# Fostering Academic Integrity in the Digital Age: Empowering Student Voices to Navigate Technology as a Tool for Classroom Policies

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## Abstract

Digital technology has transformed classrooms, enabling new teaching methods. With widespread personal technology, students' devices can enhance learning but also cause distractions. This research amplifies secondary students' voices, exploring how they use technology and how it should be managed. The study addresses the question: What considerations are needed for school policies on personal, digital technologies? Conducted in an Ontario secondary school with Grade 11 students, data was collected through observations, conferences, focus groups, and journaling. Findings highlight that while technology is vital for learning, it can distract users and classmates. Students want clear directives on device use and training on managing distractions. This research underscores the role of teachers in promoting responsible technology use. By involving students in policy development and providing guidance, educators can empower them to use technology effectively while maintaining academic integrity in the digital era that now includes artificial intelligence.

*Keywords*: digital technology, school policy, student perspectives, secondary school, Ontario

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Technology permeates classrooms, influencing both the way teachers teach and the way students engage, learn, and achieve. Technology has changed the way we think and learn (Gareau & Guo, 2009) as well as the way we teach (Ghory & Ghafory, 2021). The widespread ownership of mobile technology among students has given rise to schools using a "bring your own device" (BYOD) approach (Raghunath et al., 2016).

Technology can be the catalyst for deeper literacy learning (Cummins et al., 2007), and because schools are "places to learn," allowing students to bring their own technology can improve student learning and achievement (Tapscott, 2009, p. 134). However, digital distractions (Hanin, 2021) or cyber-slacking (Koay & Poon, 2022) divert students' attention from learning, raising concerns among educators (Flanigan & Babchuk, 2022), parents (Keane & Keane, 2018), and students themselves (McCoy, 2020). Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational technology introduces new dynamics and challenges, particularly concerning academic integrity (Yeo, 2023).

When we go online, we enter an environment that promotes hurried reading and distracted thinking (Carr, 2010). This has led many educators to advocate for restrictive policies and to implement varied policies. Katz and Lambert (2016) offered bonus points to students who voluntarily put their cellphones in a box at the front of the classroom. Roberts (2016) penalized cellphone use by deducting grade points. Laptops have been banned in classes at Harvard Law School, Yale, George Washington University, University of Virginia, and South Texas College of Law because professors began to get irritated with students hiding behind their laptop screens and multitasking (Yamamoto, 2007).

It is not only postsecondary educators who are faced with the need to develop a policy to combat distracted learning. Secondary and elementary schools face the same obstacle. Manhattan Beach Middle School in California banned cellphone use during the school day; students can continue to use other devices, like laptops, while in class, but cellphones are not allowed (Gillmore, 2019). The Ontario government in Canada announced an educational policy restricting the use of cellphones and mobile devices while in school (Robertson et al., 2020). However, the ban "could be dismissed as a largely symbolic or arbitrary move on the part of politicians and policymakers" (Selwyn & Aagaard, 2021, p. 9). It is seen as symbolic because most school administrators and teachers' unions will not allow teachers to take students' cellphones away. In addition, despite the ban, parents continue to allow their children to take their cellphones to school and often contact their children via text during the school day. Finally, Canadian courts have yet to implement a legal precedent related to cellphones in school. Therefore, school boards are reluctant to create strict policies and consequences for cellphone use, as they may be seen as an overreach of authority.

Parents and children agree that banning personal technology in the classroom is extreme, yet these two groups aren't blind to the distraction technology can create in the classroom (Mullen,

2006). Many parents prefer that schools have a policy with regards to cellphones and other personal technology (Obringer & Coffey, 2007). A complete ban isn't justified, but a balanced approach to creating a "fair policy that respects the students' desire to possess and use a cellular phone and respects the principal's duties to oversee the school" is advocated for (Kiedrowski et al., 2009, p. 47). In addition, "we still face a situation where cohorts of students are having educationally potent and personally significant devices taken away while in their classrooms and schools" (Selwyn & Aagaard, 2021, p. 9). Researchers have explored classroom policies to minimize distractions, but these policies yield limited success. Educators cite that policing cellphones fractures the relationship with their students (Rhoades, 2021). Educators face student resistance when they ask students to put their phones away or to leave them on the teacher's desk. This can result in an argument, and teachers want to maintain a positive relationship with their students (Karlins, 2022).

