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Looking into Educational Technology Training in Quebec Higher Education: addressing the Ethical Issues

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Summary

Ethical issues in Educational Technology have been scarcely considered in the literature so far and only recently raised more attention. Considering Educational Technology as a research area and ethical practice, this qualitative study aimed at exploring which and how ethical aspects are considered in Educational Technology training. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight university instructors in Education departments with expertise in Educational Technology and/or Distance Education in Quebec (Canada) higher education institutions. The results show that there are topics distinctly more present than others, but some were considered relevant to address in Educational Technology training offerings despite not being so at the moment of the study. Others are still quite new. Spotlighting practitioners' perspectives about these issues is an important contribution of the study.

Proposal / Research / Research questions and theoretical framework

The massive and forced used of technologies in education due to the Covid-19 pandemic put on the table ethical issues that were marginally addressed previously (Williamson et al., 2020). For example, the datafication phenomenon or the surveillance through online proctoring came into light; but other less recent issues reemerged (e.g., data privacy and plagiarism) (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

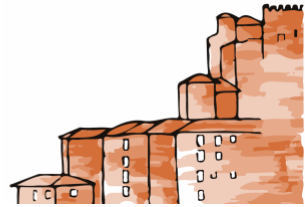
In a previous scoping review on ethical issues in the educational use of technology with 99 studies, Marín and Tur (2022) identified two prominent research topics: *data privacy/confidentiality* and *academic honesty and intellectual property*. More than half of the studies were of theoretical nature and only few strategies to deal with them and with the other eight topics detected (*digital divide, surveillance, content accuracy, netiquette, algorithmic decision-making, health & digital well-being, language & culture, and environmental issues*) were identified. The importance of considering practitioners' perspectives about these topics and their strategies to deal with them was pointed out.

Considering Educational Technology as a research area and an ethical practice (Savard et al., 2022), we posed the following research questions in this study:

- What ethical aspects are considered in Educational Technology training?
- How are those ethical aspects worked through Educational Technology training?



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Methodology

Based on an interpretive paradigm that focuses on understanding and interpreting instructors' perceptions, a qualitative study through semi-structured interviews was conducted.

The topic of ethical issues in Educational Technology training was the second part of a broader study within the context of Educational Technology training for (future) teachers in Quebec higher education. The following questions were asked: *Which ethical aspects are being considered in the broader training of Educational Technology? How are they worked on with the students, or planned to do it?*

As a support to these questions the list of topics developed in the scoping review previously described were shown (Marín & Tur, 2022).

The intentional sample consisted of eight university professors of Education departments in Quebec higher education institutions. The criteria for selecting them was their expertise in Educational Technology and/or Distance Education and their connection to training programs related to these areas.

Data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the qualitative software MAXQDA. A combination of deductive and inductive coding was applied. For the deductive coding, which came first, the ten topics related to ethical issues in the educational use of technology identified in the scoping review were used.

Results and Conclusions, Scientific Relevance

The most frequently mentioned ethical issues by the instructors were *academic honesty and intellectual property, content accuracy and netiquette*. The first one was mentioned by all of them, usually forming part of the programs' regulations and syllabi in the courses.

Several participants mentioned *netiquette* as something that is often assumed and discussed briefly but, due to its importance, may need to be reconsidered in training. Similarly, *content accuracy* was considered highly relevant and often discussed in the classes, but difficult to deal with.

Data privacy/confidentiality was weighed as important by many of the instructors, and one of them remarked its novelty and people's increased awareness surrounding it. With less presence, *algorithmic decision-making* was considered also relevant, but still mostly unaddressed. Some instructors referred to the importance of *language & culture*.

Some topics were addressed with students through training, depending on the instructor. For example, *digital divide* was mentioned as part of the course contents, and *surveillance* was briefly worked through a reading. When addressed, *data privacy/confidentiality* was worked through reflective questions or a reflective journal and the discussion of data protection strategies. Topics such as *environmental issues or health & digital well-being* were not commonly addressed.

The study contributes to the research gap on ethical issues in Educational Technology by providing insights into instructors' perspectives about these topics and their strategies to deal with them in Educational Technology training. Future work could involve considering these practices to develop strategies for training and comparing the results of this study with other geographical contexts.



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Acknowledgements

Victoria I. Marín acknowledges the support of the Grant RYC2019-028398-I funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and FSE “El FSE invierte en tu futuro”.

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