

## **GOOGLE FOR EDUCATION AS A DRIVER OF EDUCATIONAL DIGITALIZATION: new challenges for teachers**

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DIGITALIZATION: new challenges for teachers

GOOGLE FOR EDUCATION COMO MOTOR DA DIGITALIZAÇÃO  
EDUCATIVA: novos desafios para os professores

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### **Abstract**

The article examines the expansion of Google for Education as a key player in educational digitalization and its impact on teaching work and educational policies. Using a qualitative and descriptive approach, it analyzes how this U.S.-based corporation has achieved global reach through public-private partnerships, teacher training programs, and the diffusion of its products and pedagogical values. The study situates the phenomenon within the context of Latin American digital capitalism, marked by technological dependency and limited national investment in digital ecosystems, leading to the emergence of a new corporate educational ethos. It describes Google's expansion mechanisms — such as school certification, professional development programs, and educator communities (GEG) — as forms of ideological and market intervention in education. The paper concludes that Google's model of digitalization poses challenges to teacher autonomy, pedagogical practice, and educational governance, while promoting subtle forms of privatization and algorithmic control of educational work.

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**Keywords:** Digital education. Google for Education. Teaching. Digital capitalism. Educational privatization.

### Resumo

O artigo analisa a expansão de Google for Education como protagonista da digitalização educativa e sua influência na redefinição do trabalho docente e das políticas educacionais. A partir de uma abordagem qualitativa e descritiva, o estudo discute como a corporação de origem estadunidense consolidou uma presença global por meio de parcerias público-privadas, formação de professores e disseminação de seus produtos e valores pedagógicos. O texto situa o fenômeno no contexto do capitalismo digital latino-americano, caracterizado por dependência tecnológica e baixo investimento público em ecossistemas digitais, identificando a construção de um novo ethos educacional corporativo. São descritos os mecanismos de expansão da empresa — como a certificação de escolas, programas de formação docente e comunidades de educadores (GEG) — que configuram um campo de intervenção ideológica e mercadológica na educação. Conclui-se que a digitalização promovida pelo Google implica desafios à autonomia docente, à prática pedagógica e à governança escolar, abrindo caminho para formas sutis de privatização e controle algorítmico do trabalho educativo.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação digital. Google for Education. Docência. Capitalismo digital. Privatização da educação.

### Resumen

El artículo analiza la expansión de Google for Education como actor central de la digitalización educativa y su impacto en la redefinición del trabajo docente y de las políticas educativas. Desde un enfoque cualitativo y descriptivo, se examina cómo esta corporación tecnológica ha consolidado una presencia global mediante alianzas público-privadas, programas de formación docente y la difusión de sus productos y valores pedagógicos. El estudio sitúa el fenómeno en el marco del capitalismo digital latinoamericano, caracterizado por la dependencia tecnológica y el limitado desarrollo de ecosistemas digitales nacionales, destacando la configuración de un nuevo ethos educativo corporativo. Se describen los mecanismos de expansión empresarial — certificación de escuelas, capacitación docente y comunidades de educadores (GEG) — que configuran un espacio de intervención ideológica y comercial en la educación. Se concluye que la digitalización promovida por Google genera tensiones respecto a la autonomía docente y la gobernanza escolar, favoreciendo nuevas formas de privatización y control algorítmico del trabajo educativo.

**Palabras clave:** Educación digital. Google for Education. Docencia. Capitalismo digital. Privatización educativa.

### Introduction

Over the past two decades, the expansion of digital capitalism has profoundly transformed the ways of producing, communicating, and learning, shaping a socio-technical framework in which education plays a strategic role. Global

technology corporations—among them Google, Microsoft, Apple, Meta, and Amazon—have assumed a leading position in defining contemporary educational agendas, offering platforms, devices and discourses that promise efficiency, innovation and personalized learning. Yet behind such promises lie new forms of corporate intervention in public schooling that reconfigure the relationships between knowledge, power and technology. In this context, the Google for Education project constitutes a paradigmatic case for examining how large corporations articulate their economic interests with the production of teacher and student subjectivities aligned with the global digital market.

