

## DIGITAL ETHICS IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

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### Abstract

*The rapid growth of educational technology and teaching resources and the inclusion/adoption of virtual classrooms have changed how teaching and learning takes place globally. The expansion of virtual classrooms and educational technologies has reshaped learning by increasing accessibility, flexibility and interaction among teachers and learners. While technological tools enhance accessibility, collaboration and personalised learning there are ethical considerations that must be addressed to ensure equitable and responsible digital learning environment. Key considerations include data privacy, digital balance, surveillance, academic integrity, AI bias and emotional impacts of constant connectivity. Institutions, policymakers are faced with the challenge of balancing technological innovations with respect for students rights and well-being. This paper looks at the ethical dimensions of digital education, emphasising the importance of establishing all embracing policies, fostering digital literacy and improving ethical literacy and improving ethical design in educational platforms. By adopting a principled approach to digital ethics, educators can create virtual learning environments that are not only technologically advanced but also socially just and ethnically sustainable.*

**Keywords:** Digital ethics, Virtual Classrooms, Educational Technology, Data Privacy, Academic Integrity.

## **Introduction**

Virtual classrooms and educational technology have transformed modern teaching and learning by enhancing the traditional classroom setting into digital and interactive environments. They provide opportunities for remote access, flexible learning and innovative pedagogy that transcends geographical, social and economic barriers. Spector (2021), virtual classrooms is a platform where teachers and learners interact in real-time or asynchronously through digital devices, they simulate many aspects of traditional classrooms but add unique tools such as video conferencing, digital whiteboards, chats and collaborative software. Parson (2020), educational technology is the application of digital tools, platforms and innovations to enhance learning processes, improve instructional delivery and broaden access knowledge. It includes hardware (devices, smartboards), software ( learning management systems, apps) and digital resources (e-books, simulations, AI tutors). The globalised world (21st century) has brought about the integration of virtual classrooms and the use of various digital devices in teaching and learning. Just few years ago with the global disruptions such as the COVID-19 outbreak. Digital platforms have expanded, opportunities for accessibility, collaboration are gaining more attention. To ask about ethical values in virtual education is to analyse whether, in an educational process virtual education allows participants to experience ethical values and encourage and requires ethical actions to obtain academic knowledge. Frank and Spalding (2023), emphasised that in the education accreditation processes, there are no clear guidelines on ethics applied to education. Thus, it is important to determine whether there is a pathway to being ethical that is developed by the student who interacts with the virtual environment via technological appliances and establishes a character with future responsibilities as a citizen who participates in societal decisions for the benefit of community and society. Virtual classrooms, learning management systems (LSM), artificial intelligence (AI) and immersion platforms such as virtual and augmented reality are no longer supplementary but central to contemporary education. These innovations are creating new opportunities for inclusion, flexibility and personalised learning and raise critical questions about digital ethics in virtual classrooms and educational technology principles and moral considerations that guide responsible use of technology in education. Technology to supporting various human activities is here to stay. With this growth in technology, several questions arise around the ethical repercussions for the public and private users. The added value technology brings to education requires new forms of human interactions. However, both technology and education are not passive subjects, that is they have an effect on humans and as such there is an ethical responsibility, considering that today's society has benefited from the advancement of technology. However education does not end in an individuals egocentric wellbeing, its purpose is for social and community wellbeing, which is an assertion that states that technology is for all. There is need for the design of virtual education norms for a universal learning. In the light of this it is necessary to identify the values within a virtual learning environment. The values will be

understood as the desirability of things, reality's convenience that an individual needs, as such there is no values without appropriateness and appropriation. Therefore the course study and higher institutions or other institute of learning curriculum in various academic programs should hold values as contained in an operational policy. In the light of this, this paper provides and identifies the values of digital ethics in virtual classrooms and educational technology based on the growing digital world. It is important to understand the natural context in which the learning process takes place and transform existing teaching practices. It is important to know that teaching practice becomes more effective by communicating knowledge and feelings so that students are challenged. It important to reconsider quality virtual education as a space capable of generating authentic ethical commitment and promoting the development of citizens. Scholars in education have offered relevant data for understanding the term "good learner", for the development of learning, they explored the concept of "minimum and maximum learner" from the educational field in a polarised and pluralistic societies such as those seen today. Being a good learner or citizen depends on some factors and causes as education remains a capital task for an individual to undergo.

