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### **Abstract**

The integration of digital technologies in education has transformed the learning landscape, raising critical ethical concerns. Therefore, the researchers looked at the ethical dimensions of digital education in Nigeria. The researchers also reviewed some related literature and qualitative analysis was carried out. Virtue ethics theory and connectivism learning theory were used to guide this research. It was concluded that digital education ethics should be monitored and enforced and that ongoing dialogue on digital education ethics should be encouraged. It was recommended amongst others that context-specific digital education ethics guidelines should be developed for Nigerian institutions and government should integrate digital literacy and ethics into educational curricula.

**Keywords:** Digital education ethics, education, ethics, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Digital education ethics refers to the principles and guidelines that govern the use of digital technologies in educational settings to ensure fairness, equity and responsible practices. Put

differently, digital education ethics is a branch of ethics that addresses the moral and social implication of using digital technologies in educational settings. It encompasses various principles, guidelines, and best practices to ensure responsible and ethical use of digital technologies in education. It encompasses various aspects which include; data privacy and security, digital citizenship and responsibility, intellectual property and copyright, accessibility and inclusivity, academic integrity and authenticity, teacher-student boundaries and online relationships, cyber bullying prevention and online safety, digital divide and equity. Although digital education ethics can be beneficial, it also possess some concerns. Some benefits are; improved online safety and security, enhanced digital literacy, increased academic integrity, better teacher-student relationships and more inclusive learning environments. Some key concerns are;

- Data privacy: Protecting students' personal and academic data is paramount.
- Digital citizenship: Teaching responsible online behaviour is essential.
- Intellectual property: Respecting copyright and licensing agreements is vital.
- Accessibility: Ensuring equal access to digital resources for all students is crucial.

**Some challenges of digital education ethics include;**

- Rapidly evolving technology, balancing freedom and control, addressing digital divide, ensuring teacher training and support, and managing online harassment and bullying. These challenges have prompted the writing of this article.

Digital education ethics is a crucial topic, and some authors have weighed in on its importance. According to John O'Brien (2017), digital ethics is about 'doing the right thing at the intersection of technology innovation and accepted social values'. He emphasizes that technology advancement should be balanced with caution, ensuring we don't overlook the ethical implications. Is this what is applicable to/ in Nigeria?

**Some Key Issues with Digital Education Ethics in Nigeria:**

Digital education ethics in Nigeria faces numerous challenges; such as infrastructure and access; limited internet penetration, poor digital infrastructure in schools, and inadequate computer-to-student ratio.

**Digital Literacy:** Low digital literacy rates among teachers and students, limited training on digital education ethics and inadequate digital skills for effective online learning.

**Data privacy and security:** Weak data protection laws and regulations, inadequate cyber security measures in schools and risk of data breaches and cyber attacks.

**Cultural and social factors:** Cultural and social norms hindering digital adoption, limited awareness of digital education ethics and societal skepticism towards online learning.

**Policy and Regulatory Framework:** Lack of clear policies on digital education ethics, inadequate regulations on learning and limited enforcement of existing policies.

**Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism and academic dishonesty, limited understanding of intellectual property rights and inadequate citations and referencing practices.

Teacher-student Relationships: Blurred boundaries between teachers and students online, inadequate guidance on online interactions and risk of online harassment and bullying.

Other issues may include; power outages and unstable electricity supply, limited access to digital resources and materials and inadequate funding for digital education initiatives.

### **The Concepts of Ethics**

Ethics can be said to be a system of moral principles which effects how people make decisions and lead their lives. It is concerned with what is good for individuals and society and is also described as moral philosophy. In other words, ethics is the study of what is right or wrong in human conduct. This is a branch of philosophy which studies moral principles. Hence, ethics is known as moral philosophy. It involves philosophical reasoning about what behaviours society should consider right or wrong. Morals are personal principles on which one's judgments of right or wrong are based. Morals involve reasoning on a personal or individual level. Individuals use moral reasoning to what they believe is right or wrong based on their values, experiences, and personal beliefs. Ethics involves systematic thinking about right or wrong, good and bad and moral obligations. Some key concepts of ethics are morality, which is concerned with distinguishing right from wrong, values which concerns itself with fundamental beliefs and principles guiding behaviour, virtues which has to do with character traits promoting moral excellence, principles which are fundamental guidelines for ethical decision- making and norms which is concerned with social standards shaping moral expectations. The different types of ethics are;

Descriptive Ethics: It studies moral beliefs and practices.

Normative Ethics: Prescribes morals principles and values.

