

## Call for Research Proposals: EdTech responses to Covid-19

### Background

Covid-19 related school closures have affected 90% of the world's student population. The use of educational technology (EdTech) has been identified as a potential way to reach out to and support children in the continuation of education, and is part of many countries' responses to the pandemic in some form. Yet the evidence base on what is showing promise, for whom, and under what circumstances is limited. As governments and organisations mobilise to provide education to children and youth, there is an opportunity for researchers to strengthen knowledge and evidence to inform and advocate for more effective responses to disruptions to education, and to contribute to the overall EdTech evidence base.

The EdTech Hub is a global non-profit research partnership and our goal is to empower people making decisions about technology in education. To further expand available evidence, the Hub is launching a call for proposals for small research projects investigating EdTech responses to Covid-19 in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). We are specifically soliciting applications for research in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania.

This call for research proposals will adopt an expedited application and screening process, with the intention that the research should be able to be immediately conducted given the on-going and urgent nature of the crisis. Research conducted under this call will be published on the EdTech Hub website, and we encourage further applications to journals as appropriate. The Hub encourages and will support the dissemination of findings within communities where the research is conducted.

### Scope of the call

Due to the urgency of the crisis, short-term research projects are encouraged; once commissioned, projects are expected to be started circa the beginning of 2021 and completed within three to six months. As such, we encourage applicants whose research builds upon existing in-country programmes, projects, and networks. For example, applicants could apply for additional funding to investigate how a previously-researched EdTech

intervention has been adapted and used in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Research projects generally can apply for between **10,000 GBP and 25,000 GBP** in funding through this call. Additional funding, up to a total value of **50,000 GBP**, may be able to be made to a small number of applications, particularly where they allow for comparison sites as part of the research.

The purpose of the funded projects will be to generate new evidence on the ways in which EdTech can be used to support continuation of education in LMICs during and beyond the Covid-19 crisis. Funded projects will investigate the practical application of EdTech, generate primary research, and develop recommendations relevant to Covid-19 educational response, recovery, and beyond.

Projects must involve robust empirical research<sup>1</sup> and relate to one or more of the EdTech Hub's main thematic research areas:

- The use of technology to strengthen education system governance, data management, and accountability.
- The use of technology to improve the professional development, retention and attendance of teachers.
- The use of technology to adapt for learners, including a focus on diverse needs of girls, learners with disabilities, out of school children, refugees, and internally displaced learners. Research on personalised adaptive learning and teaching at the right level<sup>2</sup> is also encouraged.

Projects **must** focus on and be undertaken in one of the following EdTech Hub priority countries:

- Bangladesh
- Ghana
- Kenya
- Pakistan
- Sierra Leone
- Tanzania

**Design-based research studies**<sup>3</sup> that generate design principles for scalable initiatives are especially encouraged, but other methodologies will be more appropriate for some research questions.

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<sup>1</sup> For information about criteria used by the Hub in assessing rigour of evidence, please see [https://www.edu-links.org/sites/default/files/media/file/BE2\\_Guidance\\_Note\\_ASE\\_0.pdf](https://www.edu-links.org/sites/default/files/media/file/BE2_Guidance_Note_ASE_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For information about personalised adaptive learning and teaching at the right level, please see [Major, L., & Francis, G. A. \(2020\). Technology-supported personalised learning: Rapid Evidence Review](#)

<sup>3</sup> For discussion on design-based research, please see Anderson, T., & Shattuck, J. (2012). *Design-based research: A decade of progress in education research?* Educational Researcher, 41(1), 16-25. and Bakker, A. (2019). *Design research in education: A practical guide for early career researchers*. Routledge.

Here are some examples of research questions that would fall under this call for proposals in line with the Hub's thematic areas listed above (non-exhaustive list):

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**The use of technology to strengthen education system governance, data management and accountability.**

- How has Covid-19 affected the ways of working and use of technology in the education sector of a particular country?
- How has the use of certain technologies in a country brought results in the response and recovery of its education system to Covid-19 in supporting learning?
- How did Covid-19 catalyse the use of a particular technology in a particular country in support of its education system?