Instead, policies that consider students' perspectives are being advocated (Wearmouth & Goodwyn, 2019). Allowing students' voices to be heard may lead them to comply with the policies they've helped to develop (Tindell & Bohlander, 2012). "Increasingly, there are calls for including children's perspectives as relevant and insightful in learning more about aspects of their worlds" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 106). In fact, students are the ones most affected by educational policy and practices, and yet their perspectives are often absent from inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

As AI becomes more prevalent in educational tools, concerns about academic integrity grow. AI-powered tools can assist with learning but also make it easier for students to engage in dishonest practices, such as using AI to complete assignments. McDonald et al. (2024) posit that until clear and comprehensive policies are created to guide the integration of AI in education, educators and students will face challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate discussions of academic integrity and AI integration into the development of technology policies in schools. This research aims to explore students' perceptions of classroom technology so that their perspectives can be included in developing and implementing effective policies. These policies should foster a positive learning environment by maximizing the benefits of personal devices, mitigating their negative effects, and ensuring the integrity of academic work. By embracing a constructivist approach, educators can empower students as active participants in shaping educational policies, thereby enhancing both the educational experience and ethical standards within schools.

## Background Literature

Technology can significantly enrich the classroom environment. Carstens et al. (2021) suggest that technology engages today's learners by facilitating communication with their peers (Tai & Chen, 2023) and their teachers (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017). However, research supports the

idea that technology enhances students' learning most effectively when complemented by face-to-face interactions with teachers (Saunders & Gale, 2011) and peers (Kee, 2020). These insights informed the decision to conduct this research in a physical classroom rather than an online setting. Ensuring consistent and ongoing face-to-face contact with peers and teachers allowed the study to assess whether personal, digital technologies serve as useful tools for engagement and learning, thereby informing school policy considerations.

With technology at their fingertips, students can watch videos related to classroom learning to deepen their understanding (Zou & Xie, 2019) and use web-based tools to complete tasks and achieve learning outcomes (Carvalho & Goodyear, 2018). Additionally, technology supports students with disabilities (Ahmed, 2018) and English language learners (Khalil, 2018).

Allowing students to use their own devices can increase productivity due to their familiarity with the hardware (Nuhoğlu et al., 2019). It can also make students feel more comfortable (Carstens et al., 2021).

Despite the benefits, the use of technology in the classroom is not without controversy. Some believe technology hinders learning by causing constant interruptions that "chip away [students'] capacity for concentration and contemplation" (Carr, 2008, p. 90). It can disrupt the classroom (Anshari et al., 2017), lead to partial attention (Wang, 2022), and affect the learning of others (Tindell & Bohlander, 2012). Nikolopoulou (2020) found that personal technology usage often results in social networking, web surfing, and taking photos, raising privacy concerns.

Moreover, the integration of AI in educational technology introduces new complexities, including concerns about academic integrity (Kumar et al., 2024). AI-powered tools can assist with learning but also make it easier for students to engage in dishonest practices, such as using AI to complete assignments. Therefore, technology policies must address these challenges while fostering a positive learning environment (Santos et al., 2021). Barrett (2023) emphasizes understanding students' perspectives on technology use to establish evidence-based guidelines for its integration. The research site allowed students to have their digital devices at all times, enabling the researcher to observe if they interrupted or distracted students or led to any bullying incidents.

## Theoretical Framework

Constructivists view learners as active rather than passive, whereby knowledge is not simply gained from the outside world or from a teacher; rather, the individual learner interprets and processes what is received through the senses to create meaningful knowledge.

Exploring students' perceptions of personal technology in the classroom through this lens offers the opportunity to increase our understanding of what needs to be considered when creating school policies surrounding cellphone and personal technology use. In true constructivist fashion, it is critical to ask students what they believe about the use of digital technology in the classroom and explore how they believe its use should be managed. By listening to the voices of secondary students, the learners become active participants in educating the educators so that schools can work to develop a policy that fosters learning and autonomy.

Additionally, integrating discussions of academic integrity into this exploration is essential. As students increasingly rely on digital tools for learning, ensuring academic integrity becomes paramount. The introduction of AI further complicates this landscape, as AI-powered tools can both enhance learning (Volante et al., 2023) and present challenges to academic honesty (Rodrigues et al., 2024). "People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 12). By recognizing the inherent value and responsibility of each student, educators can engage them in conversations about how technology impacts their learning and academic integrity. This understanding allows for the development of policies that support both learning outcomes and ethical behaviour.

