



Technology in education through the eyes of school leaders

Insights from a survey reveal how more than 6,000 school leaders in the Global South experience and relate to technology in education. By **Camila Pereira**.

In a rapidly evolving educational landscape, technology is viewed as a powerful tool for transformation. During the Covid pandemic, it proved crucial in maintaining learning continuity, sparking global conversations about its role in education.

International schools, like their counterparts in the Global South, are leveraging digital tools to enhance learning, streamline administration, and foster global connections.

However, questions remain: Is technology truly supporting school leaders, or is it adding complexities to an already demanding role?

While discussions often centre on teachers and students, school leaders play a critical role in bridging policy with practice. Whether leading an international school with extensive digital resources or managing a school in an under-resourced setting, school leaders face a common challenge –

making technology work for their school. And their voices and experiences are key to shaping effective strategies.

To better understand their realities, Global School Leaders (GSL), an international nonprofit dedicated to supporting school leadership in the Global South, conducted the 2024 Promoting Understanding of Leadership in Schools (PULS) Survey. With insights from nearly 6,000 school leaders across 18 countries, the findings reveal their experiences with technology and its potential to enhance school leadership. I believe they offer valuable lessons for school leaders everywhere.

Key findings from the 2024 PULS survey

Heavy administrative burdens:

School leaders report spending 66 per cent of their time on administrative tasks, leaving only

34 per cent for instructional leadership. This imbalance heightens stress levels and detracts from their ability to support teachers and improve student outcomes.

Nearly 70 per cent of school leaders reported high stress levels, a stark reminder of the need for systemic support. Technological solutions can help reduce administrative burdens and unlock time for instructional leadership.

Abdikadir Ismail, a school leader from Kenya, highlighted this challenge: “Administrative tasks divert attention from supporting instructional leadership, and you spend a lot of time handling paperwork, discipline, and parent issues. For example, you may have scheduled some instructional support when a discipline issue occurs in school and you end up spending time to address this unplanned occurrence.”

Infrastructure gaps:

Speaking about the limited infrastructure in schools, Abdikadir added: “With only two laptops and one projector for 500 students, there is an extreme limitation in providing equitable access. Without a computer lab or dedicated online spaces, it becomes challenging to deliver even basic digital literacy, much less to integrate technology into daily lessons”.

The digital divide continues to hinder equitable access to technology, with many schools lacking access to reliable internet and electricity. Across the Global South, 70 per cent of school leaders report inadequate devices, while nearly half of their students lack reliable electricity or internet at home. These challenges affect the ability of schools to leverage technology effectively for both teaching and management.

Training gaps:

While technology holds promise, the lack of comprehensive training for school leaders limits its



“Is technology truly supporting school leaders, or is it adding complexities to an already demanding role?”

potential. Only 41 per cent of school leaders in Africa and 33 per cent in Latin America received technology training, compared to 69 per cent in Asia. Moreover, existing training often focuses on classroom applications rather than school management and administrative tasks. This leads to school leaders undervaluing technology's role in enhancing school management. To maximize technology's potential, training must address administrative and leadership needs.

Manuel Urrutia, a school leader from Chile, emphasized this point: “The main barriers to accessing technology in schools are related to the knowledge and effective use of these new digital tools. Training for school leaders and teachers is key to giving purpose to the use of technology in schools, whether as a tool to reduce administrative tasks or to foster creative solutions that enhance learning for all students”

Optimism about technology: Despite these challenges,

school leaders remain optimistic about technology's potential. Over 90 per cent believe it can enhance learning by making it more accessible and engaging. Additionally, 83 per cent reported increased student engagement when technology was used in the classroom, and 60 per cent noted that teachers enjoy incorporating technology into their teaching practices.

Agustina Castillo, a school leader from Argentina, said: “Technology is key and powerful for student learning. It can be used in very motivating ways to enhance their learning experience.

All stakeholders need to get involved and create meaningful agreements to quickly implement technology in schools in ways that maximize learning outcomes.”

However, without the necessary infrastructure and training, translating this optimism into sustained practices remains challenging.

The path forward

The findings of the PULS Survey offer valuable lessons

for practitioners, policymakers, and school leaders globally:

- Prioritize infrastructure investments:** Addressing the digital divide is a foundational step. Ensuring reliable access to devices, internet, and electricity is essential for integrating technology into teaching, learning, and school management.
- Streamline administrative tasks:** Technology should be leveraged to reduce the administrative burdens on school leaders. Tools for data analysis, reporting, and communication can free up time for school leaders to focus on instructional leadership.
- Comprehensive training programmes:** Effective use of technology requires well-designed training programmes for school leaders that help make them aware of the available tools while building their confidence to use them. Training programmes should not only demystify technology but also position it as a tool to enhance leadership and management.
- Foster collaborative learning:** Regional and global networks can enable school

leaders to exchange best practices, accelerating the integration of technology. Peer learning opportunities, both within and across regions, can help leaders build confidence and competence in using digital tools.

While the challenges faced by school leaders in the Global South may seem distant from the context of international schools, the 2024 PULS Survey highlights the reality of the potential and pitfalls of integrating technology into education. By collaborating with under-resourced schools through partnerships, peer networks, and resource-sharing initiatives, international schools can play a role in narrowing the digital divide, and co-create innovative practices that benefit all students.

By addressing infrastructure gaps, reducing administrative burdens, and fostering collaborative learning, we can empower school leaders to focus on building strong schools and improving teaching and learning. Together, we can ensure technology serves as a bridge – not a barrier – to educational excellence. ♦

Camila Pereira is the CEO of Global School Leaders, a non-profit organization focused on improving student learning outcomes in under-resourced schools across low and middle-income countries through innovative training programmes for school leaders.