

## TEACHERS'S ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN MANAGING CHILDREN'S ONLINE BEHAVIOUR

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### ABSTRACT

*The rise of digital technologies in education has reshaped how children learn, communicate and interact online. While digital platforms provide opportunities for enriched learning, they also expose children to various online risks, including cyber bullying, misinformation, privacy violations and exposure to harmful content. This paper examines the ethical responsibilities of teachers in managing childrens online behavior within the context of digital learning environments. Drawing on contemporary literature, the study analyzes teachers' roles in online safety, digital literacy instruction, behavior monitoring, modeling ethical conduct and collaborating with parents and institutions. Using a qualitative review methodology, the paper synthesizes research findings on ethical teaching practices, child protection standards and digital citizenship frameworks. The discussion highlights challenges faced by teachers, including balancing privacy with monitoring, insufficient digital competence and rapidly evolving online risks. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy makers, educators and schools, emphasizing professional development, policy reform and stronger partnership with parents. Ultimately, teachers hold a critical ethical obligation to safeguard childrens digital well-being while fostering responsible online engagement.*

### INTRODUCTION

Children online activities has grown rapidly due to mobile devices, social media and technology to enhanced learning. As a result, teachers now have new ethical responsibilities related to monitoring and guiding learners digital conduct. These responsibilities include protecting children from online risks, promoting digital citizenship, ensuring safe digital learning environments and modeling appropriate online behaviour (UNESCO 2018). Teachers are also expected to uphold professional online boundaries and comply with school policies on technology use (UNESCO 2017) understanding these responsibilities is critical for improving digital safety practices in schools.

The integration of the internet and digital tools into primary and secondary education has accelerated rapidly in the last decade. Children now use digital devices for communication, collaboration, research and entertainment, making online environments a central part of their lives both inside and outside school. While technological growth has enhanced opportunities for interactive learning, it has also created new ethical concerns for educators responsible for guiding children in safe and responsible digital engagement. Research indicates that primary school-aged children are among the most vulnerable to online risks due to their limited capacity to evaluate risks and understand long-term consequences (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010).

Teachers, as front-line educators and child protectors, play a critical ethical role in shaping children's online behavior. Their responsibilities extend beyond curriculum instruction to include digital safety education, privacy protection, monitoring online interactions and modeling ethical digital conduct. Ethical responsibilities are rooted in professional teaching standards, child-protection laws and expectations for promoting the holistic development of learners. As digital technologies continue to shape educational systems globally, the need for teachers to understand and uphold ethical responsibilities in managing children's online behavior has become increasingly important.

This paper explores teachers' ethical responsibilities in managing children's online behavior, drawing from established theories of digital citizenship, ethical education and child protection. It examines the conceptual foundations of online behavior management, reviews relevant literature and presents practical strategies and ethical considerations for teachers. It also highlights emerging challenges and provides recommendations for educational stakeholders.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Digital Citizenship Education

Digital citizenship comprises online safety, respectful communication, media literacy and awareness of digital rights. Studies show that explicit teaching of digital citizenship improves children's online decision making and reduces risky behavior (Öztürk 2021; Zhong, 2023). However, digital citizenship is often inconsistently implemented across primary schools, highlighting a gap between policy and practice.

### Safeguarding and professional boundaries

Teachers have a legal and moral responsibility to protect children from harm including cyberbiling expansions to harmful content and private communication with pupils on personal social media account are essential to maintaining professionalism and protecting learners (CW&lsh et al. 2022).

Safeguarding also includes identifying online risk really and reporting incidents according to school procedures.

### **School Policy & Monitoring System**

Effective management of online behaviour relies on strong institutional policies, including acceptabilities agreements, filling systems, reporting mechanism and parental engagement studies show that schools with integrated online-safety policies achieve better outcomes in regulating students online behaviour Clauccell a cot at 2020; W & Ish, et al; 2022).

