Ethical Issues in Technology-Mediated Education

John Nnaji, Department of Philosophy, University of the Balearic Islands, Palma, Spain

ABSTRACT

Contemporary system of education has been strongly revolutionised as a result of the current trends of facilitating learning and improving performance through creation, usage, and management of appropriate technological processes and resources. Manipulating technology in a way to use information correctly and realize information flow effectively has become a necessity. However, such necessity has been beclouded by variety of ethical issues that range from privacy, accuracy, accessibility to question of intellectual property rights. It is such ethical problems that this paper will address by analysing the impact of technology-mediated education on the transmission of socio-cultural and academic values. It also raises the issue of whether technology-mediated educational settings are conducive for academic freedom or do they undermine it?

Keywords: Academic Freedom, Computer Ethics, Computer Technology, Educational Technologies, Intellectual Property

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented ways in which technology has transformed modern societal life and contributed immensely to solving human problems. There is no doubt that one of the fastest growing aspects of the technological trend has been the computer technology. Computer technology has become an integral part of any contemporary societal development and is increasingly in use in every area of our societal life ranging from shopping online to registration in schools, instruction and communication between students and teachers.

Some authors argued that Artificial Intelligence will play a significant role in this emerging technology (Moravec, 1996; Kurzweil, 1999). Others like Andy Hines (1996, 9-10) went further to predict that the artificial-intelligence tutor will become a valuable assistant, providing the individualized instruction that a teacher with 20 or more pupils does not have the time for. Learning can take place at the student’s pace. Given the fact that education is perhaps the most important domain of life, being the domain in which people are prepared to live and work and contribute to society, the need to determine how technology-mediated education has facilitated the transmission of socio-cultural and academic values by institutions of learning becomes imminent.

With the rise of digital plagiarism, illegal copying of copyrighted media, hacking, improper use of computer resources, harassment and hate speech, breaches of informational
privacy and confidentiality, many studies have sought to illustrate ethical dangers in the use of technology in education. There are issues of ethical conflicts in information and technology (Parker & Baker, 1990). Some studies base their discussion on the unethical use of computer in education on certain practices in higher education and universities (Gülbahar, 2008; Namlu & Odabasi, 2007). Likewise, most ethical issues are predominantly linked to the emergence of Virtual Education through the mediation of technology in higher learning (Croy, 1998).

Virtual education, it is argued, may weaken the communicative structure of education and also disorient students. Thus, we are faced with the ethical problem regarding where to situate the desirable balance between the social surround and digital surround in education. The fundamental aspect of learning is not just the bulk of information students acquire, the relationship and interaction with other students and with the teacher, within the physical confines of the classroom, have important impact on the level of personal development and performance. The implication is that if we accept wholly the premise that underlies the use of the computer as a didactic device delivering instruction and exposition, we will be obliged then to rethink the assumptions that lead to the grouping of students into classes and classes into schools in the way in which we currently do.

This paper discusses the ethical issues in technology-mediated education by the stressing the need to checkmate the erosion of face-to-face interactions in education so as to avoid the unpleasant implications unlimited dependence on technology might have on the transmission of academic and socio-cultural values. In this paper, technology will be considered as synonymous with computers. Its justification for this seemingly narrow perspective is the rapid convergence of all media and communications technologies with computer technology. Thus, computer technology is designated as the range of computing technologies that include stand-alone personal computers, privately owned computer systems and networks (e.g., Local area networks [LANs] and Wide area networks [WANs]), and the Internet itself. Therefore, the use of the term ‘technology’ will specifically refer to the use of computers in education.

**EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY**

Educational technology is the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources. It includes, but is not limited to software, hardware, as well as internet application and activities. Other systems used in the process of developing human capability are involved. The four major objectives in the use of modern educational technologies include:

1. Intensification of the educational process;
2. Increasing the efficiency of education, i.e., the criteria of evaluating results;
3. Facilitating access to quality education;
4. Provision of additional skills unavailable through traditional methods.

The achievement of these objectives has invariably determined the modes of use of technology in education. They include the usage of computers as communication medium; as an archival medium; as an expository medium; and as an exploratory medium respectively.

As a communication medium, computer provides us the facility for communications that could be both one-to-one and/or one-to-many, both synchronous and/or asynchronous. It guarantees the liberalisation of the exchange of ideas and information. With the introduction of the internet and the spread of the personal computer, individuals become active disseminators of information. This development created a profound shift in the nature of control of the dissemination of information in a society which used to be the sole right of governments, schools and organisations. For instance, a student can readily get access to any kind of information with just a click on the internet. The issue is not the access the student has to such information; the actual question is on how does such information
Global Education Access Utilizing Partnerships and Networked Global Learning Communities
www.igi-global.com/chapter/global-education-access-utilizing-partnerships/67918?camid=4v1a