

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Dr. C. ANITHA (Corresponding Author)
Department of Studies in Food Science and Nutrition,
Karnataka State Open University
Manasagangothri, Mysore-570006, INDIA

T. S. HARSHA
Department of Studies in Environmental Science,
Karnataka State Open University
Manasagangothri, Mysore-570006, INDIA

ABSTRACT

Today, e-learning and various online education applications are used in many countries and educational institutions than ever before. Ethics deals with the principle governing ideal or good behavior, it focuses on what is right or what is wrong. Although in education, the ethical issues that they may be facing are not about of life and death issues. An ethical dilemma will take place when the educator faced with a decision that maybe incongruent with the organization's values and policies. There are several examples of ethical issues in education.

In this reason, the educator must be guided with the appropriate decision-making strategies. With the increasing use of new communication technologies, adoption of distance education by traditional educational institutes and owing to growing demand on the part of learners, it becomes more important to discuss the ethical issues. This important title provides academicians, students, and professionals with ethical insight into the world of e-learning through fascinating case studies that elucidate the issues through real-world examples. Pioneer's experience in the field of distance education indicates that the profile of distance learners varies, cutting across barriers of gender, class and caste.

The distance learner may be suffering from a sense of isolation as he/she makes a return to study after a gap of time or while working. It is there that the distance educator makes a positive, ethical and interventionist role by helping the student to learn beyond the stereotypical classroom situation and can act effectively as the friend, philosopher and guide of the learner. However, the industry of education is a serious one, requiring well defined ethics and values, well bound in visible legal outlines to regulate its exchange and distribution.

Because as the industry grows, so do the issues of ethical concern such as plagiarism, electronic voyeurism, and licensing.

The objective of this paper is to raise awareness of additional ethical issues in order to encourage further debate and consideration of these importance issues. The present paper will focus on the ethical values to be followed and implemented in the open distance education system

Keywords: ODLS, e-learning, Tri-Council Policy Statement, Ethical Practice and Student Support Services.

INTRODUCTION

Ethical values are deemed to have a positive effect on the day-to-day conduct in the lives of the People. More so, when ethical values are less held in the priority list, still caliber coupled with high morale has been the most adorable theme for many. Achievement and progress without any Moral Character seem to be more criticized than being acknowledged. And Distance Education/Open Learning Discipline is no exception to confiscate this issue of ethics in its practice. Above all, ethics should be highly regarded amidst nuclear deals, space growth, blue/green/white revolutions and to make this a practice, every human being irrespective of the origin, education and monetary status have to join hands together right from the entrance to the exit of life in this world. For those, who ask why a paper on ethics in distance education, my answer simply will be "Why not?". The field of open and distance education has witnessed much transformation from simple print based communication to the WEB strategies. With the increasing use of new communication technologies, adoption of distance education by traditional educational institutes and owing to growing demand on the part of learners, it becomes more important to discuss the ethical issues. UNESCO has advocated ethics in its educational programmes and has initiated deep instilling the ethical values based on the cultural, legal, philosophical and religious heritage of the various human communities. Keeping in tune with the rapid growth in the area of scientific knowledge and technology, the General Conference of UNESCO in 1997 approved the formation of a World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) which is consultative in nature. Ethics in education in general and distance education in specific has its manifestations in various forms like those pertaining to pupil-teacher relationship, research ethics, cheating in examinations, information and Internet ethics etc.

Need for Ethics in Distance Education

When we interact with others face-to-face we see the results immediately of inappropriate and unethical behaviors. When we use information technology in a way that does harm to others, the act feels less personal because we can't see or hear the other person in the exchange. It is also important to understand what leads to cheating, such as, pressure for grades, the testing environment, lack of understanding of academic regulations, personality characteristics, and development of moral reasoning. There are many breaches of ethics with the Internet, such as harassment, defamation, and infringement of intellectual property rights. Breaches of ethics may occur unintentionally and often because users are unaware of policies that may be in place.

List of Ethical Issues in Education

Following are some of the most common moral, legal and ethical issues in education that are most often faced by the givers and receivers of education, along with the education institutes, management thereof and, sometimes, parents and guardians of students.

- 'Ethical Conundrums In Distance Education Collaborators' - the launch of online courses full programs of study offered at a distance by novice in the field and describes of how the modus operandi of the International Distance Education

Collaborators, Organizational Culture of the collaborators, leadership patterns in the collaborative institutions in distance education field, affect the extent of responsibility and accountability for effective service to the students. There is the dire need for the establishment and monitoring of a set of standards for ethical practice in distance education, there is no recognized body that ensures the adoption or enforcement of a code of ethics for distance education.