### **Teachers Competence and Professional Development**

Teachers ability to guide online behaviour depends on adequate training. UNESCO C2018) emphasizes that teachers need competencies in digital safety, ethical decision making and pedagogical use of technology. Research indicates that teachers lacking confidence in technology struggle to respond to online safety issues effectively (AJSTIME, 2023)

### **Teachers as Ethical Role Models**

Teachers are expected to model safe, respectful and responsible online behaviour. Professional guideline emphasize that learners mirror the actions of adults, making teachers' conduct online and ethical benchmark (HEP-UNESCO 2017). Modelling includes respecting privacy, demonstrating digital etiquette and using technology legally and responsibly.

The literature on digital childhood, online safety and educational ethics has grown significantly in the last 15 years. The following subsections summarize key themes from contemporary research.

### **Children's Online Behavior and Vulnerabilities**

Children engage in various digital activities such as social networking, gaming, streaming and communication. Their online behavior is shaped by curiosity, peer influence and limited awareness of online risks (Byron, 2008). Studies indicate that children encounter risks including cyberbullying, online harassment, exposure to explicit content, privacy breaches and misinformation (Livingstone et al., 2014). These experiences not only affect academic performance but also mental health.

### **Ethical Responsibilities in Education**

Teacher ethics encompass principles of care, responsibility, professionalism and respect for learners' well-being (Campbell, 2013). In digital contexts, ethical obligations extend to protecting children from online harm, ensuring equitable digital access, respecting privacy and guiding

responsible online conduct. Research emphasizes the need to integrate digital ethics into teacher training (Hughes & Read, 2018).

### **Digital Citizenship Education**

Digital citizenship frameworks emphasize safe, responsible and ethical online engagement (Ribble, 2015). Teachers are expected to embed digital citizenship skills such as digital etiquette, digital literacy, cybersecurity awareness and information evaluation. Studies show that teaching digital citizenship reduces cyberbullying and improves responsible digital behavior (Jones & Mitchell, 2016).

### **Teachers' Roles in Online Safety**

Teachers are increasingly required to supervise students' digital behavior and respond to incidents involving cyberbullying, harmful content, or academic dishonesty. Professional standards require teachers to model ethical behavior, maintain secure online environments and communicate with parents regarding children's digital habits (Livingstone et al., 2011).

### **Challenges in Managing Online Behavior**

Teachers face barriers including lack of training, ambiguous school policies, rapidly evolving digital platforms and difficulty balancing monitoring with respect for student privacy (Stoilova et al., 2021). These challenges necessitate systemic support, continuous training and collaborative approaches to digital safety.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a systematic literature review approach. Peer reviewed journals, policy documents and educational frameworks published between 2010 and 2024 were examined using keywords such as digital citizenship, teacher ethical online behaviour safeguarding and ICT Competency. Inclusion criteria required that sources relate directly to teachers' ethical duties in digital environments. Documents were analyzed thematically to identify recurring responsibilities, challenges and recommendations.

This study adopts a qualitative literature review methodology. Academic articles, reports, guidelines and policy documents published between 2010 and 2024 were analyzed. Databases searched include ERIC, Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science. Inclusion criteria:

- Studies focused on children's online behavior, digital safety, teacher ethics, or digital citizenship.
- Empirical studies, theoretical papers and policy analyses.

- A thematic analysis approach was used to identify recurring ideas and synthesize findings relevant to teachers' ethical responsibilities.

### **Ethical Responsibilities Are Multidimensional**

Teachers must teach, model, monitor and moderate online behaviour while also maintaining professionalism. This multi-layered responsibility aligns with global teacher competency frameworks (UNESCO, 2018).

Policy presence alone is insufficient while most schools have online safety policies. Teachers often lack training to implement them effectively, practical gaps occur when teachers do not fully understand reporting procedures, digital tools or relevant laws. (Lauricella et al, 2020).

Professional boundaries remain a concern. Teachers face challenges maintaining boundaries on Social media. Clear school policies reduce risk but many teachers still experience uncertainty regarding appropriate online communication (Walsh et al, 2022)

Digital citizenship is essential but inconsistently taught. Research consistently recommends embedding digital citizenship across the curriculum, yet many schools treat it as an occasional topic rather than a continuous learning strand (Ozturk, 2021, Zhong 2023)

Continuous training determines success. Teacher competence in online behaviour management improves significantly with ongoing CPD, scenario-based training and collaborative school-wide approaches (AJSTME, 2023)

### **Protection and Online Safety**

Protecting students from online risks is a primary ethical duty. Teachers must ensure students use age-appropriate websites, manage exposure to harmful content and report inappropriate behavior. Schools with robust online safety policies demonstrate fewer cyberbullying incidents (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015).