Digital ethics in educational technology encompasses issues which include: data privacy, availability/accessibility, Intellectual Property (IP), correct assessment, algorithm bias, academic integrity e.t.c. A good example is when students are involved in an online class through various means of digital devices (computers e.t.c) their participation, performance and biometric data, when collected and stored, there is concern about surveillance, consent and long-term data security. Also, the use of AI-Powered assessment tools introduces risks and bias to students on its use. Furthermore, virtual classroom also redefined the social interaction between teachers and learners, questions of social decorum, respect in digital interactions and boundaries between teachers and students relationships become more complex in a mediated space. Reliance on technological devices for learning can compound inequalities, students from under-resourced area may lack reliable internet connectivity or access to digital devices, giving room to ethical concerns around fairness and inclusion. Ezumah (2020) looking at the nature of sophisticated technological tools used, there must be proper guidance on the use of these devices for learning and discourage total dependence and lack of human cognitive and constructive disposition.

In this paper, digital ethics in virtual classrooms and educational technology provides a framework for evaluating both technical efficiency of educational tools and broader societal, cultural and moral implication. Taddeo (2024) emphasised that educators should have a template of moral code of conduct while teaching and learning online, accountability should be a pivotal drive in the discharge of lessons to avoid a drift from the focal point. He encourages policymakers, educators, developers and learners to ponder on how technology can be used responsibly to ensure teaching and proper learning I achieved. The ethics of virtual classrooms and educational technology is intricate, it is

concerned with intellectual property to promoting inclusively and maintaining academic integrity. Shannon Cohnney et.al (2020) advocates for educators and policymakers within schools institutions of learning who have embraced online learning to establish clearer guidelines and regulations tailored to educational environments. This paper navigates and addresses the ethical challenges in digital education with the increase in technology and Internet connectivity, e-learning has become a part of education. E-learning or digital education refers to the use of electronic media and digital technologies in education. It provides convenient learning opportunities to people across globe. Sharples (2023) learning virtually is viewed as a collaborative process among humans and AI systems setting goals interpreting data building understanding, reconciling ideas and transferring knowledge to new contexts. Therefore educational technology brings about some ethical issues that need careful consideration as the paper x-ray and proffer solution. This paper draws support on Socrates theory on ethical behaviour which stands as an influence to moral thought. Ethical behaviour is not about obeying rules blindly but about aligning ones actions with reason and the pursuit of the good. Living ethically for Socrates, meant harmonising the soul and achieving inner excellence which leads to genuine happiness. Theory of ethical behaviour is grounded in the belief that knowledge leads to virtue and virtue leads to happiness. He emphasised reason, self-examination and the pursuit of truth as the path to moral living.

### **Ethical Challenges in Virtual Classrooms and Educational Technology .**

Following the adoption of virtual learning and the use of various technological gadgets for teaching and learning, ethical consideration will remain a significant aspect of its development. New ethical challenges will arise with technological advancements requiring continuous review and innovation.

#### **Here are some ethical challenges in virtual classroom and educational technology:**

1. Continuous changes in technology and pedagogy brings about more flexible, communal-driven approaches to ethical guidance in complementing other kind of frameworks.
2. The growing use of advanced technologies like Augmented Reality (AR)/ Virtual Reality (VR), Artificial Intelligence (AI)/ Machine Learning (ML) and Internet of Things (IoT) in education comes with new ethical challenges around data privacy e.t.c.
3. Open educational resources shared publicly require attribution standards to protect the content of information within a given class of learners.
4. Digital credentials gotten online is of great significance standardisation with verifiable security required to curb misleading claims and protect learners future opportunities.