With the accelerating pace of educational digitalization, it is crucial to question the ideological and political assumptions underpinning the integration of digital technologies into school systems. Critical research on global education policies (Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2016; Saura, Díez-Gutiérrez, & Rivera, 2021) warns that the expansion of digital platforms and technological solutions cannot be understood outside the logics of commodification and privatization that characterize contemporary neoliberalism. From this perspective, the case of Google allows us to examine the configuration of a new pedagogical common sense—one sustained by technocratic rationality and by faith in innovation as a universal principle. This work therefore proposes a critical reading of the role of Big Tech in the restructuring of the educational field, paying particular attention to its implications for the professional condition of teachers and the emerging forms of school governance.

Some estimates consider that the global digital learning industry will have a value of one by the year 2028 (Google, 2022). This industry consists of start-ups, mega technology corporations and an army of users whose unpaid digital labor generates a fundamental *raw material* for today's economy. The expansion of this economy has largely been driven by the corporate strategies of companies such as Google, which even before the pandemic, but particularly due to the need to continue educational activities in a context of school closures, managed to find new market niches in which to position their brand and increase the total number of users on their platforms.

This becomes particularly evident in the case of Latin America. A post on the

Google Blog in August 2020 (Montes de Oca, 2020) reported that, by that date, the company had supported more than 30 million students in the region, largely as a result of public-private collaborations with national and subnational governments in Chile, Peru, El Salvador, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia. This example illustrates the level of projection the company has achieved in global education while inviting us to reflect on the potential effects that the growing prominence of private actors in global educational debates and policies may have on schools and on the organization of teachers' work.

Although the actors are diverse and different from each other, this work focuses on Google, because its Google for Education division has experienced significant expansion across multiple areas of the educational sector. Below, I outline some key elements for understanding the different dimensions of their educational agenda and then propose certain challenges that teachers will have to face. Although the text provides more information on Latin America, I propose opening the debate to a dialogue with other experiences that share common elements, such as those relating to Spain and the *educational arrival* of *Big Tech* companies in its different territories.

## **1 Digitalization and education**

Digital capitalism has gradually expanded across Latin America, a region described as being at "an intermediate level" in the development of its digital ecosystem (Caf, Cepal, DPL, and Telecom Advisory Services LLC, 2020). According to Cepal (2021), just under 70% of the population is internet users, placing the region in fourth position among those with the highest user penetration after North America, Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States. However, the adoption of digital devices, the use of software and changes in production processes have become intertwined with the region's longstanding patterns of economic dependency. This is evident, for example, in the fact that the price of the digital industry is considerably lower in the region compared to OECD countries, particularly in exports of goods and high-tech products.

The weight of the digital ecosystem in regional GDP is also comparatively low

(Cepal, 2021), exacerbated by the absence of strong national policies for digital ecosystem development. Some general trends of digital capitalism in the region can be identified: a) the digitalization of some internal processes in companies, and the use of digital tools to maximize profitability (such as e-commerce); b) growing demands for a workforce with some type of *digital literacy*; c) an increase in smartphone use among the population; d) the expansion of activities by global technology corporations (GAFAM) and e) the emergence of new educational needs and narratives responding to the demands of the so-called digital economy.

Historically, the functioning of educational systems has been closely linked to shifts in economic structures and processes (Bonilla, 2021), as well as to the strategic activities of their main actors. In the context of digital capitalism, Silicon Valley companies have managed to build a social *ethos* and to gain control over the data produced by billions of users, which allows them—among other aims—to operationalize the law of value. In addition, their influence on education has been considerable. *Big Tech* corporations have promoted expansion policies in the education sector in Latin America and around the world. Worlock (2017) explains that these companies have long been involved in the provision of educational services and products, including hardware, classroom management tools, curricular content and professional development resources. Their goal is the creation of complete educational ecosystems (Worlock, 2017). This facilitates the growing adoption of their products by educational communities and contributes to shaping a new common sense in education infused with the principles of contemporary capitalism.

## **2 Google and Educational Digitalization**

The Silicon Valley corporation has achieved an unprecedented position in the global educational market. Its strategy has gone beyond simply supplying schools with software and hardware or producing curricular content. Neither has it been confined to lobbying for shifts in educational policy or functioning as a think tank devoted to generating information for institutional change. Google is a global

technology corporation which, through its capacity to process vast amounts of information transformed into data (Big Data), is able to perform all of the aforementioned tasks simultaneously, though at varying levels of depth. This capability has positioned it as a leading *driver of educational transformation* in the digital sphere.

