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● A Hyve Event

POWERING UP EDUCATION:

Insights on inclusive digital
transformation from
global leaders



Setting the scene

The Powering Up Education Ministerial and Policy Leaders' Roundtable hosted by Bett Asia, a member of the UNESCO Global Education Coalition in partnership with the Ministry of Education Malaysia and UK Department for Business and Trade, convened on 1st October 2024 in Kuala Lumpur. This roundtable brought together 32 experts from Ministries of Education and Higher Education from South-East Asia, the Pacific and Europe, alongside policymakers, and senior leadership from educational institutions, international development organizations and the private sector.

Central to the discussions was the Six Pillars Framework¹, a structured approach to digital transformation in education developed by the UNESCO Digital Transformation Collaborative². The roundtable provided participants an opportunity to share insights on prioritizing key components of digital transformation in education, assessing both opportunities and challenges, and exploring collaborative opportunities to bridge the digital divide and promote inclusive, equitable learning.



The opening remarks highlighted the critical need to tackle regional disparities in digital access, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating these inequalities, which left millions in East Asia and the Pacific without access to remote learning opportunities. Collaboration, cross-country learning, and human centred, sustainable digital transformation of education were emphasized as essential strategies to address the regional learning crisis.

There were also two featured case studies from Malaysia and Indonesia, highlighting regional digital transformation initiatives.

1. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391299>

2. <https://www.unesco.org/en/global-education-coalition/digital-transformation-collaborative?hub=343>



Case studies

Malaysia's National Digital Education Policy

Malaysia's digital transformation journey began in 1996 with the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) initiative³, which included the Smart School project, an early model to introduce technology into classrooms to improve education quality and prepare students for the information age. By 2020, 98% of Malaysian schools had achieved Smart School status, setting a strong foundation for broader digital integration.

More recently, Malaysia's National Digital Education Policy launched in 2023 aims to drive economic growth to produce digitally fluent students that are competitive in the digital economy. A key feature of the policy is that it is aligned with national agendas like the Malaysia Education Blueprint, the 12th Malaysia Plan, and National Fourth Industrial Revolution Policy.

Notable achievements of the policy include establishing digital competency standards within the curriculum, with over 87% teachers completing digital competency assessment and 40% of school leaders trained in digital leadership. The policy's implementation is further supported by the DELIMa platform, a digital learning platform developed by the Ministry of Education offering free educational resources and applications, which has earned multiple international accolades.

Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar Policies

Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) policy employs a systems thinking approach to improve the quality of learning for all students, aligned with the competencies in the Pancasila student profile. A key element of the reform is policy coherence, ensuring that the policy vision is effectively communicated to and implemented by teachers, school leaders, and schools.

Recognizing that long-term reform requires changes to the taught, written, and assessed curriculum, Merdeka Belajar restructured standardized testing to hold schools accountable instead of students. Assessment results are digitized for insights into planning and budgeting through the Rapor Pendidikan platform, which is fully integrated with procurement and budgeting systems.

The reform also introduced a collaborative approach to technology development, where procurement begins with joint input from schools, teachers, and the technology team, positioning the tech technology as a strategic partner in the iterative development of applications.

One of the vital digital platforms launched under Merdeka Belajar, is the Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM), which offers teachers self-directed training modules, access to online communities, and relevant teaching materials, including textbooks and classroom assessments. With high adoption rates, PMM has become Indonesia's most widely used government education App.

3. <https://www.mida.gov.my/industries/services/other-services/other-services-multimedia-super-corridor-msc/>



The Six Pillars Framework

The Six Pillars Framework for digital transformation in education is developed by UNESCO's Digital Transformation Collaborative, a subgroup of the Global Education Coalition launched by UNESCO. The framework provides a shared language and toolkit to strategically advance digital transformation in education across diverse environments and contexts. It is also accompanied by a maturity model that describes the three stages of a digital transformation journey, to help education leaders strategize and self-assess. The outer layer of the framework represents the vision, while the inner layer comprises the six pillars, namely:

Coordination and Leadership:

Establishing robust governance structures and strategic vision to guide digital transformation.



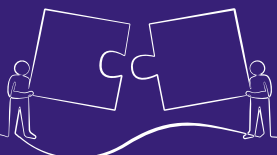
Capacity and Culture:

Building digital literacy, skills, and competency among education stakeholders and their mindsets towards digital transformation.



Connectivity and Infrastructure:

Availability, reliability, and accessibility of the technical infrastructure required to facilitate digital learning.