5. The expansion of educational technology tools automated assessment requires ethical oversight to ensure academic integrity to address possible issues of lack of face-to-face interaction which may harm students well-being.
6. Massive open online courses (MOOCs), there is massive inclusion of underprivileged groups in this teaching and learning arrangement. There is need for careful consideration and planning in the development and implementation of MOOCs.
7. Unequal access to stable Internet devices and learning platforms disadvantages students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Raising ethical questions about fairness, inclusion and equal learning opportunities.
8. EdTech companies may prioritise profit over pedagogy, ethical concern include marketing to students, exploiting personal data, or turning learning into a commodity.
9. Blurred boundaries in virtual space (e.g message outside class hours, social media overlap). This concern raises ethical professionalism, safety and digital etiquette.
10. Learning online without some kind of measures can make cheating, plagiarism and impersonation easier.

### **Ethical Consideration in Virtual Classroom and Educational Technology**

1. **Data/Information Protection and Privacy:** This is a pressing issue in virtual classroom and educational technology, where sensitive sensitive personal information is routinely collected and stored. Data protection is the legal and technical measures put in place to safeguard from unauthorised access, while privacy is the rights of individuals to control how their personal information is gathered, stored and shared. With the increase in ICT tools in learning, especially among students and users there is need for a design to safeguard personal and sensitive information from unauthorised access, theft, misuse or exploitation. This involves ensuring the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information while respecting individuals' rights to control their personal information. The key aspects of data/information protection and privacy are **lawfulness, fairness, transparency, data minimisation, accuracy, storage limitation, security and accountability**. By prioritising data/information protection and privacy, organisations can ensure confidentiality, integrity and availability of data/information while respecting individuals rights.
2. **Access and Equity:** ethical teaching demands inclusively, avoiding the reinforcement of digital divides. There should be equal access to technology and Internet connectivity for all students, bridging the gap between those who have access and those who do not. This should be free of bias while using technological tools or proper inclusiveness to help students of different abilities through tools like captions, screen readers, and adaptive

- interfaces. Language diversity also matters as many platforms are designed primarily for English-speaking learners. Access and Equity in virtual classrooms are critical to achieving the goals of inclusive and quality education. Bridging digital divide, addressing socioeconomic barriers and fostering inclusive design strategies.
3. **Academic Morality:** academic morality in virtual classrooms is demanded from stakeholders. This promotes the upholding of honesty, fairness and responsibility in virtual learning environments. With the shift to digital platforms, issues such as plagiarism, unauthorised collaboration, contract cheating and misuse of online resources can be challenging to monitor. Maintaining integrity virtually requires students and educators to commit to ethical practices. Students are expected to submit original work, respect assessment rule and use digital tools responsibly. Stakeholders, educators on the other side, should design assessment that discourages dishonesty, employ plagiarism detection device and promote culture of trust.
  4. **Instructional Responsibility:** educators should ensure that online teaching should promote meaningful learning, Equity and ethical engagement. In digital learning teachers must go beyond content delivery to create supportive, inclusive and interactive learning spaces that address students diverse needs. Educators should design engaging lessons, foster participation and ensure that assessment practices are fair and transparent. Educators must model digital ethics encourage academic integrity and guide students in responsible use of technology and online resources. Instructional responsibility also involves monitoring students progress, providing timely feedback and ensuring that no learner is left behind due to technical barriers.
  5. **Intellectual Property and Content Ownership:** for educators, ownership of teaching materials like lecture slides/notes recorded classes often depends on institutional policies. Some institutions claim ownership of course content produced with their resources. Ethically, both educators and institutions must respect authorship, provide proper attribution and avoid misuse of digital content. Clear guidelines on consent, copyright, licensing and data use should be established to protect all stakeholders. In practice transparent communication about authorship, ownership and fair usage policies will foster trust and safeguard intellectual rights in virtual classrooms and educational technology.
  6. **Teacher-Student Boundaries:** Unlike physical classrooms, virtual classrooms extends interactions into personal spaces through emails, videos/calls, social media e.t.c. To maintain professionalism, teachers must respect students privacy, avoid unnecessary invasion into their personal lives and use official communication channels rather than informal platforms. Clear boundaries protects both parties from misunderstandings,



favoritism or inappropriate relationships. Upholding teacher-student boundaries in virtual classroom safeguards academic integrity, foster mutual respect and ensures a safe, inclusive and professional digital learning atmosphere.

