

Six ways that tablets really can transform teaching

September 5 2018, by Nicola Pitchford And Laura Outhwaite



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The holidays may be over – but the debate over young people and screen time continues. And as anxious parents prepare children for the start of a new school term, many will have concerns about what exposure to technology they will have in the classroom.

The UK education secretary Damian Hinds has [challenged the technology industry](#) to spearhead a classroom revolution. He wants more classrooms to take advantage of the gadgets and software available which enable pupils to go on "virtual trips" or "control robots".

Hinds is right to see the potential that technology has to transform teaching and learning. High quality [educational apps](#) available on smart phones and tablets really can help raise attainment, and provide a unique learning experience.

Over the past five years, we have been conducting an [international research project](#) evaluating a series of educational apps developed by the British charity [onebillion](#).

These interactive apps are designed specifically to support early years numeracy and literacy skills. They are available in [different languages](#) and enable children to learn independently and at their own pace. There is even an "in-app" [teacher](#) who guides them through the curriculum-based content.

Children interact with the apps by touching, dragging, and dropping objects to answer questions. Their learning levels are then assessed through quizzes.

So far, we have found many positive results from using these apps in early years education. Here are some of the things they can do:

1. Improve learning outcomes – these apps significantly raise attainment in key skills such as mathematics and literacy (when used alongside standard teaching methods).
2. Foster an inclusive learning environment – children with special educational needs and disabilities can learn effectively with these apps. This gives teachers a tool for providing high quality

education for children with specific needs alongside mainstream classroom peers.

3. Support cognitive development – when using educational apps to acquire specific skills, such as mathematics, core cognitive skills can also develop. When children in Malawi used interactive maths apps on a daily basis for eight weeks, their attention and concentration skills also improved.
4. Promote development of non-cognitive skills – teachers in Malawi and the UK using the same interactive apps to support early mathematical and [literacy skills](#), reported that children become more confident and independent in their learning.
5. Bridge home/school divides – these apps are also available for parents to download and are easy to use, so can support learning at home.
6. Equalise access – as these apps are available in different languages, are easy to use by teachers and parents, and promote self-paced learning, they can be used in different settings, equalising access to high quality education for all.

The apps are currently being implemented by [Voluntary Service Overseas](#) in Malawi in their flagship international development programme, [Unlocking Talent through Technology](#). They have also been implemented in 15 schools across Nottinghamshire with [promising results](#). So far, children using the app for 12 weeks (for 30 minutes a day) were up to four months ahead of their peers. The app was particularly beneficial for children struggling with maths.

But it's not just about numbers. Educational apps can also be used by teachers and children to create their own imaginative content, and connect classrooms worldwide. [Stories of a Lifetime](#) is a global literacy project run by Marc Faulder (in the UK) and Jason Milner (in Australia), which creates a library of local stories and myths, told by children in their own words and animations. Part of Apple's "[Distinguished](#)

[Educators](#)" programme, it enables teachers across the world to share their [children](#)'s stories in way which promotes digital literacy, communication skills and a sense of identity.

Teaching the teachers

But while tablets have considerable potential to transform teaching, teachers themselves need to be [skilled and confident](#) in using this technology creatively. To revolutionise learning through technology, greater opportunities for professional development of teachers is needed.

Tech giants such as Apple, Microsoft and Google already offer introductory and specialised training for teachers in using tablet technology effectively in the classroom. But for [technology](#) to enhance learning universally, training should be an integral part of professional development.

Those currently in the profession, and those studying to become teachers, would benefit from being taught how to use apps and tablets to improve learning in all subject areas – even if that means the adults having a bit more [screen time](#), too.

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