To a large extent, this is the source of the success it has achieved so far in expanding its educational offering around the world, which can be seen in the growing number of public-private partnerships with national and subnational governments to promote the adaptation of its technological offering in education systems, the growth in the number of active users on its platforms, the proliferation of groups of teachers who are aligned with its educational approach at the international level and the expansion, also international, of private schools *certified* by the company itself.

In general terms, its educational project consists of a commitment to the modernization of education through the use of digital technology as a means to provide a more personalized educational service to students, which also facilitates and makes teaching work more efficient.

Google's involvement in education dates back to 2006, the year in which the corporation consolidated its division dedicated to education. As part of its expansion, Google for Education launched two interconnected initiatives: Google Apps for Education and Google for Educators. The educational toolkit, now called Workspace for Education aims to "enable every "leader" to bring innovation to their schools; create technology that "empowers" all educators [and] equip each student by ensuring inclusion and accessibility wherever they want to be" (Saura, Díez-Gutiérrez, and Rivera, 2021). Google has developed these proposals with the aim of intervening in the educational field and generating change through the use of its digital tools, as well as building a new market niche.

According to company executives at the time, Google began to expand its educational program in response to increasing requests from teachers asking for support in teaching students how to use the Google search engine (Borja, 11/21/2006). This demand prompted the company to launch teacher training programs that same year, centered on its applications.



In general terms, the company has promoted various generic values in education, which can be clearly seen in the functioning and discourse of schools certified by the company, known as Google Reference Schools. Those who work there believe that by using the company's digital tools (its suite) and adopting certain educational principles, it will be possible to: empower students; encourage collaborative work in the classroom; reduce the ecological footprint; achieve efficient management of school time; encourage the personalization of education; promote educational innovation and school modernization; facilitate teaching work; normalize the use of digital technology; and, to varying degrees, dispense with face-to-face education (Jarquín-Ramírez & Díez-Gutiérrez, 2022). These ideas are clearly shared by teachers and administrative staff in schools from different regions of Mexico and Spain, which, despite their contextual differences, maintain a series of common discursive (rhetorical and practical) principles.

The company has developed an educational offering that, under the one-size-fits-all model, has traveled the world standardizing the inputs, contents, and practices proposed to improve education.

**Table 1-** Functions and Tools of Google Workspace for Education

Function	Tools
Enables collaboration among educational communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Docs</li> <li>• Slides</li> <li>• Sheets</li> <li>• Drive</li> <li>• Forms</li> <li>• Jamboard</li> </ul>
Increases productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom</li> <li>• Assignments</li> </ul>
Supports flexible communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gmail</li> <li>• Meet</li> <li>• Chat</li> </ul>
Organizes tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep</li> <li>• Calendar</li> </ul>
Security (protects against digital threats)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager</li> </ul>

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025)

### 3 The Individual Teacher

Beyond serving as the inspiration for the development of its educational proposal, teachers have become a fundamental sphere of intervention to advance the project. By promoting the use of its digital tools and solutions, Google claims to seek the empowerment of each teacher, enabling them to connect with students and design engaging lessons that foster teamwork, collaboration, and, at the same time, individualized learning (Google for Education, 2022).

In addition, the provision of this technology is intended to strengthen teachers' professional development through lifelong learning, enabling them to respond to a time marked by constant changes in labor markets. In this regard, the company developed both the Teacher Center—designed to support training in the use of technology and digital resources for teachers—and the Google Educator Groups (GEG), collectives aimed at fostering interaction and the sharing of experiences around Google's suite of tools. The company also offers free teaching guides and curricula, as well as programs to encourage student participation in class and to ease teachers' workload.

For Google, teacher training in the use of its toolset is considered crucial. Consequently, it offers a range of training programs, with different purposes but with the common element of integrating technology into everyday educational practice.

**Table 2-** Google Teacher Programs

Program	Target
Certified Educator	For those who are beginning to use Google's suite in their teaching practice, with the goal of improving their use of technologies and increasing their digital safety.
Certified Trainer	For teachers who want to lead and train colleagues in the use of Google tools.
Certified Coach	For coaches who seek to implement structured, research-based strategies.
Certified Innovator	A program for educators who want to solve an educational problem. Any educator may apply.
Google Educator Groups (GEG)	Spaces where local educators share, collaborate and support one another.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on information provided in the Google Blog (Chelette, 2020).



