

The New Digital Education Policy Landscape: From Education Systems to Platforms, edited by Christóbal Cobo and Axel Rivas

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In the new millennium, digital technology widely supported by artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) is radically shifting the foundations of modern education as never before. The changes accelerated by technology are creating conditions conducive to a new global capitalism that of course has exponents and detractors. While some voices propose that the advance of technology means the degradation of social life (Baudrillard 2003; Virilio 2004), others applaud digital technology as a valuable instrument to more efficient (safer) societies (Martin 2008). A mixed, balanced argument has certainly been given by Manuel Castells (2002), who argues that technology works as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it potentiates the consolidation of new relationships based on multidimensional transformation marked by a liberalisation of information. This means that lay citizens not only get information faster than in other centuries but also directly interrogate the political authorities and their government actions. On the other hand, he regrets that the excess of information leads citizens to standardised social relationships that negate dissent (Castells 2002). Beyond any doubt, digital technologies have come to stay. They have started a great revolution in the constellations of education worldwide. This seems particularly true after the COVID-19 pandemic, a moment that pushed millions of students to take online courses (to stop the dissemination of the virus). Doubtless, the COVID-19 pandemic has ignited new forms of communication, socialisation, and sensorialities where technology occupies a central position (Scribano, Korstanje, and Rafele 2022).

In their recently published book, Cristóbal Cobo and Axel Rivas offer a more than interesting editorial project that places the problem of modern education and technology



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in the foreground. Having said this, the book is oriented to discuss what the editors dubbed the “platformisation” of education, which means the unbridled growth of digital platforms to measure and predict students’ performance. This growth is invariably subject to a notable paradox. While the logic of platforms is based on their success and ability to achieve long-lasting network interaction, it is no less true that their advancement is changing the nature of education. The book departs from the premise that though technology enhances (in some contexts) education, not all education networks are well prepared for online courses or online learning. The opposite is equally important, some families are certainly excluded from access to technology or digital connectivity. This results in a much deeper ghettoisation process that marginalises thousands of young students, relegating them to a peripheral position in the educational system. In years, these young students will become part of an underclass with low-skilled capacities to compete directly with other workers. To put it bluntly, the present book questions who the real winners and losers of this game are. In addition, nation states are systematically failing to control the rise and expansion of digital technologies as well as their immediate effects on daily life. The 10 chapters have been authored by experts in the fields from different countries. Part 2 is formed by five chapters strictly based on firm, study-case descriptions.

In the first chapter, Niels Kerssens and Jose van Dijck examine the educational technology (edtech) landscapes in the Netherlands. Per their viewpoint, platformisation and a cloud-centred learning environment are creating the conditions for two new phenomena overlooked by policymakers who specialise in classic education in the country. At a closer look, there is a new force known as interoperability aimed at facilitating fluid connection among a set of different platforms. Secondly, the interoperability allows the connection with vertically interlinked proprietary platforms. Both forces should be controlled by policymakers to avoid the dissociation between private and public interests. Put differently, though platformisation offers a valid opportunity to resolve the current setbacks in education, it should be closely scrutinised to avoid asymmetrical consequences in the Dutch educational system. In the second chapter, Kashvi Shetty and Pranjal Mishra evaluate the effects of the pandemic on the platformisation process in India. The pandemic should be valorised as a disrupting event that prompted a new rule in modern pedagogy globally. We are witnessing a transition from the *traditional mode* to a *digital mode* in the field of learning. Technology itself does not guarantee the democratisation of education at all levels of the system. Some established problems are being reproduced by technology. For the sake of clarity, the edtech industry has not resolved persistent maladies such as poverty, inequality, or poor working conditions for teachers in the country. The authors give interesting tips and recommendations to achieve a more sustainable education system.

In the third chapter, Miguel Brechner provides a critical reflection on the role played by hybrid modes in classrooms as an accelerator of pedagogy. The author analyses the cases of Uruguay and Korea as two similar examples of innovation. Whereas Korea has a higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita level than Uruguay, both countries

are good illustrative cases of how technology can integrate positively into the education system. This happens simply because Uruguay and South Korea have implemented long-run policies that have not been altered in decades. As the author notes, the private sector innovating in the edtech industry has faced minimal barriers or controls by the state. In the fourth chapter, Elena Arias Ortiz et al. review the case of EMIS (a project named Education Management and Information System) applied in Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina. Per their obtained results, EMIS has the potential to change education by integrating human and material resources more efficiently. At the same time, they enumerate some problems in sustainability, data ethics, and interoperability. In some countries, EMIS lacks a centralised vision or strategic plan (at the public level), in which case, some local stakeholders or agents eloquently show some resistance to the application of EMIS in the education system. In the fifth chapter, Sheila Jagannathan describes how global capitalism opens the door to a volatile job economy often subject to countless technological and environmental changes (if not disruptions). Yet, technology can boost workers' competence, accelerating continuity in high-skill learning. The chapter evaluates the benefits and limitations of platformisation in the skilling and re-skilling of the future workforce.

Part 2 is limited to offering conceptual reflections revolving around how digital technology and education platformisation deal with the state. In the sixth chapter, Lanze Vanermen et al. remind us that the debate regarding access and participation in edtech is open to date. Over the years, Western economies have devoted resources and time to eradicating the barriers that historically prevented lay citizens from accessing education. Massive open online learning managed remote education, allowing disabled or marginalised people to access educational resources (that is, articles, papers, or online material). Nonetheless, the pay-for-access mode, a tendency which dominates academia, has recently been questioned by universities, colleges, and scholars. Instead of contemplating platforms as natural spaces of socialisation, some voices toyed with the idea that digital platforms are programmed structures that draw actively the user's action. In consequence, these platforms dominate the market, situated as intermediaries between users and education organisations. In turn, the authors elucidate new forms of cooperation towards an open-access mode. In consonance with the book's content, the seventh chapter (written by Emiliano Grimaldi et al.) alludes to platforms as supra-architectures that mould a variety of disrupting points that lead us to re-consider modern education. The chapter invites readers not to become enthralled to or take for granted the spread of digital platforms. Rather, it confronts the belief that the diffusion of platforms naturally leads to free education. The chapter calls for the introduction of ethical-political questions that evaluate deep power relationships between involved stakeholders. The rest of the book delves into the dilemmas of platformisation, which include the standardisation and degradation of human relationships, ethical problems in data-gathering, cleavages between the private and the public sphere, the neglect of policymakers to adopt edtech because of employability issues, inequalities among classes to access free education, and the lack of reliable resources to understand the long-lasting effects of digital platforms in Westernised economies.

The present book is, at least for this reviewer, an interesting project that describes the future and limitations of digital technologies to be applied in education. Most certainly the main argument would be enriched by incorporating more critical viewpoints that stave off the neoliberal paradigm that is enthralled by the liberal market as the organiser of human relationships. Part of the gathered information is ultimately digested to suggest the deregulation of the education system, which is widely supported by edtech. In fact, the recent criticism elicited in academia and potentiated by the university presses' boycott of consolidated publishers over open access content reflects very well how the market should be regulated. This turning point is important for readers who have criticised Western universities and global publishers for the current subscription-fees system. This has created a paradoxical situation for many universities which pay the wages of their researchers and the subscription fee for their students to read the same material their professor publish in peer-reviewed journals. This is one of many examples that should be discussed as a challenge posed by the current Western education system.

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