Chapter XXI
Ethical Practices and Implications in Distance Education:
Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT

The changing dimensions of distance education methodologies, new roles of distance teachers, and learners and use of modern communication technologies have necessitated putting ethics on the top of agenda of educational administrators, thinkers and practitioners. This chapter highlights major outcomes emerged from the research, theory, practice and discussion on different themes of distance education by various authors in their respective chapters. This chapter also highlights various themes entangled in this book.

INTRODUCTION

The Open and Distance Learning System (ODLS) has emerged as an alternate benefiting a number of aspirants of education, specifically higher education. The numbers in ODL has also increased many fold over a short span of 2 decades. The emergence and developments in ODL methodologies have brought certain theoretical and pragmatic approaches to the field. As with any other new phenomenon, this mode of education has brought a new set of emotional, physical and

psychological issues. The teaching and learning through this new medium exposed the learning community to such experiences where the teacher and students normally do not see face to face with each other. The virtual classroom faces issues, including humanizing, roles, norms, ethics, privacy and socio-psychological.

The ethical issues become significant, and we keep reading about misuse of Internet and e-mail. Electronic voyeurism is also common in online communication. Plagiarism is one of the most common misuses of the Internet facilities among students. Copying assignments from others' work or taking material from the Web is seen as the easy way out for the students. Privacy of the messages is very difficult in online communications. The most striking feature besides traditional education of the open distance education and especially online distance education is to open its doors of global education to the student at his desktop. What is critical to the success of this mode of education is to have ethics in place; it is a different field which is based on mutual trust and respect. This trust, respect and honesty may be in the form of providing conviction to the learner by the teacher or vice-versa, or an honest feedback to the researcher by the respondents for the right conclusions of research questions. These ethical concerns, which are carried on from the traditional education to the distance education, thus form a very significant base for the future of online education.

Even though ethics is a relative term, it absolutely depends on each and every individual who comprises the group initially, and later the society at large. Moral science classes, which we have undergone in school, reminds of what ethics is even now. In an era where achievement and progress are in the priority list by any means, reaching the top/goal with the optimum ethics is like leaving footsteps to follow.

This book, Ethical Practices and Implications in Distance Education, has covered topics such as student support services, international distance education partnerships, organizational culture of the partners and leadership patterns in the partner institutions in the distance education field, the rise in academic cheating, multiculturalism as the causative factor, unethical computer using behaviors, academic dishonesty and theft, research ethics, interactions involved in teaching and learning at a distance, students' individual integrity and rights, ethical concerns of ODL practitioners and so forth.

MAJOR OUTCOMES

The objective of the proposed book was to provide a bunch of case studies on implementation of the ethics aspect in different contexts of open and distance learning viz. nonformal education, school education, college and universities, industry and corporate world, social development, vocational education, the health sector, the agricultural sector and lifelong learning and further education. The purpose of this book was to showcase the ethical practices for all those involved in the producing materials, copying, licensing and implementation of ethical perspectives in ODLS.

- One of the most significant developments to the education and training sectors has been the growth of online programs, virtual institutions, corporate universities, and for-profit providers of instructional software. Whatever the impact of instructional technology has on the education and training sector, the supreme position of the teacher cannot be put to question. Therefore, the acts and behaviour of teachers must be guided by ethical and moral values. If adequate safeguards are not put in place, increasing use of technology in the distance education, especially, may cultivate unethical behaviour.

- Prevalence of strong emphasis on ethical dilemmas both at in the philosophical and

the practical realm for those who enter into distance education partnerships so as to ensure promotion of the "right" values and fostering of ethical behavior.

- Emotions play an important role to the psychological development of individual. Emotions are related to moral values as well. Therefore, ODL pedagogy must create enough room for recognition of the emotional state of the learners and take appropriate measures to transform the same when needed.

- The prominent rise in academic cheating in the era of globalisation of education. Availability of technologies to the higher education students cited as the causative factor for rendering challenges and opportunities for exhibiting cheating behaviours.

- The learners must not be blamed if they are not properly guided about what is academic dishonesty.

- Cheating has been reported to be rampant in the educational institutions. ODL also is not immune to this "phenomenon." Often the urge to have good grades, examination stress, personality traits, difficulty in understanding the content well and so forth are some of the reasons students resort to cheating. Therefore, ODL institutions need to prominently highlight the policies related to cheating in their profiles, manuals or handbooks.

