Anna Lukina   July 29th, 2025

Confessions of a Luddite teacher: a case for edtech pessimism

Swimming against the tide in a higher education environment replete with learning technology, **Anna Lukina** *has adopted an unconventional approach in her classroom*

I shall preface my post by saying that I love technology. It is a constant in my day-to-day life as I spend most of my working hours behind the computer screen, make (totally real!) friends on social media, and indulge in my video game hobby in what is left of my free time. In fact, I used ChatGPT to generate the cover image for this blogpost, and despite my initial scepticism, I was pleasantly surprised with the result. However, when it comes to my teaching duties, I am highly sceptical of incorporating edtech (educational technology) into my teaching, preferring to stick to more traditional teaching methods and techniques.

A lot of discussion of technology in the classroom, both at schools and universities, concerns itself with the use of technology by students, the prime example being the ongoing debate about whether laptops should be banned in class. However, this is not my focus here, as I think that university students should be allowed to take control of their learning and structure it according to their needs (including accessibility-related adjustments) and preferences. The way I use edtech tools, by contrast, is within my discretion as an educator.

Tech-free teaching

What does incorporating technology into teaching look like? Edtech can take many forms and be integrated into various stages of teaching and learning processes. In this post, I would like to limit myself to the use of technology in the classroom rather than beyond it. This excludes, for instance, learning organization platforms and includes the use of in-class tools enabling the teacher to present visual aids, conduct polls and quizzes, and perform other similar activities.

My discipline – legal philosophy – is conservative in its teaching methods. The classes and seminars I teach are modelled after the way the same highly abstract philosophical questions were

discussed by the Ancients, with no devices in sight. Think Raphael's *The School of Athens*. Some other fields, however, cannot – and often should not – dispense with technology so easily, although one would be surprised that, as a colleague informed me, even coding classes can be made tech-free. Nevertheless, my further observations about teaching using edtech are meant to be necessarily contextual.

> ❝
>
> *Using technology while teaching is one such metric as teachers feel that they must show that they are keeping up with the times.*
>
> ❞

As educators, we are often influenced by our prior experiences as students – both positive and negative – and I am not an exception. One of my former professors became a faculty member in the 70s and has not changed his approach to teaching since. Before each class, he would circulate printed (and sometimes even typewritten) readings, that my classmates and I would then discuss, with no technological aids at hand. While that professor's old-fashioned teaching style was puzzling to my more technologically savvy peers, it nevertheless appealed to me and has influenced my approach to teaching ever since.

Challenging the consensus

Consciously choosing to minimize the use of technology on my side of the classroom often feels like swimming against the tide as the pressure to incorporate technology in class instruction is high. This, in my view, is an example of what Stephen Ball, back in 2003, called performativity. Instead of reflecting on what will boost both attainment and interest, educators are often pushed to tick the boxes necessary to signal reward-worthy performance. Using technology while teaching is one such metric as teachers feel that they must show that they are keeping up with the times. But uncritically advocating for technology for the sake of technology without considering its actual benefits and drawbacks, both in general and in the context of the specific learning activity one facilitates, is a mistake. There is, of course, a view that incorporating technological tools, such as Mentimeter, into class instruction better captures students' attention and is thus conducive to better learning. However, it can be challenged on three grounds.

Firstly, the benefits of edtech are often overstated – it is not always the silver bullet we are taught it is. An intriguing study conducted in 2024 found that secondary school students' psychological needs satisfaction (autonomy, relatedness and competence) and academic wellbeing (interest and effort) were dependent not on the use of technology, but on whether the teaching style used by the instructor is sufficiently autonomy-supportive, or allows students to be active participants in their learning. Even though the authors found that technology could have positive effects when combined with this teaching style, they nevertheless detected no benefits of technology use on its own. While the study focused on the learning experience of 9-16-year-olds, this result could apply in a higher education setting, especially in view of studies on agentic engagement among university students. It would show that the impact of edtech on student learning is not that straightforward.

> "
>
> *Even if edtech is still marginally beneficial, its use in the classroom comes with drawbacks.*
>
> "

Secondly, even if edtech is still marginally beneficial, its use in the classroom comes with drawbacks. For instance, on reflection, one of the main reasons I appreciated the technology-free classroom was that I felt that I could concentrate on the class material without distractions, something that, to me, was often missing in classrooms where more technology was used. My observations were confirmed in a study by Neil Selwyn, whose student participants cited four core downsides of using edtech – not only aforementioned distraction, but also potential technological disruptions, logistical difficulties, and detriments to the quality of teaching material. The time and energy spent on navigating those challenges can be used to broaden or deepen one's knowledge of the topic at hand. This is particularly crucial when it comes to teaching disciplines such as philosophy that are built on close and uninterrupted reading of the set texts.

Thirdly, perhaps the statement in question is predicated on the wrong assumption about what university education is. In a popular paper titled, *Let me edutain you!* the authors explained how university lecturers often conflate engagement as an emotional construct with engagement as a cognitive construct, or, in other words, aiming for students to like their classes rather than learn from them. This also dovetails with the recent neoliberal turn in education that treats students as consumers who need to be 'edutained' (to use the authors' portmanteau) in that way. Edtech, in turn, is often marketed as serving that purpose. However, while fun has its place in education (there is a reason I chose to pursue a career in academia), what university students seek first is that they

come out of the class with an enhanced understanding of the discussed material. Instead of trying to win students' attention, perhaps teachers should take it as a given and try to match their learning expectations, with technology or without it.

Overall, while merging technology and teaching via edtech may seem like an attractive prospect, it comes with its challenges. Edtech should only be used if it genuinely enhances the students' learning process in the specific context it is employed. As a result, I shall adopt what Selwyn called, in 2011, a pessimistic, or critical, stance on the question at hand.

This post is opinion-based and does not reflect the views of the London School of Economics and Political Science or any of its constituent departments and divisions.

Image: Anna Lukina

A version of this post first appeared on the Contemporary Issues in Teaching and Learning Blog, part of the LSE PGCertHE, on 3 March 2025.

About the author

Anna Lukina

Anna Lukina is a Fellow at the LSE Law School, London School of Economics, UK

Posted In: Pedagogy to Practice

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

© LSE 2025