Meta Ethics Which analyzes the nature of moral judgment.

Ethics is important because it guides decision-making promotes social cohesion, encourages accountability, supports personal growth and enhances professional integrity. These are some of the reasons it is very vital in digital educations to curb eliminate and reduce the abuse of digital education.

Aristotle's views on ethics as outlined in his Nicomachean Ethics emphasizes that ethics is about character, not just action. Virtue is a mean between excess and deficiency. Happiness (eudaimonia) is the ultimate goal. Reason guides human action and moral virtues are developed through habit and practice. If all these are put into consideration, the abuse of the digital space will greatly reduce as teachers in this area (digital education) will help build in their learners good character, and reason actions out before taking them so as not to deprive their fellow creatures of their happiness. On the other hand, Plato's view on ethics, as outlined in his dialogues, emphasize ethics as concerned with the pursuit of wisdom and virtue. The ultimate goal is to achieve eudaimonia (happiness) through living a virtuous life. The soul is divided into three parts; reasons, spirit and appetite, and justice is the harmony

between these parts. Then, virtue is knowledge and knowledge is virtue. His ethical principles include, the form of the good, the ultimate reality and source of morality and the importance of self-control; temperance and moderation are essential.

The digital education teacher should inculcate in his learner strong moral standards that will guide the learners' actions and self-control as this would help the learner to always be in control of his actions and not to deprive others of their happiness via digital education.

### **Digital Education**

Digital education refers to the use of digital technologies to enhance and support teaching, learning, and assessment. It encompasses various modes of education including;

- Online learning (e-learning)
- Blended learning (combines online and face-to-face instruction)
- Mobile learning (m-learning)
- Distance learning and
- Digital literacy

Digital education tools include;

- Learning Management Systems (LMS)
- Online Course Platforms (eg. MOOCs)
- Virtual Classrooms
- Educational Software
- Mobile apps
- Digital Whiteboards and
- Social media

Digital education has both its benefits and challenges. The advantages include;

- Increased accessibility
- Flexibility and convenience
- Personalized learning experiences
- Enhanced engagement and interaction
- Improved assessment and feedback
- Cost-effectiveness and
- Scalability

Some of its challenges are;

- Digital divide
- Technical issues and infrastructure
- Information overload
- Lack of face-to-face interaction
- Ensuring academic integrity and
- Data security and privacy

## Digital Education in Nigeria

Digital education ethics in Nigeria has evolved overtime, addressing various challenges and opportunities. Before 2010, there was limited digital infrastructure and access, there was focus on basic computer literacy, minimum online learning platforms and ethics focused on computer misuse and cybercrimes. Recently, there has been increased digital penetration and access, growth of online learning platforms and digital resources, focus on digital literacy, online safety, and cyber security ethics emphasized;

- Data protection and privacy
- Intellectual property rights
- Academic integrity and plagiarism and
- Online harassment and bullying, this is why ethics on digital education should be emphasized now more than ever.

Currently, covid-19 pandemic accelerated digital education adoption. There is increased focus on;

- Digital divide and equity
- Online learning quality and accessibility
- Teacher training and digital competence
- Student data protection and privacy
- Emerging issues; artificial intelligence and algorithmic bias
- Social media and online radicalization and
- Cyber security threats and data breaches.

Digital literacy in Nigeria refers to the ability to use technology effectively for various purposes. Understanding the benefits of digital literacy for Nigerians is crucial in today's digital age. Digital literacy enables Nigerians to have easy access to a wealth of information on the internet. Through digital skills, they can stay informed, learn new things, and enhance their knowledge. Nigerians can connect with people globally through various digital platforms like email and social media. Digital literacy enhances communications skills and opens up opportunities for networking. By acquiring digital skills, Nigerians can empower themselves and become more employable. They can access online job opportunities, work remotely and start their businesses. It also enables Nigerians to have access to online courses and educational resources for continuous learning. It promotes a culture of self-improvement and lifelong learning among individuals.

Embracing digital literacy is not only beneficial on a personal level but also crucial for the collective progress of the nation. Nigeria's aspiration to attain 95 percent digital literacy by 2030 underscores a profound commitment to equipping its citizens with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the digital realm. The use of AI in digital learning also raises concerns about safety, such as data privacy and cybersecurity. It is essential to ensure that the systems used for digital learning are secure and that students', teachers' and administrators' data are protected.