#### 4 A New Global Community of Educators

Although most programs focus on individual development, the existence of GEG ensures a collective space for exchange capable of generating shared innovations that enhance teaching practice in the use of technology. Established in 2014, the GEGs are described as “a community of educators who learn, share, and inspire one another to meet their students’ needs through technological solutions.” These groups organize a range of formal and informal events with which they seek to strengthen the use of digital tools in their daily practice, which may include picnics, talks, outings, training workshops, and educational design workshops (Google for Education, n.d.).

It is relatively easy to find testimonies from teachers who participate in these groups, sharing both their experiences with the company’s technologies and what they have gained from being a part of the GEG community. For example, they state that they value the sense of community and the possibility of engaging in projects on a global scale. They describe the certification programs as life-changing, opening opportunities they “never imagined possible.” Many report feeling more confident, noting that their view of schooling has been transformed by Google’s tools, which also amplify their voices. According to these testimonies, participation in the GEG encourages teachers to take risks, reinforces the idea that their contributions to education matter, and enables them to have an impact (Global GEG, 7/8/2020).

The GEGs are *informal communities* described as “independent of Google,” and each group operates autonomously. Teachers or school principals can join these spaces in order to share experiences and build collective knowledge regarding the use of technology in education. Their broader purpose is to foster a global community of educators around a corporate educational project. *In the Latin American region, a total of 265 GEGs can currently be identified, distributed as follows:*

**Table 3** – Distribution of Google Educator Groups (GEG) in Latin America

Country	Number of GEGs
Argentina	10

Chile	6
Uruguay	1
Paraguay	2
Brazil	174
Peru	12
Bolivia	5
Colombia	5
Ecuador	4
Venezuela	2
Dominican Republic	1
Costa Rica	1
Nicaragua	1
Guatemala	7
El Salvador	5
Honduras	1
Mexico	28
Total in Latin America	265

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the official Google for Education page (2025).

## 5 The New Challenges for Teachers

Much remains to be explored regarding the impact of educational digitalization and Big Tech's technological offerings on the pedagogical work process and on the professional condition of teachers, particularly in Latin America. The absence of empirical and ethnographic studies that would allow us to understand the implications of adopting such digital products in teaching practice is notable. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify interesting research (Saura, Díez-Gutiérrez, and Rivera, 2021; Ideland, 2020) that outlines discussions which can frame necessary debates. Examining the Swedish case, Ideland (2020) points out that the teacher in a digitalized classroom represents an "incomplete potentiality." This framing positions teachers as in constant need of professional development, turning them into objects of change —and consequently, of intervention. Google's educational proposals are usually transferred in a less mediated way than conventional educational reforms; as

a result, shared values remain strongly tied to a centralized dynamic. In light of the above, it is urgent to develop a broad discussion around the following points:

### 5.1. Potential Changes in Teaching Practice

In his study on teachers' expectations regarding digitalization, Ideland (2020) states that the desirable figure is one who is absolutely present at work, who trains, is flexible and is willing to work anytime, anywhere. Teachers are responsible for educating future generations in entrepreneurship and resilience, always connected and in good spirits. For corporate promoters of digitalization, the figure of the teacher is closer to that of a facilitator and, in any case, a data manager than to the figure of the intellectual proposed by critical theory (Giroux, 1990).

The centrality of technology and the gradual loss of relevance of the teacher as a central actor in learning can lead to a double movement: deprofessionalization with redistribution of competencies. Dominant educational digitalization encourages the displacement of teachers from tasks related to direct support for each student as well as from the development of situated curricula, thereby affecting/questioning their professional status. The practice of teaching seems to require less and less articulation of knowledge and expertise related to the teaching-learning process, which are core identity components of their profession.

In contrast, a set of instrumental skills related to the use of technologies in the classroom—aimed at promoting learning in a specific range of areas—has become increasingly relevant. This is linked to the tendency for authority, creative power, and the ability to set the pace and direction of classroom work to be concentrated directly in a kind of impersonal and distant governance, located outside of any classroom or community conflict, anchored in that supposed immaterial space of the cloud, data, and algorithms. Given that a digital literacy imperative persists across Latin America, interventions directed at teachers, with the aim of making them more “competent”, become even more forceful on the part of governments, companies, and various other organizations.