In summary, adopting a constructivist approach to understanding students' perceptions of personal technology in the classroom allows educators to empower students to be active participants in shaping educational policies. Integrating discussions of academic integrity and AI into this exploration provides a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by technology in education.

## Methodology

Ethnography was selected as it provided a framework to explore secondary students' perceptions and opinions regarding technology in the classroom. It's an opportunity to understand the thinkings, sayings, and doings of participants in a particular situation (Van Maanen, 1988). Ethnographies provide the landscapes and the details of worlds. They aim to discover, understand, and describe human behaviour holistically, as it occurs naturally within social and cultural contexts. In doing so, ethnographers can look for patterns and themes that ethnographic consumers can take away and use to enhance their own understandings. Ethnography, as a qualitative approach, was best suited for this study, as the research sought to gain a more in-depth understanding of students' perspectives on the benefits and obstacles of technology use in the classroom.

Moreover, the integration of discussions of academic integrity and AI enriches ethnographic exploration. Understanding how students navigate the ethical considerations of using technology and the implications of AI-powered tools adds depth to the analysis. Ethnography

allows researchers to delve into the nuanced ways in which students perceive and engage with technology while considering integrity concerns. By immersing themselves in the natural contexts of students' experiences, ethnographers can uncover insights into how academic integrity intersects with technological usage in educational settings.

Ethnography can also be empowering (Green, 2003; Jones & Watt, 2010), as participants become increasingly confident in sharing their perspectives and willing to self-advocate and seek information that they may or may not need (Green, 2003; Jones & Watt, 2010). This aligned with the focus of this research, which was to use student perspectives to guide policy.

Finally, ethnography allows participants to be collaborators and co-researchers. They are not mere spectators in the research process but are part of the research itself, thus avoiding the superordinate-subordinate relationship between teacher and students. Rather than demanding, interpreting, judging, and answering (Hammersley, 1990), the participants became co-interpreters, co-judges, and co-researchers. This allowed the research data to authentically represent the voice of the participants.

This study received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) and from the school board's External Research Review Committee. All participants agreed to participate in the research, and because the participants were under the age of majority, their parents also consented to the student participating in the research.

## *Context and Participants*

This research attempted to explore how the use of digital technology in the secondary classroom engages secondary students. This inquiry sought to explore what secondary students had to think, say, and do about technology in a classroom setting and how they viewed its connection to student engagement.

### *The School*

The school where the research took place is a Grade 9–12 secondary school located in southern Ontario. It was a new school that aimed to be paperless, encouraging teachers and students to embrace technology. The primary purpose of ethnography is to pursue an opportunity to learn within the culture and world of the participants. This site was seen as a place where the researcher could truly get a sense of how students engage with technology. The school provided a space that could tell more than the researcher knew to ask (McGranahan, 2022).

### *The Participants*

The classroom included students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and students who were English Language Learners (ELLs). To respect and value all the students in the classroom,

they were each offered the opportunity to participate in the research. This ethnography took place in a class composed of 28 secondary English students in a secondary school in a middle- to upper-class neighbourhood in southern Ontario. The students were enrolled in a Grade 11 university-level English class coded in the Ontario curriculum as ENG3U. Students were expected to meet the expectations of the Ontario curriculum for the course by critically examining the influence of power. Learning objectives included writing in different forms, analyzing and creating media, and engaging in active reading by critically examining the content. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 17 years old. They met for one period each day, from Monday to Friday. The class period was 75 minutes long and students had a total of 110 hours of instructional learning time. Fifteen students (n = 15) consented to participate; 10 of the 15 identified as female (n = 10), and five as male (n = 5). Fourteen students were in Grade 11 and one student was in Grade 10 but enrolled in a Grade 11 English class.

The participants participated in their secondary English class just as the students who weren't part of the study did. Student participants completed assignments and submitted them for evaluation. They engaged in group work, class discussions, conferences, interviews, and activities, all of which could potentially contribute to their final grade. The course experience of the student participants did not differ in any way from that of those students who didn't participate in the study. The classroom teacher decided when students could use technology and when it needed to be put away. She chose when to interrupt students' cellphone use and she chose the appropriate consequences for when a student was not following instructions. As a participant observer, over the course of 5 months, a record of behaviours displayed by each student while they were using technology was maintained in a reflective journal with field notes. Participants completed questionnaires and engaged in conferences with the researcher, and focus group conversations. As such, this was a mixed-methods research study whereby quantitative data was used as a gateway to initiate conversations during conferences and focus group conversations with student participants. How and when the data sources were collected and analyzed is summarized in Table 1. This configuration of data sources allowed the researcher to explore "ethnographic hunch[es]" to create a way of knowing that emerged with the research participants and the researcher (Pink, 2021).