7. **Viability and Responsibility:** for virtual classrooms to be sustained , there must be stable Internet connectivity, user friendly platforms, digital awareness among participants and adequate institutional support. Without these virtual classrooms risk excluding students or delivering sub-standard learning outcomes. Educators have the a duty to design inclusive and engaging lessons, ensure academic integrity and the use technology ethically. Institutions should bear the responsibility of providing training, infrastructure and policies that safeguard privacy and Equity. Students on their part should be responsible for active participation, self-discipline and respecting digital usage. The success of virtual classrooms rests on shared responsibility among all stakeholders, educators to create a fair, ethical and viable digital learning environment.

### **Strategies to Advance Ethics in Virtual Classrooms and Educational Technology.**

This paper x-rays the strategies stakeholders, educators learner can uphold for a smooth operation of virtual classroom with educational technology devices. For an online class to retain its importance among users in the educational setting, there are strategies educators, stakeholders should employ, these include:

- Those involved in virtual teaching should strengthen infrastructure and access, expand broadband coverage and provide affordable digital divide. The effectiveness depends heavily on the robustness of supporting infrastructure and equitable access to technology. Without adequate system in place many students and teachers face exclusion, limited participation or low learning outcomes. Strengthening infrastructure and access is therefore essential for making virtual learning inclusive, reliable and sustainable. Reliable internet connectivity is a backbone of virtual classroom government-private sector should expand broadband coverage, provide affordable data plans and support connectivity in rural areas. Many learners lack access to adequate devices such as laptops, tablets, smartphones. Strengthening access involves institutional programs that provide devices through partnerships with technology companies. Schools can also encourage bring-your-own-device. Virtual classrooms platforms must be secure, friendly and scalable. Strengthening access also means ensuring inclusivity, platforms should integrate accessibility features such as screen readers, captions and adjustable text format giving room for disabled students to participate. Government and educational institutions must prioritise digital learning infrastructure in policy frameworks. Strengthening infrastructure and access in virtual

classrooms is foundational for the success of digital education. Beyond hardware and connectivity it requires inclusive platforms, capacity building and socio-political commitment to equity. By investing in sustainable infrastructure and ensuring universal access, virtual classroom can serve as a powerful tool for democratising education and bridging learning divide.

- Promoting inclusive and accessible design, the benefit of digital learning can only be fully realised when platforms and practices are intentionally designed to be inclusive and accessible to all learners. Promoting inclusivity and accessibility ensures that virtual learning with the use of various technological devices caters to diverse needs, reduce inequalities and upholds the principle of education as a universal right. Virtual classrooms must embrace teaching strategies that respect diversity in learning styles, background and abilities. Adopting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) will encourage multiple means of engagement, representation. Educators can provide content in varied formats such as videos, text, audio and interactive modules to support different learners. The learning environment should reflect linguistic and cultural diversity, offering translational tools, multilingual content and culturally relevant examples makes the classroom more welcoming for students from different backgrounds. Culturally responsive teaching also fosters a sense of belonging and improves student engagement. Teachers play a central role in implementing inclusive design, regular training on digital accessibility, inclusive teaching methods, and sensitivity to learners' needs empowers educators to create fair learning experiences. Awareness campaigns for students also foster respect for diversity and encourage collaborative learning. Institutions and government must adopt policies that mandate accessibility standards in digital education. Promoting inclusive and accessible design in virtual classrooms is essential for building equitable digital learning environment. By integrating accessibility devices, fostering cultural sensitivity, ensuring affordability and supporting educators with training, virtual classrooms will be a space where all learners thrive.
- Enhancing teachers' training and digital literacy, to effectively prepare students for the 21st century, teachers must be adequately trained and digitally empowered. Enhancing teachers' training and digital literacy therefore stands as a strategic priority for improving the quality of education in both traditional and virtual learning environments. Training includes ICT tools, learning management system, productivity applications and digital communication platforms. Beyond technical skills, teachers should be guided on how to integrate technology into curriculum delivery, assessment and feedback processes. Training should foster competencies in digital safety, online ethics, content evaluation, intellectual property awareness and data privacy. To enhance teacher training and digital literacy a holistic



