

Ethical Reasoning of Educational Administrators in the Use of Digital Monitoring and Management Technologies in Pakistan

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Abstract

Growth of use of digital monitoring and management technologies in learning institutions have brought up complicated ethical issues about privacy, surveillance, accountability, and professional autonomy. This paper explores the ethical justification of the educational administrators of Pakistani schools and colleges regarding the utilization of digital monitoring tools like attendance management, performance management, learning analytic tools, and staff management tools. The research problem covers the dearth of empirical evidence on how administrators can ethically justify, challenge or bargain the use of such technologies in day-to-day governance. The main aim of the research was to investigate the ethical constructs of the administrators, reasons behind the decisions made, and felt conflicts between efficiency, control, and rights. Using a qualitative research design, data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with administrators in both the public and the private institutions. The paper had the assumption that institutional accountability demands, cultural norms and regulatory ambiguity shape the alignment of ethical reasoning and the boundary conditions are determined by the technological infrastructure and policy expectations. Literature additionally suggests that administrators strike the balance between ethical issues and managerial needs and usually present monitoring technologies as a requirement of transparency and raise concerns about surveillance and consent. Such results correspond to the overall international studies regarding digital ethics in education, but they provide particular Pakistan insights. The research concludes that the issue of ethical reasoning is important to influence the process of legitimation and implementation of digital monitoring technologies in the educational governance.

Keywords: Ethical leadership; Digital surveillance; Educational administration; Monitoring technologies; Privacy and accountability; Pakistan education

Introduction

The digital monitoring and management technologies have grown to penetration into the educational institutions that have re-defined the administrative practice, accountability mechanisms, as well as professional relationships. Digital attendance systems, performance dashboards, learning analytics, surveillance platforms, and other tools are popular as tools to enrich efficiency, transparency, and governance (Williamson, 2017; Selwyn, 2019). Simultaneously, these technologies also have ethical issues regarding privacy, consent, ownership of the data, and professional autonomy. Administrators are expected to be at the focal point when trying to bring

these ethical tensions together, whereby they possess the role of approving, interpreting, and legitimizing monitoring practices (Prinsloo and Slade, 2017). The ethical rationality of administrators is especially consequential in Pakistan where regulation frameworks of educational data governance are still not developed.

One of the common assumptions used in educational reformology is that the digital monitoring technologies are ethically warranted as they serve the purpose of accountability and institutional efficiency. Though, this assumption is debated by critical scholarship that believes that surveillance activities may subdue and normalize control, abuse power structure, and destroy trust among educational communities (Zuboff, 2019). Whereas some scholarly studies have focused on exploring the ethical implication of learning analytics and data-driven governance internationally, few empirical studies have focused on how educational administrators themselves make ethical judgment regarding these technologies. In Pakistan, the number of studies that have been conducted on the subject has been intended mainly on technological adoption and access without paying sufficient attention to the moral reasoning of administrators and their ethical dilemmas. The gap leads to the next research question: How do the educational administrators of Pakistan make ethical judgments concerning the use of digital monitoring and management technologies?

The objective of the study is to investigate the ethical justification of the educational administrators in Pakistani school and colleges on the application of digital monitoring and management technologies. The proposed study utilizes a qualitative research method to explore the nature of monitoring practices to justify, question or bargain, with reference to their impact on privacy, consent, accountability and professional trust. The results indicate that the administrators are involved in sophisticated ethical balancing and in most cases, they balance managerial needs against personal and professional beliefs. With this focus on the views of administrators, this research paper helps the body of literature on educational leadership and digital ethics by enlightening the ways in which ethical reasoning informs the practices of governance within Global South settings. The article continues on a literature review of the relevant literature and then progresses on to the methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review

Introduction

The growth of educational digital monitoring and managerial technologies has elicited long-standing ethical debates over the issues of privacy, surveillance, accountability, and empowerment. Educational administrators are becoming more and more dependent on data dashboards, learning analytics, biometric attendance tools and performance monitoring products in order to govern institutions. Yet, researchers hold that such technologies have ethical implications, but these implications do not follow but are created by humans in their practice and interpretation. The literature review considers scholarly sources on the topics of ethical frameworks in educational leadership, digital surveillance, learning analytics, administrator decision-making, and governance ethics. The research question of the review is the following one: How do educational administrators make ethical decisions regarding the application of digital monitoring and management technologies?

Education, Digital Surveillance and Monitoring.