### *The Digital Setting*

The chosen research site featured classrooms where students watched educational videos and used web-based applications for evaluations. The classroom was equipped with a screen and a projector that could be connected to the teacher's laptop. The classroom teacher had a laptop and used a slideshow to accompany her daily lessons and activities. This slideshow was posted to a class website so students could access it if they needed to or wanted to. The classroom had an Internet modem in the room, allowing the students to easily connect to the Wi-Fi with their

personal digital devices. Every student in the class had a cellphone that had internet capabilities and many of the students had their own personal computer. At the research site, students had access to a class set of Chromebooks while also being allowed to use their personal devices if they preferred. Students with their own digital technology were controlled when they used it, with the teacher using her own professional judgment to encourage a student to redirect if their personal digital technology was distracting them from classroom learning. At times, students would use their personal digital technology to follow along on the slideshow the teacher was projecting on the whiteboard, while at other times, students would use it to take notes, work on tasks for another class, watch videos, or visit social media sites. When the classroom teacher deemed that digital technology was essential as part of classroom learning or activities, she wheeled in a class set of Chromebooks that students who didn't have a personal computer could access.

**Table 1**

*Design Summary*

| Phase | Data source | Methodological tools | Data analysis method |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Students | Participant observation; field notes; questionnaire; audiotaped conferences | Cutting and sorting method |
| 2 | Students | Participant observation; field notes | Cutting and sorting method; grouping word repetitions |
| 3 | Students | Exit questionnaire; audiotaped focus-group discussion | Cutting and sorting method |

### *Data Analysis*

There is no quick formula that can be used to analyze data from an ethnography. Marshall and Rossman (2006) define qualitative data analysis as:

> the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. (p. 111)

This method of analysis allowed the researcher to "recognize and substantiate new meaning" (Stake, 2005, p. 97) to the data obtained.

The data were analyzed in a similar way for patterns and commonalities so that common and divergent themes could be identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Initial analysis looked for similarities and differences in content and patterns of keywords-in-context (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Morgan, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) using both the cut-and-sort method and the word-repetition method identified by Ryan and Bernard (2003). A second cycle of coding arrived at emergent themes—patterns that emerged through participant responses. This was done "in order to begin drawing deeper meaning from participant responses regarding their perception of technology integration and its impact on student engagement" (McDowell, 2013, p. 56).

Ethnography is, at its core, a storytelling framework (Van Maanen, 2011) that values collaboration and dialogue with participants, openness, reflexivity, and respect in a way that allows for their perspectives to be presented accurately and fairly. Student insights—revealed using their words and transcribed conversations—were only woven together once the ethnography had been experienced and read firsthand (Van Maanen, 1995). The participants took an active role in the research. During the data collection stage and through an ongoing dialogue, they co-interpreted and co-authored to create the final multi-voiced product (Lassiter, 2005), which is this research. Snippets of conversations and field notes created a montage of the perspectives of participants, and this montage intersected with the researcher's own interpretations to create a story and answer the research question (Denzin, 1997). This led to a systematic effort to turn fieldwork art into imaginative and creative work (Wolcott, 1997).

## Results

The data analysis revealed two overarching themes: (a) the use of devices as an essential learning tool, and (b) devices as a distraction that can be managed with explicit intervention. This section presents the results by weaving in participants' words and the researcher's field notes to create a narrative that illustrates how technology intersects with the fundamental values of the International Center for Academic Integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage (ICAI, 2021). By exploring these themes, we can better understand the multifaceted role of technology in education and its impact on fostering a scholarly community rooted in academic integrity. Integrating AI into this analysis underscores the dual role of technology as both a powerful aid in personalized learning and a potential source of ethical challenges.

### *Devices as a Learning Tool*

All participants had regular and consistent access to personal devices. On numerous occasions, students used their personal technological devices to assist them in meeting classroom expectations. For example, six of the participants used their phones to take pictures of

resources posted around the classroom so that they could be referred to at another time. One participant consistently listened to the class discussion thoughtfully and observed the teacher make notes of the key ideas on the whiteboard. The participant then took a picture of the whiteboard. She explained that this strategy allowed her to "just listen" and not worry about trying to "write it [all] down." This approach highlights the role of personal devices in alleviating the cognitive load during classroom activities.