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**The use of technology to improve the professional development, retention and attendance of teachers.**

- How can technology use support and strengthen teacher professional development programmes when learners and teachers cannot access schools?
- How can technology be used to support teachers' motivation during school closures?
- Has the shift to remote learning highlighted gaps or teacher professional development needs in relation to the use of EdTech?

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**The use of technology to adapt for learners, including a focus on diverse needs of girls, learners with disabilities, out of school children, personalised adaptive learning, and teaching at the right level.**

- How can low-tech interventions be used in fragile and conflict affected situations to enhance educational outcomes during Covid-19?
  - How can technology be used to enhance psycho-social responses in Covid-19 responses and recovery?
  - How do particular EdTech interventions meet the specific needs of a marginalised group (SEND, women and girls, rurally located learners etc.)?
  - What is the evidence of differential access to a specific form of EdTech for marginalised groups in the context of Covid-19 and how can it be addressed?
  - How did X project enhance educational outcomes during Covid-19 and what lessons can be learned?
  - How can technology be used to support out-of-school learners with visual and/or hearing impairments?
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# Eligibility

Projects must fall within the thematic areas and countries outlined above in order to be considered. They must clearly demonstrate the potential for impact - that is, high potential for the research findings to inform decision-making processes. Applicants must clearly describe the gap in the existing body of evidence on EdTech that their research would fill, and present a clear dissemination plan that addresses how the evidence generated through this research could be used by decision-makers. The Hub team will work closely with selected applicants to support and enable dissemination opportunities within and across countries, and globally.

Applicants may apply as institutions, individuals, or small teams. Researchers should be based or have existing work and networks in one of the Hub's six focus countries listed above.

Any potential conflicts of interest must be made explicit in the application. Any applicants who work for / are a partner of the EdTech Hub will need to submit a conflict of interest declaration form. These are available upon request.

Successful applications will be expected to produce a final report outlining lessons for the Covid-19 response and/or recovery. Selected partners will be expected to assure project data and outputs are published on an open access basis unless otherwise authorised by the Hub. The outputs will be reviewed according to the Hub's peer review and quality assurance process.

The following eligibility criteria apply to research project proposals – and will be used to assess the suitability of applications:

## Essential criteria

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- Research must be empirically-based and the topic must be related to the role of EdTech in the immediate Covid-19 response and/or recovery
- Focused on K-12 level education (up to end of secondary school level) and/or teacher education. Research focused on higher education and post-secondary technical and vocational education and training (TVET) will not be considered.
- Explicitly aligns with one or more of the EdTech Hub's priority research areas (see themes above). Preference will be given to proposals which address issues related to equity and reaching the most marginalised learners.
- Focused on projects in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Tanzania
- Experience of conducting rigorous research on EdTech use in low- or middle-income countries
- Demonstrated individual and organisational experience, and capability to conduct the study
- Demonstrated viability of the research and necessary logistics to complete the project within the timeframe (three to six months)
- Clear, coherent, and rigorous research design
- Clear demonstration of potential impact of produced work in relation to Covid-19 crisis both through the dissemination of the findings and its use for decision-makers

- Clear explanation and supporting evidence of how the proposed research activities provide value for money (demonstrating economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity)
- Reports to be presented in English; where appropriate, support for translations will be considered

## Desirable criteria

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- Led by organisations based in or with presence in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Tanzania
- Priority will be given to applications focusing on marginalised groups including, but not limited to: people with disabilities, women and girls, racial minority groups
- Plans for the dissemination of findings within communities where the research is conducted
- Involvement of early-career researchers working alongside experienced researchers is encouraged

## Review Criteria

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Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

