

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

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