

Cover Story



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EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY IN INDIA



EdTech, the growth catalyst of the education industry

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EdTech, or Education Technology, has become a buzzword in India, with international investors exhibiting a lot of interest in the sector. Several well-funded companies are making a play for this market, thanks to the massive potential of the Indian education sector, and the fact that India has the largest youth population in the world.

The sector holds a lot of promise as it gives stu-



If rolled out with honesty and transparency, EdTech platforms can offer cost-effective and affordable education options, making it accessible to students from different socio-economic backgrounds.



dents access to good teachers without having to be in the same room, making learning accessible, scalable and personalized. Since EdTech platforms can be accessed from anywhere, at any time of day or night, they allow students to study on their own terms and make use of their preferred learning methods. EdTech platforms are able to adapt themselves according to what works best for each individual learner, thus opening opportunities for everyone.

The growth drivers of EdTech

More than 50% of India's population is under the age of 25. This presents a huge opportunity to EdTech companies to engage with a large number of students and learners. With the increasing availability of affordable Internet and smartphones, more and more people in India have access to digital educational resources and tools.

The Indian government has been encouraging the use of technology in education. Besides, the pandemic also aided the growth of the sector as the demand for online education increased significantly, with students and teachers forced to adapt to remote teaching and learning. India's EdTech industry, which was valued at \$750 million in 2020, is predicted to reach \$4 billion by 2025. The growth drivers include increasing Internet

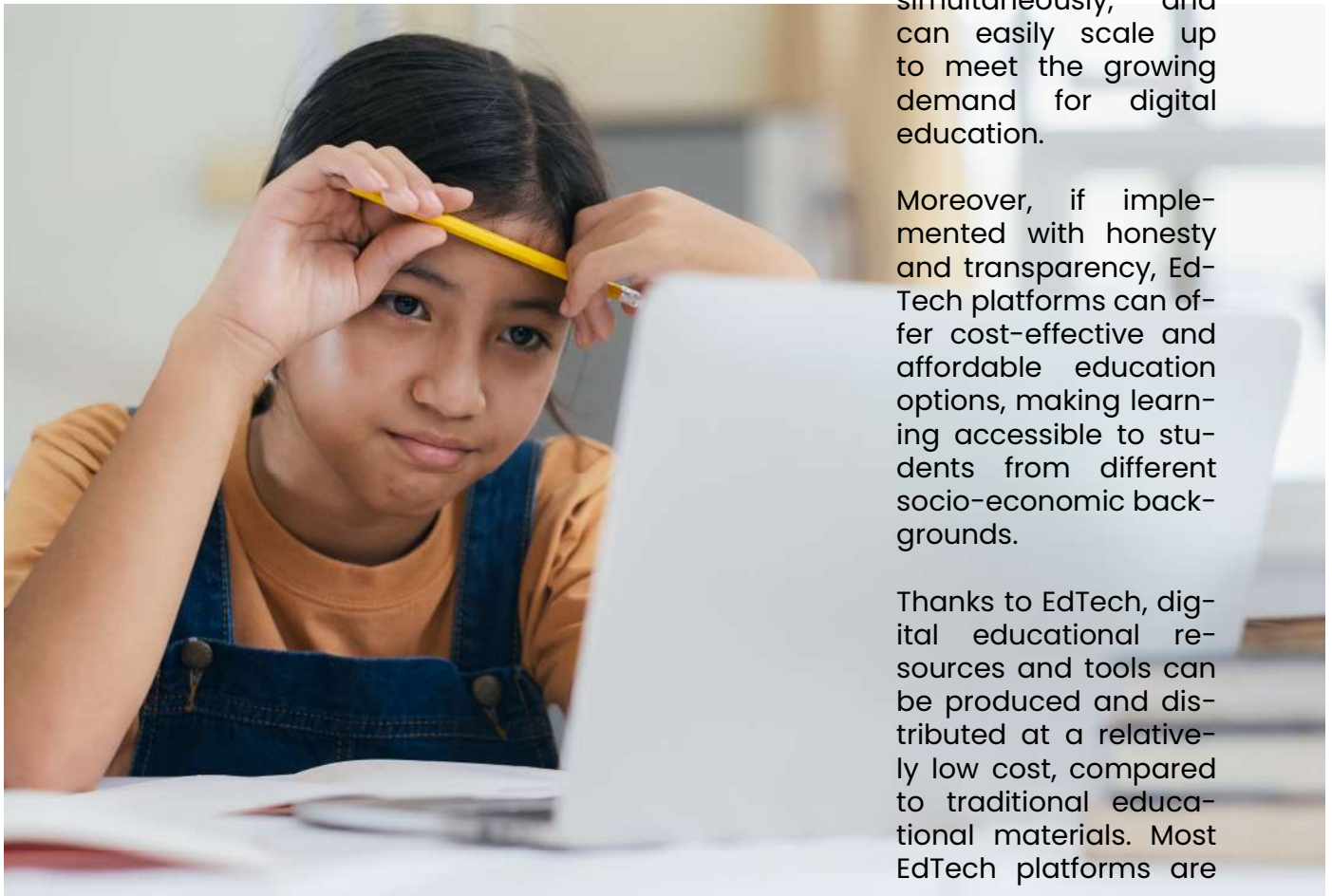
and smartphone penetration, a large and young population, and the need for more accessible and affordable education. However, the EdTech market in India also faces challenges, such as lack of digital skills, cultural resistance to technology-based learning, unethical practices by EdTech players and concerns about data privacy and security.