It is a narrow-minded activity intended for profit mainly by academic institutions partnering with for-profit corporate organizations, emphasizing on ethical dilemmas both at philosophical and practical realm for those who enter into distance education collaborators so as to ensure promotion the “right” values and fostering of ethical behavior. Launching and sustaining innovative new academic programs is typically a complex enterprise, especially distance education projects, and more particularly, such initiatives attempted by individual institutions with little or no prior experience in this arena. Inherently parochial, colleges and universities usually experiment with online courses on their own, but increasingly, as institutions engage in more ambitious efforts to develop full programs of study offered at a distance, they are recognizing, enthusiastically or reluctantly, that collaborative arrangements may make the difference between success and failure, especially for those with little expertise and few start-up resources. Collaborators are being forged between two or more higher education entities, and even more remarkably, there is growing evidence of academic institutions partnering with for-profit corporate organizations. Unfortunately, these unions too often result in more collisions than collaborations, especially when there are differing values among the parties involved.

- **'Ethics in Interactions in Distance Education' - the desirable interactions involved in teaching and learning at a distance, based on the experience as a Teacher and the Learner. linking to various theories of teaching-learning of how 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 where student interactions with other students constitute a major part of the education process. Some the pioneers have recalled the four-stage model of learning (which illustrates the cyclic iterative process through Stages 1 to 4 to equip and bring the student to go onto independent learning in a further new cycle starting at Stage 1 in a new learning venture) and at the three dimensions of Structure, Dialogue, and Autonomy of transactional distance theory that can describe distance education. He defines ethics as those pro-active interactions that induce the motivation to lifelong learning in all the students, which should override individualist autonomy as a goal in education.**

The desirable interactions involved in teaching and learning at a distance are considerable ethical issues—notably that one's own learner autonomy should be reduced at times in order to help others learn, to achieve the learning task, and at the same time help oneself to learn. Accordingly, learner autonomy is not an overarching goal of education. This is controversial, and should deal with this issue in detail to explain that learner autonomy at best is a rough guideline, and ethically based on reasoning that autonomy should be interpreted as flexibly applied.

The maxim that learner autonomy must be flexibly applied is particularly true in both cooperative group learning and in collaborative group learning in distance education where student interactions with other students constitute a major part of the education process.

The ethics in interaction in distance education are extended to cover all possible interactions, especially the important interaction by the teacher to each student followed by the interactions by the student with the learning process, that can initiate the aesthetic social intrinsic motivation to lifelong learning and thus to one's own emancipation.

Accordingly, ethics are defined here as those pro-active interactions that induce the motivation to lifelong learning in all the students. Such ethics should override individualist autonomy as a goal in education.

- **'Ethics in the ambit of distance Education'** the factors that made the Distance Teaching Institution (irrespective of the type) a fair option too many is the reasons for adoption of ethics in distance education. The identified eight spheres of concern for ethics in distance education namely Student Support Services (Administration, Admission, Eligibility Criteria/Calibre, Academic counseling, Medium of Instruction); Collaboration (Learner Support Centre, How, why they are selected); Credibility (Employability versus Continuing Education); Duplication of Efforts (Material Production, Launch of Programmes, Course Writing); Provision of intersystem transfer (Lack for interface to aim transfer); Expertise (Academic activity, Administrative activity, Resources, Research, Who does, How it is done). In each spheres, the aspects which fall under each gamut of concern. The advantages and limitations of facilitating ethics in Distance Education. There are considerable ethical issues—notably that one's own learner autonomy should be reduced at times in order to help others learn, to achieve the learning task, and at the same time help oneself to learn. Accordingly, learner autonomy is not an overarching goal of education. This is controversial, and this chapter deals with this issue in detail to explain that learner autonomy at best is a rough guideline, and ethically based on reasoning that autonomy should be interpreted as flexibly applied. The maxim that learner autonomy must be flexibly applied is particularly true in both cooperative group learning and in collaborative group learning in distance education where student interactions with other students constitute a major part of the education process. The ethics in interaction in distance education are extended to cover all possible interactions, especially the important interaction by the teacher to each student followed by the interactions by the student with the learning process, that can initiate the aesthetic social intrinsic motivation to lifelong learning and thus to one's own emancipation. Accordingly, ethics are defined here as those pro-active interactions that induce the motivation to lifelong learning in all the students. Such ethics should override individualist autonomy as a goal in education.
- **"Creating a Firewall against Unethical Behaviors' in Open and Distance Education Practice"** the grey areas which should be of great concern to many stakeholders in distance education practice, globally, include those of quality control, policy formulation and ethical issues. Contextualized ethics and ethical practice in open and distance learning against the operational philosophy and belief of what is a morally right or wrong behavior in the education sector of the society.