approach is needed. Training must not only impart technical know-how but also foster pedagogical innovation, ethical use of technology and adaptability. Government, educational institutions and stakeholders should work collaboratively to ensure sustained capacity building. By empowering teachers, the education system can ensure that students are equipped with digital skills necessary for lifelong learning civic involvement, digital society and employment.

- Prioritise ethical and responsible use of virtual classroom, this will ensure that technology enhances rather than undermines, educational values. Institutions should establish codes of conduct outlining expectations for digital behaviour, privacy and academic integrity. Educators must be trained on digital ethics, safe technology use, managing online classroom dynamics, respectful communication and plagiarism awareness. By embedding ethical principles into the design and delivery of virtual learning, education will remain a force for equity, integrity and holistic development in the digital era.
- Encouraging interactive and student-centered learning, this approach is essential in ensuring virtual classroom is dynamic, inclusive and impactful. Active engagement with learners, collaboration and communication, motivation and interest are pivotal points in ensuring a seamless teaching and learning. To promote interactive, student-centered learning, schools and institutions should invest in teacher training, reliable digital infrastructure and inclusive instructional design. Encouraging a culture of collaboration, flexibility and innovation will ensure that virtual classrooms move beyond a one-way communication channel to becoming a vibrant space of active learning.
- Investing in research and innovation, virtual classrooms are transforming education by making teaching and learning more flexible, inclusive and technology-driven. To properly harness technology in teaching and learning via virtual medium continuous research and innovation are essential. Investing these areas helps to identify challenges, improve practices, and introduce new models that enhance the quality of virtual education. There should be collaboration and partnerships among universities, technology firms, NGOs, and international organisations. Open access knowledge sharing, capacity building and regulatory frameworks that support experimentation through national policies or other recognised policies should be effective. Investing in research and innovation in virtual classrooms is not a luxury but a necessity for the future of education. Policymakers, institutions and private sector stakeholders should work together to create sustainable system that supports ongoing inquiry, experimentation and technological advancement. By doing so, virtual classrooms can evolve into resilient, inclusive and high-quality learning spaces that prepare learners for the challenges and opportunities of the digital era.

- Sustainability and policy support, the rapid shift to digital education has brought about unprecedented opportunities for flexible, accessible and innovative learning. To ensure these benefits last and reach all learners equally. Without long-term strategies, infrastructure and enabling regulations, virtual classrooms risk becoming fragmented. This ensures long term viability, equitable access, quality assurance, accountability and ethics, global competitiveness. A sustained policy will support infrastructure investment, teacher training, equity and inclusion framework, curriculum integration and public-private partnership. For virtual classrooms to be sustainable, policies must be forward-looking, insulating and adaptive. Government should integrate digital education into broader national development strategies, backed by sustained funding, research and innovation. Institutions must focus on teacher empowerment, ethical use of technology and equitable student support. Ultimately, sustainability and policy support will transform virtual classrooms from short-term solutions into lasting pillars of modern education.

Benefits of Ethical Considerations in Virtual Classrooms and Educational Technology in the 21st Century.

