

Growth of the UK EdTech sector and rapid AI development

29 March 2024



According to the Government, the UK's EdTech sector is the largest in Europe. They also report that UK schools already spend an estimated £900mn a year on educational technology.

The role of EdTech is likely to grow significantly in coming years, particularly as a result of the rapid evolution and growth of AI technologies, in particular, generative AI such as large language models (LLMs) including ChatGPT and Bard.

There are already reports that increasing numbers of children are using AI tools in their schoolwork, both with and without the direction of teachers and other educational professionals, as a result of the free availability of the growing number of tools.

Reflecting on the potential use of AI in the American educational system, writing in the journal *Education Next*, John Bailey, an academic and former director of science technology at the US department of education, said that AI could serve, or is already serving, in several teaching-and-learning roles:

Instructional assistants. AI's ability to conduct human-like conversations opens up possibilities for adaptive tutoring or instructional assistants that can help explain difficult concepts to students. AI-based feedback systems can offer constructive critiques on student writing, which can help students fine-tune their writing skills. Some research also suggests certain kinds of prompts can help

children generate more fruitful questions about learning. AI models might also support customised learning for students with disabilities and provide translation for English language learners.

Teaching assistants. AI might tackle some of the administrative tasks that keep teachers from investing more time with their peers or students. Early uses include automated routine tasks such as drafting lesson plans, creating differentiated materials, designing worksheets, developing quizzes, and exploring ways of explaining complicated academic materials. AI can also provide educators with recommendations to meet student needs and help teachers reflect, plan, and improve their practice.

Parent assistants. Parents can use AI to generate letters requesting individualized education plan (IEP) services or to ask that a child be evaluated for gifted and talented programs. For parents choosing a school for their child, AI could serve as an administrative assistant, mapping out school options within driving distance of home, generating application timelines, compiling contact information, and the like. Generative AI can even create bedtime stories with evolving plots tailored to a child's interests.

Administrator assistants. Using generative AI, school administrators can draft various communications, including materials for parents, newsletters, and other community-engagement documents. AI systems can also help with the difficult tasks of organizing class or bus schedules, and they can analyse complex data to identify patterns or needs. ChatGPT can perform sophisticated sentiment analysis that could be useful for measuring school-climate and other survey data.

However, whilst these applications potentially offer “great potential” according to Mr Bailey, he is also clear that these solutions present their own risks.

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