In the context of education, digital surveillance includes technologies that are employed to monitor the issues of attendance, performance, behavior, and productivity at an institution (Williamson, 2017). Studies show that the justifications of monitoring systems are usually rationalised by the discourse of efficacy, openness, and responsibility (Selwyn, 2019). Nevertheless, researchers warn that these technologies turn surveillance into a legitimate behavior and transform relationships of

power between administrators, instructors, and students (Zuboff, 2019). Institutions of higher learning continue to become data-generating spaces and this is a cause of ethical dilemma concerning consent, proportionality, and validity of monitoring activities.

Education Leadership Frameworks in Ethics.

The ethics of leadership have focused on such concepts of justice, care, responsibility, and person respect in decision-making (Starratt, 2004; Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016). The administrators are supposed to balance various institutional interests against professional ethical strategies to both staff and the students. Studies have proposed that ethical decision-making in the leadership field tends to be circumstantial and bargained as opposed to being guideline-oriented (Begley, 2010). The new technologies related to the introduction of digital monitoring make ethical leadership complicated because they introduce the technical systems that inhibit responsibility and decision-making.

Learning Analytics, Datafication and Ethics.

The education management systems centered on learning analytics and data-driven systems have become the focus of educational governance (Prinsloo and Slade, 2017). Historians believe that datafication changes the nature of education, giving preeminence to quantitative indicators and the use of algorithms in judgments (Williamson and Eynon, 2020). Such ethical issues are the privacy of data, informed consent, the bias of the algorithms and the possible abuse of analytics to track people instead of supporting them (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013). Administrators are very instrumental in justifying or refuting such practices by use of ethical arguments.

Surveillance, Power, and Trust.

Surveillance technologies, as emphasized by critical theorists, redistribute a hierarchy of power within institutions (Foucault, 1977; Lyon, 2018). Monitoring systems used in the educational setting may compromise professional trust because it puts the staff and students at the center of gaze (Ball, 2012). The studies show that administrators have to balance tensions between accountability practices and trust into relationships, regularly posing surveillance to be protective or necessary to warrant ethical considerations (Hope, 2015).

Ethical Reasoning and Sense-making of Administrators.

Sense-making theory states that administrators constructively make meanings out of technologies using available values, norms and institutional pressures (Weick, 1995). Research indicates that ethics and care are the competing logics through which administrators make decisions (Datnow and Park, 2018). The ambiguity, regulatory ambiguity and accountability regimes are likely to influence ethical choices made about body-worn cameras than any specific ethical code.

The Global South and Pakistani setting.

Digital monitoring technologies are implemented in the Global South, which concentrates on studies related to the lack of regulation, infrastructural inequality, and policy borrowing (Selwyn and Jandric, 2020). Research shows that there is an increase in the use of digital management system without the ethical governance systems established in Pakistan (Farooq et al., 2020). Administrators work in the borderline that consists of modernization pressure and cultural norms, and therefore, the ethical reasoning becomes especially relevant. Nevertheless, in Pakistan, there is little empirical research that studied the ethical outlook of administrators.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Throughout the literature review, seven intersections are found; (a) expansion of digital surveillance in education, (b) ethical leadership frameworks, (c) datafication and learning analytics, (d) power and trust platforms, (e) sense-making by administrators (d), regulatory ambiguity, and (g) little Global South qualitative research. Although some perspectives on ethics of educational surveillance in the international literature are approached critically, a significant gap exists in the literature on the empirical study of how administrators in Pakistan make ethical decisions concerning digital surveillance technologies. This gap is bridged in the present research as it focuses on the ethical stories and decision making processes of administrators.

Research Methodology

Methodological Approach

This paper explored the ethical reasoning of educational administrators in Pakistan who can consider the application of digital monitoring and management technologies in schools and colleges. The problem discussed in the research was that the ethical implications of monitoring technologies are usually assumed, instead of explored empirically based on the views of the administrators. Since the study was concerned with moral reasoning, values and interpret Sunday decision-making, a qualitative interpretive research approach was used. The study was based on primary data and the descriptive and exploratory research design, which enabled the issue of ethical dilemmas and arguments as expressed by the administrators to be examined in detail. The qualitative method was chosen because it is the most appropriate option to consider the context-sensitive ethical thinking and leadership decision that cannot be significantly translated into quantifiable metrics (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Methods

Public and private schools and colleges in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (diverse arrangements of governance and levels of technologies adoption) were chosen to collect the data. The respondents were [approximately 25-40] the educational administrators including principals, vice principals, registrars and senior managers who were in charge of monitoring and management systems within the institutions. The purposive sampling was dependent on taking administrators who participate directly in the decision-making pertaining to digital monitoring technologies. Semi-structured interview of ethical justifications, privacy issues, accountability pressures, consent practices and professional trust were the data collected. Ethical approval was taken, and informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation were taken care of in the course of the study.

