

News media: a place where utopian and dystopian visions collide. Mapping dominant media discourses about the use of AI in education

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Abstract. In the recent years, many educational institutions around the world, from early years to higher education alike, have become accustomed to making use of AI-based educational technologies in a variety of ways—for predicting outcomes and preventing risks, for providing insights into the processes of learning, or for personalizing the education system around every student’s personal needs. While some have greeted such uptake of AI-supported applications within the education sector with enthusiastic techno-optimism stressing the revolutionary powers of technology; others have been concerned about the potential harms such applications might have on students’ and teachers’ agency, privacy, and rights.

In my talk I will highlight some of the findings from three empirical case studies aimed at mapping dominant media discourses about the growing uptake of AI-supported applications in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Critical discursive psychology approach was applied for studying international news media articles that covered the use of 1) online proctoring software by higher education institutions to combat academic dishonesty; 2) student online activity monitoring software by secondary schools to ease the concerns related to students’ wellbeing; and 3) algorithm-issued grades for the A-level exams in the UK.

The findings of these cases studies refer to a variety of problems and concerns the uptake of AI-based technologies has created to the learners belonging to more vulnerable groups. Furthermore, our analysis of news media articles eloquently illustrates that no innovative technologies or tools – AI-based or otherwise – cannot yet be trusted to “reimagine the education”.