When given the opportunity to use technology to produce a final product to be submitted for evaluation, all 15 participants believed that technology helped them produce a better final product than they would have without it. Eight strongly agreed, with another six simply agreeing. One student was neutral; she explained that while technology benefited her work, she could still find alternative ways to ensure the quality of her work without it. This attitude reflects a sense of responsibility and honesty in assessing the impact of technology on her work. The primary reasons participants felt technology enhanced their final products were due to built-in tools such as Google's speech-to-text, text-to-speech, spell and grammar check, and predictive text suggestions. These AI-powered features provided significant support by facilitating the editing process and helping students meet their personal learning goals more effectively.

This study also highlighted the significance of AI-powered learning tools in supporting diverse learner needs, particularly ELLs. Two of the participants described using translation apps and online resources to facilitate the understanding of complex texts. On a day when students were asked to trade their writing with a partner and offer assessment feedback, one participant who was an ELL used her phone to translate the entire piece into Korean first and then she was able to provide assessment feedback to her classmate. A second participant who was an ELL used her cellphone while the class was reading Shakespeare. She had downloaded the Chinese version of the play so that she could understand what the class was reading out loud and make sense of the class discussions. She said, "It makes so much sense when I… read it on my phone." This reveals that AI provides students with improved learning experiences because of AI's ability to customize and personalize learning materials to the needs and capabilities of students (Chen et al., 2020). These participants' voices demonstrate the potential of AI to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in education, which aligns with the ICAI's (2021) values of fairness and respect. Fairness (defined as "engaging with others equitably") and respect (defined as "affirming others and accepting differences") are embodied in the ways AI supports diverse learner needs and promotes an inclusive learning environment (ICAI, 2021, pp. 7–8).

Over the course of the research, all 15 participants were seen to be engaging in deeper learning as a result of having access to their personal technology. On one day, students were asked to read an excerpt of an essay and then answer questions. After reading the essay excerpt, a participant was fixated on his phone. I inferred he was off task and noted it in my field notes;

however, when I walked over to redirect him, he explained that he was reading the original essay online because he "needed more" information after reading the excerpt the teacher provided. While reading Shakespeare, every single participant was seen accessing a dictionary or the glossary in the online text to look up what particular words meant. This demonstrates the students' commitment to fairness in the desire to "keep an open-mind" and "be objective" to ensure they fully understand the material (ICAI, 2021, p. 7).

All the participants acknowledged that technology played a crucial role in enhancing their learning. One participant said that if he does not "know something, [he] can look up something quickly on [his] phone." This reflects a constructive approach to learning and a commitment to academic excellence. Another participant felt that "having access to the internet connect[s] [her] with knowledge," while a different participant added that it allows him "to do research and whatnot." A different participant elaborated by explaining that "sometimes when you're doing an analytical question or something like that and you want to look up the close-up or themes of some things that you want a clearer view of… [you] can search it up," and that can help you "think more clearly." Another participant echoed this thing by saying, "It's a great way to access information to further your knowledge" and to "come up with different types of ideas." A male participant explained that he likes having access to the Internet for research because he "can find a lot of different perspectives on the [topic], because there's so many different [web]sites," and by reading other perspectives, he can "use it to come up with [his] own perspective." All of these thoughts support the notion that personal technology helps to build knowledge and is a tool to access information (Jonassen & Reeves, 1996). Further, these perspectives demonstrate a commitment to academic integrity by revealing that students use their technology to access more information to ensure thoroughness and rigour in original thinking, embodying the value of honesty through students' desire to seek objectivity and consider all sides (ICAI, 2021).

Beyond using technology to make meaning out of written text, technology supported students during the editing process. All 15 participants used technology to type their work for evaluation. They preferred using Google Docs over pen and paper because it allowed them to edit paragraphs by "moving entire paragraph[s] to another spot in [their] paper." They could use the online thesaurus to find a "better word" to use in their writing or they could easily share their work with a peer within the class or beyond the class to read it and provide comments. This collaborative approach supports ICAI's (2021) value of trust within the learning community.

