

Chapter XVIII

Computer Ethics: Scenes from a Computer Education Department in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on academic work on computer ethics conducted at a computer education department in Turkey. The chapter starts with the conceptual framework of computer ethics followed by the colleagues at the department, and mentions some scale development and administration papers. Along with research conducted at the department, applications of these researches in departments' courses are summarized. Then, implications of ethical practices for distance education are provided. Changes in the computing science along with those in distance education are considered to require distance education professionals to update their concepts and practices regarding integrity. Finally, future research directions, opportunities, and additional ideas regarding mentioned research and coursework are presented.

INTRODUCTION

When computer ethics is mentioned in Turkey, it is regarded double wise, that is, either the legal side

of computer use or a list of unethical behaviors occurring to one's mind are regarded. This chapter therefore focuses on a different area, academic work on computer ethics. Because ethics is a

rather esoteric subject, computer professionals usually find it difficult to study, so they choose to deal with the practical ethics mainly. However, starting from 1998, Turkey found a new platform for computer ethics studies. In 1998, the Turkish Higher Education Council opened new departments in education faculties of the universities in Turkey. These new departments are named Computer Education and Instructional Technology (CEIT). The basic aim of these departments is to equip students with up-to-date knowledge about computer and other information technologies, required for K-12 teachers. The departments combining the pedagogical knowledge with computer skills became unique standpoints for fields like computer ethics. In this chapter, we present academic work on computer ethics realized by one of these departments, Anadolu University, CEIT Department. When doing so, we prefer to classify the work as research and course work. Finally, implications of ethical endeavors for distance education practices are provided.

RESEARCH

The CEIT department at Anadolu University started working on conceptual framework of computer ethics at the very beginning of the 2000s. Odabasi and Can (2002) discussed the application of ethics to computer teaching, and suggested specifications for a scale after studying with 37 undergraduate students enrolled in the BTO 408 Computer and Internet Safety course. The study classified ethical principles, firstly those involving ethical demeanors that should be demonstrated by students as well as those involving responsibilities regarding computer and laboratory use. The study finalized with the recommendation that there should be robust scales to measure unethical computer using behaviors of Turkish undergraduate students.

Fortunately, Namlu and Odabasi (2007) developed the items further, generated new items

addressing several aspects of computer ethics, referred to expert opinions and produced the final version of the scale after administering it to 216 undergraduate students of computer technology. In the study, a robust factor analysis was conducted and unethical computer using behaviors of undergraduate students were classified under five categories, as intellectual property, social impact, safety and quality, net integrity and information integrity. Items in the first category, intellectual property, referred to the fact that information, unlike tangible property, was found hard to safeguard and hard to keep to one's self (Mason, 1986). Using unlicensed software, using crack programs, providing access to licensed software without authorization, copying and selling licensed software CDs, and distributing software licenses were instances of the first factor. The second factor of the scale, social impact, involved those items which were either socially chaotic or happened in social environments. Disturbing people in the virtual environments and using computers as means of blackmail are instances of the second factor. The third factor, safety and quality, involved items that were inclined to affect safety as well as influenced the quality of job that was carried out. Sample behaviors involve deliberately damaging the hardware of public computers, deliberately sending virus e-mails, accessing other peoples' personal computers and hacking through Internet. Items within the fourth dimension (i.e., net integrity) involved items that were corruptive for the integrity of the net, such as sending advertisement and chain mails for financial purposes. The last dimension, information integrity, involved behaviors such as misuse of information or things that disturb accessing information. Sample behaviors include plagiarizing other's software through small changes in the interface or using someone else's software as one's own by getting hold of the necessary codes. The study ended with the suggestion that unethical computer using behaviors should be studied under the light of several independent variables that

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