This unethical practice is not only found among students of both conventional and the virtual learning institutions, but it also extends to parents and tutors who, unfortunately, collaborate with the learners.

The reasons why this is the case is conjectural. For a worthwhile education therefore, and in particular, for a lasting premium on professional behavior and academic credibility of Distance Education and, or the Open Distance Learning to be highly regarded, clear and definitive proviso should be put in place to mitigate on multiple interpretation of academic standards.

The current process of democratizing education has inevitably led to the explosive demands by the citizens of the different countries for unrestricted admission into the conventional tertiary institutions as full time students.

Unfortunately, the universities have no absorptive capacity to meet the demands due to many perennial factors. In order to meet these enormous requirements, it therefore becomes paramount for universities to restructure, re-engineer and reform.

The paradigm shift therefore necessitates the repositioning of tertiary institutions in order to effect the change from "selective learning" to "lifelong learning" and from what "we offer" to what "you need" and therefore, simultaneously develop the skills of "learning to learn," especially in their clients. Where many distance learning institutions (DLIs) have become relevant in the current dispensation is in their ability to create wider accessibility to education through the open, distance and flexible operation, which allows for learning and earning going pari-passu in meeting the needs and aspirations of their heterogeneous clientele. Paradoxically, however, the majority of the world's populations who are ignorant of the operation and value of distance education generally view its products as well as its programmes, not only as useless but also as inferior when compared to those of the conventional universities. Their opaque arguments for casting aspersions on distance education institutions (DEIs) may centre on their individual doubts on the quality and massification, as well as the incidence of possible masquerading identity. Closely related to this is the general notion of whether the DEI or ODL, in any way, adhere to professional ethics or academic standards. Adherence to high academic standards, which is informed through the doggedly pursued predetermined ethics, has a predictable relationship to professional behaviour and academic integrity of the ODL, at least comparatively. Ethical principles are known indexes in organizational direction and commitments, but its lapses erode known standards in academic and research ventures, as well as the quality of community service.

- 'Ethical Concerns with Open and Distance Learning' - the ODL Practitioner while 'Preparing Students For Ethical Use Of Technology: because globalization emphasizes instrumental aims (instead of social aims) of education, it remains a challenge for ODL designers and teachers to concentrate 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.

Certain pedagogies which highlight the prevalence of human touch, for use by the ODL practitioners and also expresses deep concern about of the pedagogy should be seen in association with the deep rooted social and cultural contexts. In spite of being accustomed to the use of technology such as computer chats, instant messaging, text messaging-are either ill-prepared for using technology or use technology unethically.

That ethics if not nurtured in school and higher education level is sure to mar the societal ethics at the end. In essence, traces of how computing technology intended for educational purposes are misused by the learners and that too during the study process. The challenge to instill ethical values in students or to have students understand the issues of social responsibility leading to ethical behavior are very hard to be achieved during the learning process by the Teachers.

Stress should be on the importance of institutional/contextual/attitudes/personal factors related to academic integrity/academic dishonesty and Review of institution's policies, work environment comprising of the faculty who assist in developing and maintaining an ethically sound distance learning atmosphere and constant up gradation of policy to be remedy to maintain ethics in computing technology courses offered through Distance Education.

- Some of the more important ethical concerns associated with open and distance learning are not those that may be faced by learners. Instead, the challenges faced by those that design ODL or use it in their teaching can be seen as increasingly important. These challenges include globalization, which has emphasized instrumental rather than social aims of education, and the use of cognitive rather than affective pedagogies.

For ODL designers and teachers, this has resulted in a concentration on cognitive tasks and market-driven aspects of open and distance learning at the expense of the social harmony that might otherwise be achieved. The overarching ethical concern for ODL practitioners should be to implement an appropriate pedagogy that will satisfy both instrumental and social aims. While this can be achieved, in part, through the use of the pedagogies outlined in this chapter, the problem is seen as being associated with deeply interwoven social and cultural contexts. Consequently, there is a greater responsibility for all ODL practitioners to ensure that the choices that they make are ethical at all times, irrespective of the demands of any employer, institution or authority.