Thirteen of the participants agreed that technology helped them learn better. Two participants offered a neutral stance. The neutral stance was further explored: both students felt that access to technology does not help them learn better but it helps them learn differently. They felt that, whether the technology was used or not, they would have learned the same.

When asked specifically about classroom policies and school policies about cellphone and other personal device use, all 15 participants indicated that they appreciated being able to bring their own devices to school. They noted the convenience of having their cellphone to "quickly look up something" or the ease of being able to use their own computer "because [they] just know where everything is," making the familiarity of the device more user-friendly. All 15 participants said that the "internet is really good" in the school, making it easy to "use our devices all over the school." This supports a learning environment built on trust and respect for student autonomy.

### *Managing Disruptions*

In exploring the impact of personal technology on secondary students, participants acknowledged the potential for technology to serve as both a valuable tool and a source of distraction. While all participants had experienced distractions caused by their devices, varying perspectives emerged regarding the extent of this distraction. Some participants expressed frustration with the pervasive nature of digital distractions, describing how notifications and pop-up messages can lead to a cascade of distractions. One participant called the distractions "annoying" because she cannot ignore the box that pops up on her phone. "A little message will pop up and then [the student] will click it and then that just branches off into the next thing and the next thing and the next thing." This can result in "so many different windows opening" and then the feeling of being overwhelmed. This phenomenon highlights the allure of technology and its potential to disrupt focus and productivity, aligning with previous research on the impact of digital distractions on student performance (Aagaard, 2015). Recognizing and addressing these distractions shows responsibility in the desire to model good behaviour and honesty in being truthful with the struggles of managing their own learning environment, which are ICAI (2021) values for academic integrity.

While all the participants had been distracted by their technology, they also articulated strategies for managing digital distractions and regaining focus during learning activities. When it came to cellphones, one student put "it in [her] backpack." Another student will sometimes hear her phone keep "buzzing because [she's] got a lot of notifications," but "because it's too disturbing," she will turn it off and put it in her bag. Another student even said that when she is trying to focus, she "make[s] sure it's put away and on silence so that it will not be bothersome to [her]." These strategies continue to reveal ICAI's (2021) value of responsibility, defined as "taking responsibility for your own actions" (p. 7) but they also reveal courage, defined as being "brave even when others are not" in managing one's own learning process (p. 10).

Four of the participants welcomed gentle redirections by the teacher. One participant said that when a "teacher notices you're off task, it's embarrassing," and another participant noted that he often doesn't "even realize [he's] been on his phone for so long." This was echoed in the

field notes. The researcher noticed that students would often be motivated and driven to start a task, but when they had access to personal devices, students would often check their social media accounts, take selfies, browse the internet, watch movies, or play video games. Students often had good intentions when working on a task, but then they would veer off task. This start-and-stop process of working on a task often led some students to not finish the task they were expected to complete while in class. In this sense, the technology was "a gateway" to activities that lead to distraction (Foehr, 2006, p. 15). Another participant said that when a teacher re-focused them, "it shows the teacher notices me," and another participant added that it shows that the teacher is "paying attention." One student explained that for "the kids who want to do well," this would work, "but for the kids who don't really care," they are just going to be distracted regardless. This underscores the importance of establishing clear classroom policies regarding device use and providing supportive interventions to address distractions effectively. The value of fairness, defined as "taking responsibility for your own actions," is reflected in ensuring all students have the opportunity to learn without undue distraction (ICAI, 2021, p. 7).

Furthermore, the researcher's field notes shed light on the nuanced relationship between technology use and academic engagement. For some students, cellphones served as visible indicators of academic struggles or disengagement, prompting further investigation into the underlying factors contributing to distraction. Interestingly, collaborative learning environments appeared to mitigate distractions, suggesting the potential for peer interaction to enhance academic focus and participation.

In considering classroom policies regarding device use, participants advocated for a balanced approach that prioritizes academic integrity and student autonomy. While rejecting the notion of a complete cellphone ban, participants emphasized the importance of teacher discretion in managing device-related distractions. Additionally, participants recognized the need for consequences for persistent distraction, highlighting the role of educators in maintaining a conducive learning environment.

This dichotomy between the benefits and challenges of personal technology use resonates with previous research findings, which have highlighted the paradoxical nature of technology in education (Lavoie & Pychyl, 2001). While technology offers valuable tools for learning and information access, it also presents challenges in managing distractions and maintaining academic integrity. AI, in particular, introduces complexities related to the authenticity of student work, necessitating policies that address both its advantages and potential for misuse.

