving the country in flocks for better opportunities overseas.

The Government of Cambodia must:

- Increase its expenditure on education
  Cambodia must align the education spending within the 4-6% of GDP recommendation to ensure sufficient funding. Additional funds could be allocated to increase teacher salaries and procurement of modern educational materials and technology.

- Reform the Education Law of 2007
  Specific clauses should mandate the integration of technology in education, focusing on equitable access and quality of digital resources for students with disabilities, women, LGBTIQ+, Indigenous peoples and those from remote areas must be incorporated. Provisions should include the integration of Indigenous perspectives and languages in the national curriculum and in digital education platforms. Mandates including the expansion of internet and telecommunications infrastructure to rural and remote areas to ensure equitable access to EdTech must focus on the most underserved communities.

- Introduce digital inclusion legislation
  The government should make access to the internet and digital content a human right. This legislation would mandate the expansion of internet access to underserved communities, provide for the localisation of digital content to cater to diverse linguistic and cultural groups, and ensure that digital tools in education are accessible to students with disabilities.

- Introduce a cultural impact assessment and standards for education policies
  Similar to environmental impact assessments, this would ensure that all new education and EdTech policies are evaluated for their impact on Indigenous cultures and ways of life. Policies that support and fund bilingual education programmes, particularly in regions with high Indigenous populations, to ensure that EdTech resources are accessible and relevant.

- Abolish the Telecommunications Law
  Any provisions that may limit internet freedom or access to educational resources online must be prohibited to ensure the internet is a space for free and safe educational exchange. Measures to protect children and educators from online exploitation and abuse, especially as technology use in education increases, must be taken into account.

- Reaffirm EdTech as a public good
  The role of technology in education as a public good must be emphasised, it is the state's responsibility to provide this without allowing corporate or external interests to dictate terms or access. The government must ensure that educational technology practices promote inclusivity and access, particularly for marginalised and underserved communities.

Civil society should:

- Conduct independent evaluations of EdTech programmes
  Regular assessment of the impact of EdTech initiatives must be conducted to verify both their effectiveness and fairness. Such evaluation must focus on whether the technologies are meeting educational goals while taking into consideration human rights. Results will be made available publicly.

- Enhance community involvement in EdTech decision making
  There is a need to establish local forums and digital platforms where parents, students and educators can actively participate in discussions about EdTech tools and policies. These platforms should serve as critical feedback mechanisms to inform policy adjustments and ensure that EdTech developments align with the needs and expectations of the community.

The European Union, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Italian Agency for International Cooperation can:

- Offer no-strings-attached financial grants
  These grants should support the digital transformation of education in the Philippines and Cambodia. These grants are meant to empower local governments to develop and implement their own technology solutions in education, fostering independence and local ownership of projects.

- Facilitate education partnerships
  Partnerships between local universities in the Philippines and Cambodia and their European counterparts can be used to foster an exchange of knowledge and educational methodologies that respect local educational goals and cultural contexts.

- Assist in the development of local data management capabilities
  The European Union (EU) and Italian institutions can establish regional data centres managed and operated by local governments or universities. These centres should prioritise data sovereignty, with the EU providing the necessary technical training and initial resources but ensuring that operational control remains local.

Conclusion

The educational systems in the Philippines and Cambodia are in fragile states. While policymakers of both countries may seem too keen to jump on the bandwagon of adapting EdTech in classrooms and other learning facilities, they should be careful not to rush the implementation of such programmes without ample situational domestic research and considerations. The adaptation of digital technology in schools promises a new dimension of interactive and engaging learning experiences amongst students and teachers. Yet, the lack of consideration for poor and marginalised students overshadows these benefits. This is even made more complicated by the adoption of neoliberal policies that outsource public service from private institutions. Outsourcing of responsibilities strips the public sector of resources and capabilities while ensuring that control and profits remain in the hands of a few elites.

Both the Philippines and Cambodia need to invest in public infrastructure and public education now to build robust internet connectivity, provide reliable and modern ICT tools, and ensure that every school has the physical and technological capacity to support digital learning. If these deficiencies are not addressed now, these countries will face greater challenges on the education journey of the next generation of students. It is henceforth recommended that the Philippines and Cambodia take into account systemic problems that plague their educational sectors. By acknowledging and tackling these problems both countries can ensure that their EdTech initiatives benefit all students regardless of their background or location. This approach will not only improve outcomes but also promote fairness and equality in their education systems for all, not just a privileged few.