Teachers must also teach cyber hygiene practices such as strong passwords, safe browsing and avoiding strangers online. Ethical responsibility also includes identifying signs of digital distress among learners and taking timely action.

### **Promoting Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking**

Teachers must equip students with skills to evaluate online information. In the age of fake news, misinformation and algorithm-driven content, digital literacy is essential. Research shows that children who receive digital literacy education are better equipped to detect misinformation and practice safe online behavior (McGrew *et al.*, 2018).

## **Modeling Ethical Online Conduct**

Children learn ethical digital behavior by observing significant adults. Teachers must demonstrate respectful communication, proper citation practices and responsible social media use. Ethical modeling reinforces positive behavior and creates a culture of respect and responsibility.

## **Monitoring Online Interactions**

Monitoring is an ethical responsibility tied to child protection. Teachers must observe how students engage during online classes, on school learning platforms and in digital group tasks. Monitoring should be balanced with students' privacy rights. Ethical guidelines recommend transparent monitoring students should be aware of what is monitored and why (Stoilova et al., 2021).

## **Ensuring Data Privacy and Confidentiality**

Teachers are custodians of sensitive student data, including academic records, photos, videos and personal information. Ethical responsibilities include:

Not sharing student information without consent.

Ensuring safe use of digital tools approved by the school.

Protecting login credentials and device security.

Breaches of digital privacy can expose children to identity theft, harassment, or exploitation (Livingstone & Third, 2017).

## **Collaboration with Parents and Stakeholders**

Teachers must work with parents to reinforce online safety practices at home. Parents often lack awareness of online risks, making teacher-parent collaboration essential. Schools with strong parent-teacher communication show improved student online behavior (Jones & Mitchell, 2015).

## **Ethical Challenges Identified**

Key challenges include:

Limited teacher training in digital ethics.

Lack of uniform online safety policies.

Students' unsupervised use of personal devices.

Cultural differences in defining online misconduct.

These challenges highlight the need for systemic solutions.

## Conclusion

Teachers ethical responsibilities in managing children's online behaviour are broad and essential to modern education. They must model good digital conduct, teach digital citizenship, ensure learner safety, maintain boundaries and work within institutional policies. However, successful implementation depends on adequate training, strong school policies and a collaborative approach to digital safety.

Teachers hold significant ethical responsibilities in managing children's online behavior in today's technology-driven educational environment. Their responsibilities include ensuring online safety, promoting digital literacy, modeling ethical conduct, monitoring digital interactions, protecting student privacy and collaborating with parents and institutions. Given the complexity of digital risks, teachers require ongoing professional development and support. Ethical management of children's online behavior is essential for safeguarding their well-being and nurturing responsible digital citizens.

## Recommendations

Embed digital citizenship in the curriculum through age appropriate lessons and cross subject integration.

Strengthen teacher training in ethical online behaviour, safeguarding and practical technology use.

Clarify teacher codes of conduct to address social media use, communication boundaries and privacy expectations.

Adopt whole-school online safety policies with clear reporting mechanisms and regular policy review.

Engage parents and communities in promoting safe and ethical online behaviour among children.

- **Professional Development:** Schools should provide ongoing training in digital ethics, online safety and emerging digital risks.
- **Digital Citizenship Curriculum:** Integrate structured digital citizenship programs across grade levels.
- **Clear School Policies:** Develop and enforce online behavior policies aligned with national child-protection laws.

- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Strengthen cooperation between teachers, parents and ICT experts.
- **Ethical Use of Educational Technology:** Teachers should use only approved, safe digital tools that protect children's data.
- **Early Digital Safety Education:** Introduce age-appropriate online safety lessons in the early years of schooling.

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