- 'Conversation Ethics for Online Learning Communities' itself suggests to the learner of what to cover in. After rendering an overview of the key concepts and strategies underlying Conversation Ethics identified key elements of conversation Ethics for online learning communities and progressed to offer practical suggestions for influencing online learning communities through increased attention to conversation Ethics to optimize social interactions.

Research in key areas of Techno ethics has the potential to revolutionize social practices and institutions (including Distance Education) relying on technology use for social benefit. There is growing recognition of the important role of conversation ethics in open and distance learning systems, particularly within online learning communities. Fostering ethical conversational practices in online learning poses a serious challenge within education.

- 'The Ethics Of Designing For Multimodality: Empowering Non Traditional Learners' the changing nature of distance education in the context of higher education suggests the a two phased ethical approach to develop courses, namely,
 - integrating a range of multimodal learning and teaching strategies and
 - giving students the opportunity to discover their preferred approach to learning.

Questions in relation to the ethics of quantity reach- 'massification' and delivering technology enhanced courses to an increasingly diverse student body. Coherent way of adherence by academics to the policies set by the Institutions is still a dream. The major recommendations were to have an array of different learning modalities namely 'multimodal course materials along with the additional multimedia components' so as to fulfill the needs of the multiliterate.

- 'Open to people-pen with people: Ethical issues in open learning' attributes multiculturalism as the causative factor to study ethical dimensions in higher education. There is need to review ethical issues in the light of recent developments namely the increasing use of e-learning- which excludes the educationally disadvantaged people, the high dropout rates- which poses the question of whether the distance education has catered to yield optimum results and done the optimum to retain vulnerable students, and the development of methods of predicting student success- which targets the means to convey the information to the student from time to time.

Need for formulation of models by Practitioners to judge ethical issues in distance and open learning should be highlighted. It puts a challenge that the Research, theory and practice should be unanimously targeted to have advanced state of maturity in terms of ethics in the field of distance education.

Distance and open learning has long had such a dimension, but this chapter will argue that ethical issues need to be reviewed in the light of recent developments.

Three examples in distance education are taken: the increasing use of e-learning, dropout rates, and the development of methods of predicting student success. Some evidence suggests that e-learning may harm the openness of open learning given the numbers of educationally disadvantaged potential students which it will exclude. Dropout rates in distance education appear to be markedly higher than in conventional learning, which raises ethical issues of honesty and openness, and finally the use of methods in which a student's success can be predicted raises ethical issues about if and how that information should be communicated to that student.

- **'Ethics Review Issues Faced By Distance Researchers'** explains the Tri-Council Policy Statement that governs research ethics, and the Ethics of research involving humans intended to protect human dignity by balancing harms and benefits. According to the pioneers the Distance Researchers should be facilitated by psychological, geographical, temporal, and other distances existing between researchers and online subjects to have desirable attributes of research like candor, reflection, thoughtfulness, and objectivity. The importance for independence and autonomy to be prevalent in all types of researchers which seems to be the need of the hour for all around the Globe.
 - **'Preparing Faculty to Integrate Ethics into Online Facilitation'** explore how ethical principles for online facilitation are integrated into an online training.
 - Ethical principles can and should be built in to online courses, and must also be modeled and proactively made a part of the course by faculty as the need for the ethical principles has been felt by both the teacher and the taught.
 - **'Computer Ethics'** is the provision of the implications of ethical practices for distance education, which urge the professionals to keep themselves abreast about the concepts and practices regarding integrity. Emphasis on Computer science has a crucial place in distance education, necessary precautions for the framing of the base level policies and implementation of the instructional processes, should be well laid to prevent unethical behavior in all forms. The recommendations on what educational institutions can do to address technology ethics: set policy that provides a model for students to follow, and incorporate technology ethics issues in the curriculum.
 - Distance education in the forms of web-based or online delivery have emerged as a core educational strategy in the late 1990s and promise to thrive throughout the early years of the twenty-first century. the use of the Internet or other networking technologies has seemingly opened numerous channels through which formal education can be attained. Institutions of higher education are quickly recognizing the potential of web-based delivery as a cost-effective, wide-reaching, and technologically feasible platform through which untapped student populations can be reached. The history of distance education reveals an emphasis on providing education to disenfranchised individuals. We as professionals should be concerned with the ethical and social responsibilities surrounding technologies and education in particular should be asking what ethical issues are emerging surrounding web-based education in general, and is web-based education truly an equalizer in bringing quality education to all?
- **Ethical Practice and on-line learning** focused on describing and analyzing ethical dimensions of relationships tutor-student and student-student in on-line, in the context of the pedagogical approach of the subject/institution. It attempts to identify best practice in on-line learning to examine the ethical issues as perceived by students and found that no major ethical concerns emerged as regard to students' individual integrity and rights.