Huge potential for EdTech to grow further

With limited access to quality education in remote and rural areas, EdTech companies in India have an opportunity to bridge this gap if they provide more accessible and affordable education through digital platforms. Compared to traditional education models, EdTech platforms can reach a large number of students and learners simultaneously, and can easily scale up to meet the growing demand for digital education.

Moreover, if implemented with honesty and transparency, EdTech platforms can offer cost-effective and affordable education options, making learning accessible to students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Thanks to EdTech, digital educational resources and tools can be produced and distributed at a relatively low cost, compared to traditional educational materials. Most EdTech platforms are



designed to work on low-cost devices such as smartphones, which are widely available and affordable in India. The government has also been promoting the use of technology in education through various initiatives and policies, such as the National Education Policy and the Digital

India campaign, which can help reduce the costs of adopting EdTech.

As a result, EdTech is becoming more accessible to, and affordable for, a wide range of students and learners in India, particularly those belonging to underprivileged sections

of society.

Going beyond affordability, accessibility and scalability, these platforms also offer personalized learning experiences, tailored to individual needs and the learning styles of each student. Students can learn at their own pace and as per their



schedule.

It's not all rosy

While there's no denying that EdTech has a lot going for it, it comes with its own challenges. Some platforms have been accused of peddling sub-standard content, charging exorbitant fees, using unethical practices to make hard sells to parents, and so forth. EdTech platforms have also come under fire for exaggerating the benefits of their courses, using misleading payment structures, artificially inflating demand, and emotionally manipulating parents, forcing them to sign up for expensive courses.

Several EdTech companies have been involved in unethical practices, including pushing loans and other financing options to parents for exorbitantly expensive courses that they offer, which later turn out to be poor in quality. Some platforms have been known to use misleading advertising to entice students to sign up for their courses, making false or exaggerated claims about



the quality or content of the courses. Besides, EdTech companies have been known to manipulate parents, highlighting the supposed benefits of their products without providing evidence to support their claims. They also use testi-

monials from satisfied customers, which may not be representative of the experiences of most users.

Additionally, they exploit parents' fears and anxieties about their children's academic performance



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and future success to convince them to purchase their products. Some parents have also fought legal battles against Ed-Tech firms after being aggressively mis-sold courses, which later turned out to be sub-standard.

This issue has also been raised in the Parliament, with Karti Chidambaram (MP, Sivaganga constituency) saying: “These companies are engaging in predatory marketing practices, where they prey upon the parents who want to give their children a better edu-

cation”.

Other unethical practices used by some Ed-Tech platforms include unsolicited phone calls, or messages, to convince students to sign up for their courses, false representation of their instructors as experts in the field,

and lack of transparency.

Some platforms are often vague and evasive about the details of their courses, such as the curriculum, course material, or the qualifications of the instructors, making it difficult for students to make informed decisions about whether to sign up for the courses or not.

Another major issue is that of privacy and security of students. EdTech companies often collect and store large amounts of personal data pertaining to students and their families, including their browsing history, location data, and test scores. This data is vulnerable to hacking and other cyber-attacks, which could result in the loss, or theft of personal information. Moreover, EdTech companies sometimes share student data with third parties, such as advertisers or other businesses, without obtaining explicit consent from parents or guardians.

There have been accusations that some of these companies use data-mining techniques to track chil-



children's online activities and target ads and other marketing messages to parents based on that information. The field of EdTech is largely unregulated, which means that companies are not held to the same standards of data protection as other industries.

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Regulation of the EdTech sector

Given the digital nature of the EdTech services, there is no way one can completely regulate this sector. In today's digital world, EdTech is rapidly becoming an integral part of the modern educational experience. From online learning platforms to virtual reality simulations, technology is being used to enhance the way one learns and teaches. And as technology continues to advance,

it is clear that EdTech is inevitable and here to stay.

To ensure that students and parents are protected, it is important to take measures to safeguard personal data. Parents and students should carefully read the terms of service and privacy policies of any EdTech products they use and be aware of the data collection, sharing and retention practices. They should also be vigilant about suspicious activities, and if they notice any

security breaches, they should report them immediately.

Additionally, parents and students need to proactively educate themselves about the different types of EdTech products and services available, and choose those that align with their values and priorities. This will help to ensure that the technology is being used in a way that is beneficial for all parties involved. ■