Content and Solutions:

Quality, openness, contextual relevance, and alignment of digital learning materials, tools, and platforms.



Cost and Sustainability:

Financial aspects of digital transformation in education, ensuring sustainable funding models and equitable resource management.



Data and Evidence:

Integration of data driven decision making in educational planning and management.



Roundtable discussions:

Student voice and student-centred education

A future-ready education system must focus on the student voice, agency, and a student-centred approach. Student perspectives are often missing from the conversation in many existing policies and frameworks, especially regarding what they value in technology and how it impacts their learning. The current generation is creative, digitally fluent, understands the technology landscape, and can provide valuable insights on integrating technology meaningfully to improve their learning. Hence, it is essential to include students as stakeholders in policy-making discussions to ensure that frameworks remain relevant and practical for them.

Another recurring concern is the need for EdTech to address disparities in access and opportunities, especially between urban and rural students, students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and students with disabilities. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, student-centred education should focus on adapting curricula to meet individual student needs. This is where technology can play an important role – personalized learning facilitated by AI and adaptive technologies can create individualized learning experiences tailored to each student's needs, cultural context, background, and abilities.

Preparing students with adaptive skills is crucial, as they will need to navigate evolving landscapes, in both technology and society. As AI and digital tools rapidly spread, students need opportunities to think critically about information. Education should foster curiosity and continuous learning, ensuring that students can adapt and thrive long after they leave school. It must balance creativity and analytical thinking, equipping students to innovate and problem-solve in a digital world.

Teacher support and capacity building

The role of teachers is evolving into mentors guiding students in using technology for learning. Technology integration in curriculum can support teachers to enhance lesson delivery by creating and modifying lesson plans with AI and data insights. Therefore, building teacher competence in technology is essential, with a focus on both technical and pedagogical training of using EdTech effectively. Equipped with this expertise, they can act as ambassadors for technology in education, sharing best practices within their communities.

Training for teachers should foster a mindset shift rather than simply modifying behaviour, using culturally responsive communication to foster positive attitudes and acceptance towards technology integration. Importantly, a feedback system is needed to ensure that training is meaningful and not imposed on teachers, and to maintain the momentum in teacher technology adoption.

Ultimately, technology should support and not replace teachers, empowering them to create enriching learning experiences while maintaining their central role in students' development.



Roundtable discussions:

Data enabled decision-making

Data collection should take an intersectional approach, considering variables such as student background, disabilities, and regional contexts. Integrating AI into lesson planning and using predictive analytics can further personalize learning experiences, adapting lessons to meet individual student needs. Predictive analysis can support large-scale decision-making at a national level by identifying trends across student demographics. Technology can also enable sharing best practices quickly across regions can enhance teacher training and optimize resource allocation.

Real-time feedback and transparency in data usage is essential for teachers and parents, as it helps track student performance and make informed decisions that support student learning. Data driven insights can also guide policy decisions, improve transparency, and enable schools to adjust their practices accordingly. Large, comprehensive data sets allow for comparisons and sharing best practices on both national and global levels, promoting broader educational improvements.

Educational stakeholders and governments are increasingly leveraging technology and data systems to inform decision-making processes. The Ministry of Education in Malaysia has an integrated system to track student progress via classroom assessments, attendance, and academic results. Thailand has taken steps to centralize student and teacher data under their Ministry of Education, aiming to unify information across educational offices and support large-scale projects and policy initiatives more effectively.

Ethical use of technology

The ethical use of technology in education is paramount as digital tools, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data become more integral to learning environments. Education should lead technology, not the other way around. The focus should be on using technology to enhance teaching and learning, not to dictate educational practices. Without careful oversight, technology could lead to more passive student engagement, deviating from active, immersive learning experiences.

AI presents both opportunities and risks in educational settings, necessitating clear guidelines to govern its application. Protocols should ensure that AI outputs are effective and accurate, remain aligned with educational values, and free from bias.

Safeguarding is another ethical priority. As students increasingly interact with technology, they face potential online risks. Teachers and parents need effective tools and resources to ensure online safety of learners. There is also an opportunity for countries to collectively develop cybersecurity policies, fostering trust and a secure digital environment for learners.

Finally, there is need of greater accountability from EdTech companies. EdTech providers should adhere to rigorous standards that protect student privacy and safety. This accountability can be in the form of establishing funds or regulatory mechanisms that ensure accessible and secure technology for all learners.



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