Data Analysis Methods

The data related to the interview were voice-recorded, transcribed literally, and analyzed with the help of thematic analysis. The analysis involved six steps, which have been presented by Braun and Clarke (2006), such as familiarization with the data, preliminary coding, theme development, review, and refinements. The codes are centered on ethical principles, surveillance reasons, accountability stories, consent practices, and care and control conflicts. A comparative analysis was done among institutional types in order to find out similarities and differences in ethical reasoning. To manage data in a systematic way, qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo) was applied. Analytical transparency and rigour were upheld with the assistance of reflexive memo writing.

Methodology Judgment and Reasoning.

The qualitative interpretive method was suitable in consideration of ethical reasoning as a socially and context-specific process. Semi-structured interviews allowed the administrators to explain moral dilemmas and justifications which are frequently missing in any formal policy discussion. What increased credibility and transferability is the inclusion of administrators with diverse institutional backgrounds. The drawbacks are that it relied on self-reported ethical thinking and did not analyze the institutional policy documents that could have given further ideas on the formal ethical arrangements. The three methods of solution to these limitations were probing, comparison by cross-context and reflexive analysis. Nevertheless, the constraints do not negate the fact that the methodology offers a solid framework upon comprehending ethical reasoning in the process of addressing digital monitoring technologies in Pakistani education.

Results

This segment highlights a report that was based on semi-structured interviews of educational administrators in Pakistan in both government-run and privately owned schools and colleges. The findings are aimed at ethical logical thinking by the administrators concerning the application of digital monitoring and management technologies. Results are grouped into major themes that were repeated throughout the participants as well as the institutional settings.

Digital Monitoring Ethical Arguments.

Administrators said they explained the use of digital monitoring technologies based on mostly institutional and efficiency stories of responsibility. Respondents mentioned the use of digital attendance systems, performance dashboards, and analytics platforms as the tools needed to encourage transparency, adherence to regulatory standards, and control in an organization. Ethical reasoning placed significant focus on responsiveness to those that govern and to the stakeholders involved in the process and transferred monitoring to becoming a professional in lieu of discretion.

The Privacy and Consent It is necessary to consider privacy and consent issues.

The subjects have indicated the different perspectives on privacy and consent in using the digital monitoring technology. Although the formal consent processes were reported by some of the administrators, the data access control was in other forms, whereas some administrators gave reports based on unwritten consent that was implicitly entrenched in the institutional policies. Administrators admitted to having knowledge of the privacy issues but indicated that they had little advice regarding the standards of data protection. Privacy considerations were also usually defined as being second to the need of institutional monitoring.

Surveillance and Trust in the Profession.

Administrators said that they understood that digital monitoring technologies disrupted the professional relationships in institutions. Respondents raised the issue that surveillance activities would threaten confidence among teachers and the employees. Nevertheless, a number of administrators have indicated that they approach monitoring as supportive or protective as opposed to punitive. The ethical thinking that was applicable concerned the effort of weighing surveillance practices and the attempt to preserve professional respect and morale.

Pressures of Accountability and Ethical Tensions.

The respondents mentioned that there has been some ethical tension balancing the requirements of accountability with personal or professional values. Administrators reported the outside pressure to deliver measurable data, which affected decision-making to increase the use of monitoring

practices. Monitoring was indicated to be an ethical dilemma when it contradicted other values of administrators concerning autonomy, fairness or proportionality. These tensions were typified on the institutional type.

Inequalities in Ethical Rigidity and Leadership Directives.

Administrators tore lack of access to official ethical codes or license frameworks of the digital monitoring technology. A respondent reported that they used personal judgment or the institutional precedent or informal norms in making ethical decisions. Lack of clear policy guidance was a factor in differences in ethical reasoning and practices of monitoring differences across institutions.

Limitations in the Data.