- **Bilingual Plagiarism in the Academic World'** Multilinguistic professionalism is an asset in the era of globalization, but has serious negative effect to plagiarize work found in another language. The ownership of knowledge varies with the culture, challenges the academic community not to do academic theft under the head of translation to facilitate reach to the potential group. As borders cross over for mutual benefit in this shrinking universe, the authors state that, copied work can never be hidden and most of the time plagiarized work in the different language is being identified by the original authors themselves. Four factors namely, language competence, personal advancement, institutional advancement and ease of detection as drivers for and against bilingual plagiarism. Finally, integrity in the individuals of the academic fraternity and encourage academic cooperation not only to cultivate the habit of honoring the original work but also to prevent misusing them by any means.

CONCLUSION

Education is a novel pursuit and imparting education is even more so. However, there are certain ethical issues in education that must be kept in mind and pondering upon from time to time to assess the real values that is being added to society via the media of education.

It appears that moral and ethical issues, including character education, are slowly becoming part of the teacher education programs.

Philosophical writings and psychological research exist to provide guidance, and exemplary university training programs, provide beginning models of practice. It's now up to the profession to ensure broader and deeper implementation.

The presentation, identifies and analyzes a number of ethical dilemmas, some philosophical and others practical, which should be considered by those who enter into distance education partnerships.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHORS



Dr. C. ANITHA
Lecturer and Coordinator
Department of Studies in Food Science and Nutrition
Karnataka State Open University
Manasagangothri, Mysore, Karnataka, India.
Mobile: 9886337113
E-Mail: anithaksou@gmail.com , sheetu_sana@yahoo.co.in

Dr. C. ANITHA (Corresponding Author)
Department of Studies in Food Science and Nutrition,
Karnataka State Open University
Manasagangothri, Mysore-570006, INDIA
Phone: +91-821-2500072
Mobile: +91-9916137173
Email: Sheetu_sana@yahoo.co.in

T. S. HARSHA
Department of Studies in Environmental Science,
Karnataka State Open University, INDIA.
Manasagangothri, Mysore-570006,
Email: envrao@rediffmail.com

REFERENCES

- Aristotle (trans. 1962). *Nicomachean ethics*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Bebeau, M. J, Rest, J. R and Narvaez, D. (1999). Beyond the promise: A perspective on research in moral education. *Educational Researchers*, 28(4), 18-26.
- Benninga, J. S, Berkowitz, M.W, Kuehn, P and Smith, K. (2003). The relationships of character education and academic achievement in elementary schools. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, 1(1), 17-30.
- Berliner, D. C and Biddle, B. J. (1995). *The manufactured crisis: Myths, fraud and the attack on America's public schools*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. ED 393, 167.
- Character Education Partnership. (2002). *Practices of teacher educators committed to characters. Examples from teacher education programs emphasizing character development*. Washington.
- Damon, W. (1996). *Greater expectations: Overcoming the cultur of indulgence in America's homes and schools*. New York: Free Press. (ED 393 591).
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*. New York: Bantam. EJ 530 121.
- Goodlad, J. I, Soder, R and Sirotnik, K. A. (Eds). (1990). *The moral dimensions of teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. ED 337 443.
- Goodlad, J. I and McMannon, T. J. (Eds.) (1997). *The public purpose of education and schooling*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. ED 403 657.
- Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The Psychology of moral development: Essays on moral development*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Lane-Garon, P. (2003). Ethics in teacher education: Are we accountable for our product? Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.
- National Education Association (n.d.). Code of ethics of the education profession. Retrieved June 12, 2003 from <http://www.radford.edu/~fexp/FieldExperiences/forms/CodeofEthics.PDF>
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2002). *Professional standards for the accreditation of schools, colleges and departments of education*.