## Discussion

This research was driven by an understanding of how secondary students use technology, including AI, in the classroom. Responses from all 15 participants indicate that technology,

particularly AI-powered tools, is a powerful learning aid but also an alluring distraction. When students have access to technology, it inspires them to pursue new information and resources, prompts thorough editing, and supports ELLs in meeting classroom expectations. For instance, AI tools facilitate personalized learning experiences, helping ELL students understand complex material and aiding in language translation and grammar correction.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the dual nature of technology, including AI. While it aids in learning, students may also engage in off-task activities such as browsing the internet, checking social media, or playing games, leading to disruptions. Moreover, AI can inadvertently enable unethical practices, like cheating. Fyfe (2022) highlights that advanced language models can be misused by students to write papers and complete assignments, complicating the maintenance of academic integrity.

As technology and AI continue to permeate educational settings, addressing the challenges of managing distractions and promoting academic integrity in digital environments is crucial. Rose (2010) aptly observes that "constant connectivity has undeniable advantages," yet it also results in "continual distraction" (p. 10). Therefore, developing strategies that leverage AI to minimize distractions and support students in maintaining focus is essential. This involves integrating AI tools that help learners control and redirect their attention while harnessing the benefits of technology for educational purposes, aligning with ICAI's values of responsibility and courage.

Moreover, educators must provide opportunities for students to engage in reflective practices and intentional learning processes. AI can play a significant role here by offering tools for self-assessment and metacognitive activities. As Maxwell (2002) emphasizes, students need moments to pause, reflect, and think critically about problems before taking intentional steps forward. AI-powered tools can facilitate this process by prompting students to review and reflect on their work, fostering strategic learning.

When navigating the complex landscape of digital learning, educators have a responsibility to teach students how to use the internet and AI effectively and responsibly. The importance of the teacher's role increases in a technological classroom (Ozgur, 2020). This includes explicit instruction on information literacy, critical thinking, and digital citizenship. As Weinstein (1994) suggests, students need support to become strategic learners who can access and process information to construct knowledge effectively. AI tools can assist in this by providing real-time feedback and adaptive learning paths, empowering students with the necessary skills and competencies to navigate digital environments ethically and responsibly, and promoting fairness and trust.

As AI becomes more integrated into educational tools, it adds another layer of complexity to these challenges. This study underscores the significance of AI-powered learning tools in

supporting learners' needs, particularly ELL students, and highlights how these tools can assist with learning. Every instance of a participant using AI demonstrated collaboration between the student and the AI to generate original ideas. The AI served as a tool to support knowledge construction, highlighting its responsible use.

However, comprehensive instruction and robust policy frameworks for K–12 are necessary to address the potential misuse of AI. Recognizing academic integrity literacy as a critical skill for academic success, it is crucial to incorporate discussions of academic integrity and AI integration into technology policies in schools (Hossain, 2022).

Furthermore, school policies and practices should include explicit guidelines on the responsible use of personal technology, including AI. This involves negotiating procedures, policies, and consequences for unacceptable use of technology in educational settings. By engaging students in these discussions and involving them in decision-making processes, educators can foster a culture of responsible technology use and academic integrity. This collaborative approach reflects the values of respect and encourages students to take ownership of their learning environment.

### Limitations and Future Research

In examining the limitations and potential for future research, it's crucial to acknowledge the complex interplay between technology, academic integrity, and AI within educational contexts. In addressing the challenges posed by technology in education, it's essential to adopt a collaborative approach that involves educators, students, and stakeholders. Tanjga's (2023) suggestion includes a collaborative approach among teachers, students, administrators, and developers to develop serviceable suggestions to address the evolving challenge. As Prensky (2001) asserts, rather than deciding for students, educators must decide with them, fostering a sense of agency and ownership in digital learning environments. This partnership underscores the importance of trust and responsibility, ensuring that all members of the educational community are committed to upholding academic integrity.

This research provides valuable insights into students' experiences with technology in the classroom. However, its scope is limited to a specific group of students in one school, raising questions about the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings. Expanding this research to encompass diverse student populations in various schools would enrich our understanding of how technology engages students across different contexts. Furthermore, exploring the perspectives of educators, parents, and students from various backgrounds could inform the development of inclusive policies that meet the needs of all stakeholders.