### **Connectivism Learning Theory (George Siemens, 2004 and Stephen Downes 2005)**

Connectivism accepts technology as a major factor in our learning process. In fact, this theory promotes the idea that learning can successfully happen through digital channels, including social media, forums, videos and blogs. Connectivism begins when an individual turns to digital technology to solve a question, texting a friend, or searching for tropical social media content. Connectivism Learning Theory posits that the use of digital technology helps to solve a problem and, in turn, deepens the understanding of a topic. As more cooperation's adopt remote work and remote learning, connectivism provides a framework to ensure employees have the tools to build relations with each other and create a culture based on continuous learning. For example, imagine a new hire has a question about paid time off, he turns to slack to message colleagues with his question and is directed to an internal wiki with all the information he needs. Not only has the new hire gained the answer to his original question, but he also has access to a data-base filled with internal knowledge on a variety of topics. Even more, he has begun to form connections with his new colleagues. So, in future, he will turn to his colleagues or the wiki for answers instead of bombarding Human Resource (HR) with basic questions. George Siemens developed connectivism learning theory by mapping out his eight guiding principles:

- Learning and knowledge rest in a diversity of opinions
- Learning is a process of connecting
- Learning may reside in non-human appliances
- The capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known
- Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning
- Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.
- Accurate, up-to-date knowledge is the intent of all connectivist learning.
- Decision-making is itself a learning process. What we know today may change tomorrow.

Digital education is vital in our today's fast paced world, for easy faster communication, acquisition of knowledge and information, and for research purposes.

### **Virtue Ethics (Aristotle 384-322 BC)**

Virtue ethics is a broad term for theories that emphasize the role of character and virtue in moral philosophy, rather than either doing one's duty or acting in order to bring about good consequences, a virtue ethicist is likely to give you this kind of moral advice: 'Act as a virtuous person would act in your situation'. Most virtue ethics theories take their inspiration from Aristotle who declared that a virtuous person is someone who has ideal character traits. These traits derived from natural internal tendencies, but need to be nurtured; however, once established, they will become stable. For example, a virtues person is someone who is kind across many situations over a life time because that is her character and not because she wants to maximize utility or gain favours or simply do her duty. Theories of virtue ethics do not aim primarily to identify universal principles that can be applied in any moral situation. Virtue ethics theories deal with wider questions. 'How should I live?' and 'What is the good life?' and 'What are proper family and social values?'

In the case of humans, Aristotle argued that our distinctive function is reasoning, and so, the life 'worth living' is one which we reason well. An agent-based theory emphasizes that virtues are determined by common sense intuitions that we as observers judge to be admirable traits in other people. The third branch of virtue ethics is the ethics of care, was proposed predominately by feminist thinkers. It challenges the idea that ethics should focus solely on justice and autonomy. It argues that more feminist traits such as caring and nurturing should also be considered.

As both teachers/ instructors and learners engage in digital education, they should use digital tools in such a way that no one is harmed, as someone with ideal traits would not find pleasure in harming his fellow creatures.

### **Conclusion**

Digital education ethics is a critical component of the rapidly evolving digital learning landscape. As technology continues to transform the education sector, it is essential to address the ethical implications of digital education. Digital education ethics involves principles, values, and guidelines that promote responsible and respectful online learning environments, philosophical theories such as virtue ethics, inform digital education ethics in Nigeria.

Digital education ethics addresses issues like intellectual property, data protection, online safety, academic integrity, digital citizenship and cultural sensitivity. Effective implementation requires collaboration among stakeholders, policymakers, and technology providers. Ethics is about character, it is also concerned with the pursuit of wisdom and virtue, therefore, digital education ethics should be upheld at all levels of education.

### **Way forward/ Recommendations**

Nigeria's digital education should consider the following implications of digital education;

1. Digital education can help bridge the digital divide by providing access to education for students in remote or underserved areas.
2. Nigeria needs to invest in training teachers and administrators to use AI effectively in digital learning environments.
3. There is a need for regulatory framework to ensure that digital education is used ethically and responsibly in digital learning.
4. Nigeria needs to address the issue of e-safety in digital education by implementing strong data privacy and cyber security measures.
5. There should be sanctions for defaulters of digital education ethics
6. Digital education should start from the first/lowest level of education, to the highest level
7. Develop context-specific digital education ethics guidelines for Nigerian institutions.
8. Integrate digital literacy and ethics into educational curricula.
9. Establish robust data protection and online safety measures
10. Foster critical thinking and digital citizenship skills
11. Encourage ongoing research and dialogue on digital education ethics
12. Explore AI-powered tools for ethics monitoring and enforcement.

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