References

Adams D, Namoco SO, Ng AYM & Cheah KSL 'Leading schools during a pandemic and beyond: Insights from principals in the Philippines' (2023) 0 Management in Education, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/08920206231177375 (last visited 2 May 2024)

Afkar R, Beteille T, Breeding M, et al. Fixing the Foundation: Teachers and Basic Education in East Asia and Pacific (2023) World Bank East Asia and Pacific Regional Report, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1904-9 (last visited 2 May 2024)

Amiti F 'Synchronous and asynchronous E-learning' (2020) 5 European Journal of Open Education and E-Learning Studies 2

Angelo FA 'PHL underspending on education – study' (2024) Philippine Institute for Development Studies, available at https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/news/in-the-news/phl-underspending-on-education-study (last visited 1 May 2024)

ASEAN 'Declaration on The Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN' (2022), available at https://asean.org/declaration-on-the-digital-transformation-of-education-systems-in-asean/ (last visited 11 April 2024)

ASEAN 'Work Plan on Education 2021-2025' (2021), available at https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Public-Release-ASEAN-Work-Plan-on-Education-2021-2025.pdf (last visited 31 May 2021)

Ball J & Smith M 'Essential Components in Planning Multilingual Education: A Case Study of Cambodia's Multilingual Education National Action Plan' (2021) Current Issues in Language Planning, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2021.2013060 (last visited 2 May 2024)

CRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990, 1577 UNTS 3

CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) adopted 13 December 2006, entered into force 3 May 2008, 2515 UNTS

Essa SG, Celik T & Human-Hendricks N 'Personalised adaptive learning technologies based on machine learning techniques to identify learning styles: A systematic literature review' (2023) IEEE Access

Fenwick S 'Mobile Network Experience Report' (2023) Research report, OpenSignal

Haleem A, Javaid M, Qadri MA & Suman R 'Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review' (2022) 3 Sustainable Operations and Computers 275

Heng K & Sol K 'COVID-19 and Cambodian Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities' in Online Learning During COVID-19 and Key Issues in Education (2021) 31

Hernando-Malipot M '"Confusing" Mother Tongue subject removed; to remain as a medium of instruction --- DepEd' (2023) Manila Bulletin, available at https://mb.com.ph/2023/8/10/confusing-mother-tongue-subject-removed-to-remain-as-a-medium-of-instruction-dep-ed (last visited 19 February 2024)

ICERD (International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination) adopted 21 December 1965, entered into force 4 January 1969, 660 UNTS 195

ICESCR (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976, 993 UNTS 3

Iqbal M, Mangina E & Campbell A 'Current Challenges and Future Research Directions in Augmented Reality for Education' (2022) 6 Multimodal Technologies and Interaction 75, DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/mti6090075 (last visited 2 May 2024)

Jones BD 'Motivating and engaging students using educational technologies' in MJ Bishop, E Boling, J Elen & V Svihla (eds) Handbook of Research in Educational Communications and Technology: Learning Design (2020) Switzerland AG; Springer Cham 9-35

Luan H & Tsai C 'A review of using machine learning approaches for precision education' (2021) 24 Educational Technology & Society 250

Machmud M, Widiyan A & Ramadhani N 'The Development and Policies of ICT Supporting Educational Technology in Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Myanmar' (2021) 10 International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education 78, available at http://ijere.iaescore.com/index.php/IJERE/article/view/20786 (last visited 10 April 2024)

Millar P 'The sobering reality of Cambodia's free education drive' (2018) Southeast Asia Globe, available at https://southeastasiaglobe.com/the-sobering-reality-of-cambodias-free-education-drive/ (last visited 15 May 2024)

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Education Sector Working Group 'Needs Assessment helps to understand the impact of COVID-19 on education stakeholders' (March 2021), available at https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/media/4296/file/Cambodia%20COVID-19%20Joint%20Education%20Needs%20Assessment.pdf (last visited 15 May 2024)

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) 'Education in Cambodia: Findings from Cambodia's Experience in PISA for Development' (2018) Phnom Penh