- The research, theory and practice should be focused to have optimum ethics in the field of distance education. There is a need for formulation of models by practitioners to judge ethical issues in distance and open learning instead of adapting from the medical fields.

- Foundations in ethics, environmental technoethics, educational technoethics, cyberethics, computer ethics, Internet search ethics, Web research ethics, health and medical technoethics, engineering ethics, and biotech ethics are the areas which are being taken seriously by the ODL functionaries.

- Prevalence of the unethical computer using behaviors prevalent in undergraduate students. Emphasis on the prevention of unethical behavior in all forms because computer science has a crucial place in distance education.

- What the administrators should do to support their faculty in curbing dishonesty in their institutions and the fact that academic integrity is both the responsibility of the institution and the faculty.

- The way of how ethics-based case studies assist practice and pave way to improve the day-to-day life. As suggested by one of our authors about the potential use of case studies, especially with the increased use of digital communication with a specific approach to ethical decision-making and instruction.

- Among the well-informed experienced (published) internationally known distance researchers, nonpublishing practitioners and nonresearchers, the nonpublishing researchers are not well-informed about the policies under which distance research must be conducted.

- Academic theft under the head of translation to facilitate reach to the potential group is bilingual plagiarism (The plagiarized work in the different language could be identified by the original authors themselves incidentally by the presence of graphics).

- Learners need to be properly oriented to the concepts and their implications like copy protection, license agreements, shareware use, freeware programs, softlifting, copyright issues, computer ethics, use of academic resources, examination ethics, citation ethics and a respect toward work of others.

- One's own learner autonomy is reduced both to facilitate others and oneself to learn in both cooperative group learning and in collaborative group learning in distance education.
- Optimum social interaction exists when students prefer the opportunity to share and learn from their colleagues and when there is no contradiction between working in their professional context (an ethical environment) and studying online.
- Concentrating on cognitive tasks and market-driven aspects of open and distance learning at the expense of the social harmony instead of implementing an appropriate pedagogy which satisfies both aims, remains a challenge for ODL designers and teachers, that is, pedagogy should be seen in association with the deep rooted social and cultural contexts.
- The ethical principles for online facilitation can be integrated into an online training course for ODL practitioners.
- The ways computing technology is intended for educational purposes are misused by the learners and that too during the study process besides the importance of institutional/contextual/attitudes/personal factors related to academic integrity/ academic need to be examined closely.
- The network-enabled education is both the means and an institution.
- A two-phased ethical approach can act as an effective model to develop courses, which highlights integration of multimodal learning/teaching strategies and availability of opportunity for the students to discover their preferred approach to learning and the way to "Massification" and delivering technology-enhanced courses to an increasingly diverse student body.
- The fact that the subject matter experts, instructional designers, faculty, teaching assistants, global online learners and others

affect cultural sensitivity and localization in global e-learning is very much relevant in terms of educational ethics.

THEMES ENTANGLED IN THE BOOK

- Causative factors for academic cheating
- Need for standards
- Things to be known by researchers
- Importance of ethics in distance education
- Integrity in the individuals of the academic fraternity in all forms
- Maintenance of ethics is both the institutional and faculty responsibility
- Individual integrity amounts to all
- Sharing and learning
- Effect of globalisation on distance teaching/learning
- Globalization emphasizes instrumental aims (instead of social aims) of education and hence is a challenge for the ODL practitioner
- Increased attention to conversation ethics optimizes social interactions
- Multimodal learning/teaching strategies
- Cultural sensitivity in global e-learning

CONCLUSION

To conclude, every reader of this book would agree that even though human beings live in social groups, they have to depend on each other for mutual benefit and sustenance. Ultimately, every drop counts in the group and the individual moral values reflect highly the group morale and a little fraction of poison is sure to damage the entire slot. Distance education is no exception for this.

This volume will be one of the main source books for people interested in ethics for open and distance learning/online learning or e-learning, especially those who would like to know what

has worked and what has not worked. As different sectors of education and training is covered, the book will be of interest to teachers, students, and administrators in educational institutions, human resource managers in the industry, and professionals involved with the social development sectors.