There are some limitations that should be taken into account based on the results. The data was based on self-reported ethical reasoning of administrators and that may not be the enforced practices. The lack of the analysis of institutional policy documents does not provide an opportunity to verify reported ethical frameworks. Also, the qualitative sample restricts the possibility of generalization out of similar situations. These restrictions are not interpreted and are discussed in further detail in the Discussion section.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

This paper discussed the process through which educational administrators, operating in Pakistan, are able to use their ethical reasoning to understand the ethical soundness of using digital monitoring and management technologies in the school and college setting. The results show that the reasons why administrators often use monitoring practices as based on accountability and efficiency narratives are at the same time voiced in terms of privacy, consent, and professional trust. The tension between institutional needs and personal or professional values, as well as operating on an informal discretion because of low policy guidance, have been described as the ethical reasoning.

Interpretation of Findings

The results indicate that ethical reasoning of digital monitoring is a situational and negotiated concept as opposed to a concept that relies on formal ethical theories. Administrators were torn between contradictory impulses of control and care, and tended to place more weight on the demands of accountability imposed by governments. The issue of privacy and consent had been recognized, often taking a back seat to the task of management. This trend is indicative of ethical pragmatism in which administrators manage the uncertain situation by justifying surveillance as a must, but seek ways to reduce its affective impact.

The research observations are consistent with the studies on the normalization of surveillance technologies via institutional accountability discourses (Ball, 2012; Williamson, 2017). The present ambivalence of administrators about ethics is indicative of the larger issues of consent, data jurisdiction, and power disparities as they are expressed in the learning analytics literature (Prinsloo and Slade, 2017; Slade and Prinsloo, 2013). The dependence on intuition is related to the ethical leadership research that focused on situational logic in the state of uncertainty (Begley, 2010; Starratt, 2004). This research expands Global South viewpoints about the educational surveillance and ethical governance by concentrating on Pakistan (Selwyn and Jandric, 2020).

Limitations of the Study

A number of weaknesses must be considered. The research was based on the self-reported ethical reasoning of administrators; therefore, it is possible that this does not correspond with the implemented monitoring practices. Failure to do institutional analysis of policy restricts the comprehension on formal arrangements of governance. Besides, the qualitative sample limits generalizability because the participants were a representative of various institutions. These restrictions indicate the family of the future research of including document analysis and multi-stakeholder ideas.

Implications of the theoretical and practical.

In theory, the research can contribute to the field of educational leadership and digital ethics by conceptualizing the process of ethical reasoning as a negotiation process that was influenced by surveillance technologies and accountability regimes. Practically, the results indicate that clear ethical standards, data management principles, and administrator education oriented on privacy, consent, and proportionality are needed. Building moral capacities at institutional level might help to eliminate ad hoc moral reasoning.

Alternative Explanations

Other reasons why the administrators might provide ethical justifications can be systemic policy pressure, the fear of institutional punishment, or a lack of technological knowledge as opposed to ethical non-indifference. Ethical reasoning can also be influenced by culture in the authority and compliance norms. All these indicate that the ethical decision-making is contextualized in the broader organizational and sociocultural contexts. Returning to the research question, which is: how do educational administrators in Pakistan ethically rationalize the application of digital monitoring and management technologies? the findings indicate that administrators perform ethical balancing, that is, constant accountability, surveillance and professional trust. Their argument is pragmatic negotiation, as opposed to following the formal ethical breeds, and it is important to note that the core of their argument should be seen as the central role of administrator agency in developing ethical governance practices.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the ethical interpretation of rationalization of application of digital monitoring and management technologies in schools and colleges by educational administrators in Pakistan in response to the increasing concerns about privacy and surveillance and responsibility in school administration. Restating the main point, the results show that moral judgment in the field is not based on the formalized paradigms only but is conditioned by the perceptions of the administrators concerning institutional responsibility, regulatory expectations, and professional values.

The researchers found that accountability and efficiency requirements often informed the justification of digital monitoring practices by administrators who, at the same time, registered their concerns about privacy-related issues, consent, and loss of professional trust. Such results add to the literature by emphasizing the idea that ethical reasoning is a negotiable and situational process and not a given moral position. Relevant through restoration of connection with introduction, the study highlights that the concept of digital governance in education is incomplete without the exploration of the ethical sense-making of individuals who serve to grant and control the application of monitoring technologies.

The general importance of this study is that they implicate the ethical governance and development of leadership in Pakistan. To promote appropriate utilization of digital monitoring technologies, it

is imperative to set the ethical rules, data protection policies, and professional training. To further explain the ethical implications of surveillance practices in the education sector, institutional policy analysis and the view of both teachers and students should be part of future research.

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