Noorlander J 'Multilingual Education for Ethnic Minorities in Cambodia' (2022) Education in the Asia-Pacific region 293-309, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8213-1_16 (last visited 2 May 2024)

OECD 'PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education' (2023) OECD iLibrary, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en (last visited 2 May 2024)

Pellini A, Nicolai S, McGee A, Sharp S, Wilson S 'A Political Economy Analysis Framework for EdTech Evidence Uptake' (2021) EdTech Hub Policy Brief

Republic of the Philippines 'Republic Act No. 4670. The Magna Carta for Public School Teachers' (1966) June 18

Republic of the Philippines 'Republic Act No. 11573. An act further strengthening teacher education in the Philippines by enhancing the teacher education council' (2022) April 27

Rodriguez-Segura D 'EdTech in developing countries: A review of the evidence' (2022) 37 The World Bank Research Observer 171

Santos AP 'In the Philippines, distance learning reveals the digital divide' (2020) Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, available at https://hk.boell.org/en/2020/10/06/philippines-distance-learning-reveals-digital-divide (last visited 15 April 2024)

Sim T & Em S 'Blended learning: the way forward for Cambodian Higher Education in the post-COVID-19 pandemic' (2023) Innovations and challenges in Cambodian education 37

Smith N, Alegre AA & Rigby J '"The rich access quality education as the poor suffer": Learning crisis as Filipino schools stay closed' (2021) The Daily Telegraph, available at https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/rich-access-quality-education-poor-suffer-filipino-schools-close/ (last visited 24 April 2024)

Sotheareach S 'Education budget brief 2022, UNICEF Cambodia' (2023), available at https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/education-budget-brief-2022 (last visited 23 April 2024)

Sorongon VKC & Castillo CT 'Education technology pilot project in the Philippines wraps up with a promise of continuity' (2023) Niras, available at https://www.niras.com/news/edtech-solutions-for-last-mile-schools-pilot-project-in-the-philippines-wraps-up-with-a-promise-of-continuity/ (last visited 29 April 2024)

Suppasetseree S & Nutprapha D 'Challenges and Issues Implementing and Integrating Educational Technology for Teaching and Learning English at a Local University in Thailand' (2011) 4 International Journal of Arts & Sciences 135

UNDP 'Building Back Better: Cambodia's Post-Covid-19 Education System' (n.d.), available at https://www.undp.org/cambodia/news/building-back-better-cambodias-post-covid-19-education-system (last visited 15 April 2024)

United Nations 'Goal 4 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (2023), available at https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#progress_and_info (last visited 15 May 2024)

UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) adopted 10 December 1948, UNGA Res 217 A(III)

UNCRC (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child) 'Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of the Philippines' (2022a) CRC/C/PHL/CO/5-6, 26 October, available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FPHL%2FCO%2F5-6&Lang=en (last visited 19 April 2024)

UNCRC (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child) 'Concluding observations on the combined fourth to sixth periodic reports of Cambodia' (2022b) CRC/C/KHM/CO/4-6

Vo PTN 'An Investigation of ICT Policy Implementation in an EFL Teacher Education Program in Vietnam' (2019) PhD thesis, Edith Cowan University

Global Campus of Human Rights

Europe
South East Europe
Latin America-Caribbean
Asia-Pacific
Central Asia
Caucasus
Arab World
Africa

The Global Campus of Human Rights is a unique network of more than one hundred participating universities around the world, seeking to advance human rights and democracy through regional and global cooperation for education and research. This global network is promoted through eight Regional Programmes which are based in Venice (GC Europe), Sarajevo/Bologna (GC South East Europe), Pretoria (GC Africa), Bangkok (GC Asia-Pacific), Yerevan (GC Caucasus), Buenos Aires (GC Latin America and the Caribbean), Beirut (GC Arab World), and Bishkek (GC Central Asia).

The Global Campus Policy Observatory aims to enhance the role of the Global Campus and its regional members in undertaking coordinated research initiatives and providing guidance and expert opinions in response to urgent human rights issues to a broad primary and secondary audience. It provides a virtual hub with the participation of a team of researchers who are alumni from GC regional programmes, for the production of a set of complementary policy analyses on selected topics.

GC Headquarters
Monastery of San Nicolò,
Riviera San Nicolò, 26
I-30126 Venice Lido (Italy)

www.gchumanrights.org

Supported by