The school where this research was conducted embraced technology as an integral part of teaching and learning. However, future studies could explore how technology usage varies in

schools with different technological infrastructures. Investigating schools with limited access to technology or those that rely heavily on online learning platforms would provide valuable insights into the impact of technology on student engagement and academic performance. Additionally, examining the role of technology in self-directed learning environments could shed light on its potential benefits and challenges in promoting student autonomy and academic success.

Looking forward, future inquiries could explore innovative approaches to mitigating technological distractions and promoting academic integrity. One promising avenue is the integration of AI-driven tools for plagiarism detection and academic monitoring. By leveraging AI algorithms, educators can identify instances of academic misconduct more effectively, thereby fostering a culture of academic honesty and integrity. Moreover, AI-powered adaptive learning platforms can personalize educational experiences while ensuring that students engage with authentic and original content.

Furthermore, involving students in the policy-development process could be a transformative approach to addressing technological distractions in the classroom. By empowering students to co-create policies that regulate technology use, educators can promote a sense of ownership and responsibility among students, ultimately reducing disruptions and fostering a conducive learning environment. Additionally, integrating ethics and digital citizenship education into the curriculum can equip students with the critical thinking skills and ethical awareness needed to navigate digital environments responsibly.

Ultimately, by embracing technology as a tool for learning and innovation while upholding principles of academic integrity, educators can prepare students to thrive in a digital world while preserving the integrity of scholarly pursuits. As technology continues to evolve, ongoing research and collaboration among educators, researchers, and policymakers are essential to harnessing its full potential for enhancing education while safeguarding academic integrity.

## Conclusion

This research explores the intricate dynamics of technology use and students' perceptions through an ethnographic study in a secondary English classroom in Ontario, Canada. The findings reveal that while students recognize the powerful learning potential of personal technologies, including AI-powered tools, they also acknowledge the distractions these technologies can cause. However, students express a preference for learning skills to manage these distractions over the implementation of restrictive policies (Farooq et al., 2019). This perspective aligns with the constructivist view that students are active participants in their learning environment, constructing knowledge through interactions and experiences.

Involving students in the dialogue about technology use policies in educational settings is essential. Research indicates that incorporating student perspectives into policy-making can

lead to more effective and inclusive outcomes (McCulloch, 2009). By engaging students as stakeholders, educators and policymakers can gain valuable insights into how technology, particularly AI, both enhances and hinders learning experiences in the classroom.

With advancements in AI shaping the educational landscape, academic integrity has become a critical concern. AI-powered tools offer opportunities for personalized learning, aiding in tasks like language translation, grammar correction, and personalized feedback. However, they also raise issues regarding the authenticity of student work. Crafting policies that govern technology use must address these concerns, integrating discussions on academic integrity within the constructivist framework to help students navigate the complexities of digital tools ethically.

In light of recent directives from the Ontario Ministry of Education (2024), including restrictions on cellphone use during class time and the removal of social media websites from school networks, there is a heightened need to involve students in policy discussions. These measures aim to minimize distractions and enhance focus, but it is crucial to consider students' perspectives.

Students often advocate for a balanced approach that acknowledges technology's dual role as both a learning tool and a potential distraction. They understand the need for policies to maintain focus but express concern over overly restrictive measures that could hinder the educational benefits of technology, including AI. Respecting and incorporating students' input in shaping their learning environment is vital.

In this context, involving students in discussions about the ethical use of AI technologies can foster a deeper understanding of academic integrity. Educating students on the ethical implications of using AI tools can empower them to navigate digital environments responsibly. Additionally, integrating AI-driven plagiarism detection systems into educational platforms can uphold academic integrity by effectively detecting and deterring misconduct.

As educational institutions consider policies like cellphone bans and technology regulations, including the recent Ontario Ministry directives, it is clear that student voices must be central to the conversation. Recognizing students as active participants in shaping classroom practices ensures that technology, including AI, is used as a transformative educational tool while maintaining academic integrity and ethical conduct. This participatory approach aligns with constructivist ideals and enhances the relevance and effectiveness of educational policies.

In conclusion, fostering a collaborative and inclusive approach to technology policy development, informed by student insights and considerations of academic integrity in the age of AI, is crucial for advancing educational practices. As one participant aptly noted, "Just ask us, and we'll tell you what works and what doesn't… but you have to be willing to listen." This sentiment underscores the constructivist philosophy, emphasizing the importance of listening to and learning from students.

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