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Brazil row over switch to e-books in Sao Paulo schools

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Governor Tarcisio de Freitas. -AFP/Miguel Schincariol

SAO PAULO, Brazil: The Sao Paulo state government decided this week to largely replace textbooks with e-books in high schools, sparking a row in Brazil, where education experts and publishers warned the move could have negative consequences.

Starting next year, students aged 14 and over at 5,300 schools across Brazil's most populous state will study on digital media, except for literature classes, state education officials said.

The move is part of education reforms by the administration of Governor Tarcisio de Freitas, a leading presidential contender and ally of far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022).

State Education Secretary Renato Feder said traditional textbooks had "lost quality," in an interview with newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo.

But education experts questioned the viability of going digital in a sprawling state of 44 million people with vast inequalities and where many students have no internet access.

"The lack of technological infrastructure (was)... clearly demonstrated during the (Covid-19) pandemic by the lack of adequate access" to online learning, Olavo Nogueira Filho, executive director of the advocacy group Todos pela Educacao (All for Education), told AFP.

UNESCO has advised against the excessive use of technology by schools, saying it can negatively affect learning.

Book publishers also voiced "deep concern" over the measure, warning the damage to the textbook industry could prove "irreparable."

State officials said students who needed to would be able to access paper texts – something Nogueira Filho said "will not be the exception, but the rule." --AFP