The integration and continuous integration of virtual classrooms and educational technology (EdTech) in the 21st century has brought immense opportunities for learning. However, without ethical guidance, issues such as privacy violations, inequalities and misuse of digital tools may arise. Ethical considerations as seen above ensures that technology is used responsibly, fairly and sustainably in education. Their benefits extends to students, teachers and the society at large. Benefits include:

### **1. Protection of Privacy and Data Security**

Ethical frameworks ensures that students information, academic records, personal data are protected against misuse. Privacy builds trust between learners, educators and institutions, preventing theft, cyberbullying and unauthorised surveillance.

### **2. Promotion of Equity and Inclusivity**

Ethical guidelines will encourage equal access to digital resources for learners not minding gender, disability or socioeconomic background. Platforms like captions, screen reader and translation features promotes participation for all, reducing discrimination and fostering diversity in learning space.

### **3. Strengthened Academic Integrity**

Ethical consideration will combat plagiarism, cheating and academic dishonesty through clear policies and responsible use of digital tools. It will uphold credibility and value of online certifications and degrees.

#### **4. Clear Teacher-Student Boundaries**

Ethical standards will help to maintain respectful and professional interactions, thereby protecting learners from exploitation, harassment, bias and building a healthy and safe digital learning environment.

#### **5. Using Technology rightly**

Ethical reflection will prevent misuse of emerging tools such as artificial intelligence, monitoring software or biometric systems. It will also ensure that digital innovations complements learning without infringing on human rights thereby balancing the use of technology to avoid over-dependence.

#### **6. Enhanced Trust and Institutional relevance**

Institutions that adopts strong ethical framework will attract more students, staff and partners. This will strengthen the credibility of online learning platforms promoting growth in the education sector.

#### **7. Fostering Digital Citizenship**

This will thrive when students engage responsibly in online classes by respecting others, avoiding cyberbullying and practicing proper netiquette, preparing learners to navigate the digital world with integrity and social responsibility for future work places and society.

#### **8. Encourages Transparency and Accountability**

Ethical practices require institutions and EdTech providers to be open about data use, learning outcomes, platform policies, building confidence in technology by ensuring accountability from service providers, educators and increases fairness in evaluation processes.

#### **9. Encourages Support for Sustainable Development**

Ethical consideration encourages environmental responsible use of technology. This supports broader sustainable development goals (SDGs).

In the 21st century, the benefits of ethical considerations in virtual classrooms and educational technology are vital for ensuring fairness, safety and trust in digital education. They protect privacy, promote inclusivity, uphold academic integrity and guide the responsible use of emerging technologies. By embedding ethics into digital learning institutions not only enhance the quality of

education but also prepare students to become responsible digital citizens in a globalised technology-driven world.

## **Conclusion**

The integration of virtual classrooms and educational technologies has redefined teaching and learning and knowledge exchange in the 21st century. As these innovations hold immense promises for enhancing access, flexibility and global collaboration they also bring critical ethical challenges that must not be overlooked. Issues of academic integrity, digital equity, intellectual property and the responsible use of artificial intelligence highlights the need for a well-informed ethical framework to guide practice. Without such considerations, technological advancements risk widening inequalities, undermining trust and compromising the quality of education. Digital ethics in virtual classrooms and educational technology, therefore stands at the core of sustainable and inclusive digital space. It compels educators, institutions and learners alike to act responsibly, ensuring that technology is used not only as a tool for efficiency but also as a means of ensuring fairness, accountability, transparency and respect for human dignity. In this sense, digital ethics is not simply an add-on to educational technology but a foundational element that safeguards its legitimacy and long-term viability.

In conclusion, infusing ethical values into the design, implementation and evaluation of virtual classrooms and educational technologies is imperative for building resilient and equitable educational systems. By promoting a culture of ethical awareness, collaboration and continuous reflection stakeholders can ensure that technology contributes positively to human and national development. Ultimately, the future of education in a digital age will not be determined solely by technological innovations, but by how responsibly and ethically innovations are harnessed for the common good.

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