Key findings

- Excessive use of digital devices for leisure in classrooms can negatively impact students' academic performance.
- 58% of students in France reported being distracted by using digital devices in at least some maths lessons.
- 59% of students across the OECD said their attention was diverted due to other students using phones, tablets or laptops in at least some maths lessons.
- Students who reported being distracted by peers using digital devices in some, most or every maths class score significantly lower in maths tests.
- 29% of students reported using smartphones several times a day in schools with phone bans, on average across the OECD; 21% used one every or almost every day.
- 43% of French students reported feeling nervous or anxious if their phones were not near them.
- The digital environment offers educational opportunities but also presents risks such as cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content and privacy concerns.
- Some studies show a positive link between children's literacy skills and the time they spend watching screens with families, but a negative link if children watch screens alone.
- Policies such as smartphone bans can help mitigate distractions, but effective enforcement and other strategies are needed for focused learning environments.
- Access to digital technology is essential for education; efforts should be made to ensure all students have access to the necessary digital tools and resources with the age-appropriate support and supervision of adults.

Findings from PISA 2022 results.

The digital environment has become an integral aspect of children's lives. It offers many opportunities such as enhancing educational opportunities, expanding social interactions and having fun. However, the digital environment also exposes children to risks such as cyberbullying, the viewing of violent and other inappropriate content, sexual exploitation and abuse and breaches of privacy. Much current debate also centers on concerns that digital technologies can detract from human interaction and reduce the quality of children's social and emotional experiences.

All of these issues have fueled concerns from parents, teachers, governments and young people themselves that digital technologies and social media may be exacerbating feelings of anxiety and depression, disturbing sleep patterns and distorting body image. As we integrate new digital technologies into education, we must acknowledge the challenges and complexities that arise. As stated in the OECD Recommendation on Children in the Digital Environment, it is crucial to establish conditions for a safe and beneficial digital environment. Education systems have a vital role in supporting children to navigate the risks while reaping the benefits.

Digital risks

The OECD recognises four main risk categories for children in the digital environment: content, contact, consumer and conduct risks. Advanced technology, privacy, and health and well-being risks are also identified as cross-cutting risks. With advances in digital technology, there is more worrying material out there, including hate speech, offensive content and false and misleading content. The fact children have greater access to digital devices and the pervasiveness of algorithms also means that they may stumble upon this content more easily.

This has translated into rising concerns about the amount of potentially disturbing and harmful material that kids are seeing online. Other risks, including consumer risks, such as exposure to inappropriate marketing messages and online fraud, also continue to be an issue. In-app purchases and digital marketing pose additional threats to children's well-being and privacy.

There is also evidence that children and adolescents' mental health is impacted by time spent online. Higher rates of screentime for adolescents has been found to be associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression, and young people appear to be more vulnerable to these mental health impacts than adults. The causal pathways behind this require further investigation, but young people's ongoing brain development, exposure to problematic or harmful online content, exposure to online bullying, and the substitution of other activities – in particular sleep but also in-person socialising and exercise – for screen time all likely play a part.