Review Criteria	Percentage weighting
<b>1. Policy and/or programme relevance</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Is there clear policy/programme demand for research to further understand this topic?</li> <li>ii. Is there a clear articulation of policy/programme relevance of the research in the given geography, with policy windows, target legislation and/or stakeholders in government defined?</li> <li>iii. Does the application demonstrate a clear pathway for how policy influence will be achieved?</li> <li>iv. How is the proposal relevant to the EdTech Hub programme of work and aims?</li> </ol>	30%
<b>2. Research Questions, Design, and Methodology</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. What are the primary (and secondary if applicable) questions guiding the research?</li> <li>ii. What is the research design? Is the design appropriate, gender-sensitive, well thought-out and clearly articulated?</li> <li>iii. Is there a clear rationale as to why the chosen methodology is most appropriate for the question(s)/objective(s)?</li> <li>iv. What prior experience does the team have in using this methodology?</li> </ol>	15%

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- v. Will the project test any methodological innovations?
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**3. Cultural sensitivity and ethics**

5%

- i. If involving human participants, how does the proposal address the research ethics (including any recognised ethics approval frameworks which will be used)? Does the proposal consider safeguarding?
  - ii. How does the proposal address cultural appropriateness of data collection and analytic methods?
  - iii. Are the research tools/instruments and analysis culturally relevant and sensitive?
  - iv. Is the dissemination strategy culturally relevant, sensitive, and appropriate?
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**4. Logistical Viability**

10%

- i. Does the approach to organising and managing the research uptake proposal show a good understanding of the operational and political complexities (for example, government authorization or funding)?
  - ii. Are the partnerships to execute the proposed activities stated?
  - iii. Are the potential risks and potential methods to address these risks identified?
  - iv. Does the proposal outline if there are threats that could compromise the validity of the proposal? If so, how does the proposal sufficiently address those threats?
  - v. Are the challenges relating to Covid-19 travel and in-person meeting restrictions described? Are methods to address these challenges detailed?
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**5. Team Composition**

25%

- i. Does the proposed composition and experience of the team demonstrate the required rigour and expertise?
  - ii. Is the proposal led by an organisation or a team leader from LMICs, and/or are the partner organisations from LMICs?
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**6. Value for Money**

15%

- i. How do the proposed research activities provide value for money (demonstrating economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity)?
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## Criteria Scoring

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The proposals for each of the criteria will be marked against the following scoring table:

Score	Description
6	Outstanding - provides an outstanding response to the review criteria
5	Excellent - provides an excellent response to the review criteria
4	Very good - provides a very good response to the review criteria
3	Satisfactory - provides a satisfactory response to the review criteria
2	Poor - provides a poor response to the review criteria
1	Unsatisfactory - provides no response to the review criteria

## Timeline

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Activity	Date
Call for proposals (4 week window)	Launch: Friday 30th October 2020 Close: Friday 27th November 2020
Review process (2 week window)	Start: Monday 30th November 2020 Finish: Friday 11th December 2020
Successful candidates notified	Week beginning Monday 14th December 2020
Negotiations and awards	December 2020 - January 2021

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## Eligible expenses

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Research funding cannot be used for activities which discriminate against any group on the basis of age, gender reassignment, disability, race, colour, ethnicity, sex and sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief; on gifts; or in illegal activities. Research funding can cover the time of researchers, administrators, communications professionals (e.g. editing and typesetting), and travel expenses necessary for high-quality research (based on receipts).

## How to apply

The application process involves submitting a proposal that demonstrates adherence to the eligibility and review criteria outlined above. For applications to be considered, the following **three documents** must be sent to the email address below:

1. [The technical proposal template](#)
2. [The budget proposal template](#)
3. **CVs of each team member**, including the following information:
  - a. Name and nationality
  - b. A short biography
  - c. Employment record (including countries of work experience)
  - d. Education
  - e. Membership of professional associations
  - f. Other training
  - g. Language(s) level(s)

The documents are also available for download via the **Call for Research Proposals: EdTech responses to Covid-19** [webpage](#).

## Contact

For queries and submission: [hello@edtechhub.org](mailto:hello@edtechhub.org) (Subject: C19 RESEARCH CALL)