## 5.2. The Teachers' Union and Collegial Work in Times of Virtualization

Although Google has been at the center of controversy due to accusations of hostility toward workers' political organization—for example, when it was accused of illegally dismissing dozens of employees for attempting to unionize (Palomeque, 5/7/2023)—the company has not, to date, openly or officially criticized the existence of teachers' unions. Nevertheless, the construction of other spaces for teacher interaction (GEG), now centered on the company's logic and proposals, raises new questions about how to conceive collegial work in an educational environment increasingly shaped by virtualization, where cutting-edge ideas in the sector seem to originate in large technology-based corporations, startups, digital evangelizers, and/or market-linked think tanks.

Teachers' unions face the enormous task of further strengthening collegial work—an especially important practice in Latin America—as well as creating spaces for discussion on new technological developments and their impact on students' formal and non-formal education. It is essential to develop pedagogical and school organization strategies that can respond to the social needs of current times, without schools, teachers, and students losing autonomy in decisions regarding their work and activities.

## 5.3 The Incorporation of Market Practices and Actors into the Inner Life of Schools

Ongoing digitalization can impact the school space and its interactions in multiple ways. Learning management systems (LMS) such as Google Classroom tend to alter the forms of interaction between teachers and students, rendering some activities impersonal and atomized. Teacher professional development programs promoted by Google and other companies seek to incorporate into teaching culture criteria generally linked to perspectives of efficiency and entrepreneurialism in education. The standardized adoption of hardware is often associated with efforts to encourage brand loyalty, while the uncritical reception of market narratives contributes to the emergence of a common sense regarding what schools are expected to do. All of the above could lead to a new cycle of educational privatization

that, starting at the digital level, could end up affecting many areas of schools. On the other hand, this could lead to a direct and rapid creation of new education markets connected to the price-free market of digital capitalism and the valuation of educational communities based on data. Although spaces for discussion on this issue have already been created in Latin America, there is still much work to be done.

## **6. The “problem” of solutionism in education – final considerations**

Google’s educational paradigm—shared by other actors that embody Silicon Valley’s Californian ideology—reflects, in various ways, a clear form of technological solutionism (Morozov, 2013). That is, through investment in technology and its use, it seeks to solve problems that are not actually problems in themselves, since the “solution” is pursued even before the fundamental questions have been fully posed. In this way, the “inefficiency” of schools regarding learning outcomes becomes a problem to be solved, for example, through the incorporation of learning management systems or educational personalization software, without considering the complexity of such inefficiency or, more fundamentally, without discussing the very concept of inefficiency.

A central issue with this perspective is that the problems to be solved through the use of technology are defined without the creation of collective spaces where comprehensive diagnoses can be generated. The actor providing the solution a priori has already defined the problem, while also prescribing how it should be addressed and what direction should be taken. This complete intervention leaves little room for teacher agency and for educational communities in general, and, de facto, radically transforms educational governance to the detriment of heterogeneous, democratic, and popular forms of educational organization.

The expansion of Google for Education and other technology corporations in the educational sphere should not be understood merely as a process of technical modernization, but rather as an expression of a structural transformation in the relationships between the State, market, and education. The growing presence of digital platforms and management algorithms in school life progressively and silently

shifts the center of pedagogical decisions toward private entities that operate under the logic of efficiency and control. This reorganization redefines the roles of teachers, students and institutions, inserting education into a circuit of technological dependency that goes beyond the instrumental and reaches into the realm of ideas, subjectivities, and formative practices.

In this context, the promises of personalization, innovation, and inclusion often conceal the constitution of a new regime of educational governance, sustained by data, metrics, and standardized protocols. Schools become spaces for the consumption of digital solutions, and teachers become mediators of algorithmic processes that constrain their intellectual and creative autonomy. The penetration of these technical rationalities deepens the commodification of the pedagogical experience, replacing human connection and critical mediation with an operational logic oriented toward productivity, measurement, and performativity. The risk is that digitalization, under the banner of progress, legitimizes new forms of cognitive and epistemological colonization, limiting the possibilities of a comprehensive and socially committed education.

Faced with this scenario, it becomes urgent to reaffirm the public, political, and humanizing character of education, understanding technology not as an end in itself, but as a field of dispute and creation. It is necessary to restore the centrality of teaching as a practice of thought and dialogue, capable of challenging the narratives of technological solutionism and opening space for a critical, ethical, and emancipatory use of the digital. The reconstruction of a pedagogical culture oriented toward autonomy, collaboration and social justice thus constitutes one of the most pressing tasks of our time. Only by placing technology at the service of life—rather than at the service of the commodification of human experience—will it be possible to reinvent the school as a space of imagination, sensitivity, and democratic resistance.

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