Chapter I
Ethical Practices and Implications in Distance Education:
An Introduction

Ugur Demiray
Anadolu University, Turkey

Ramesh C. Sharma
Indira Gandhi National Open University, India

ABSTRACT

Education is intimately connected with ethics, because holistically speaking education is more than simply passing examinations and acquiring degrees. Education is character building and life long learning. Savants and philosophers throughout the history of humankind have borne testimony to this aspect of education. Today there is a great deal of emphasis on continuous and life long learning which implies that education is a continual learning process and not merely relegated to certification. Our 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. Thus practicing what you preach is the moto of ethics in distance. This chapter deals with ethics in general, its role in distance education and its significance to educational agencies.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is growing exponentially. The subjects or disciplines of knowledge are being specialized. Nowadays, it is not necessary to go to schools or colleges or universities to be literate in the traditional sense to become acquainted with information, adding to the knowledge we already possess. Modern means of information and communication technology are serving as information providers. But there is a dark side to this glowing picture, in that there can be such a huge inflow of information, blinding people's consciousness that they may sometimes fail to discriminate between what is right or wrong. The phenomenon of globalization and liberalization has added problems of their own to the social, economical or spiritual lives of people. In the modern world, if we carefully delve into the struggles most human beings make to achieve worldly success in wealth, power or fame, one can easily spot that human beings have become selfish and self-centered. They wish to achieve what they want to and at any cost. This greed on the part of either individuals or groups (business firms, politicians, sports persons or whoever) takes them to a level where the thirst for more and more is not satisfied. As a result, the atmosphere of unhealthy competition, raising unethical, illegal and even criminal behaviors, is created. The field of education is not insulated from this darkness. Due to lack of wisdom, the students, teachers or administrators cannot make right decisions. Accordingly, we should strive to enrich our education with principles and values that contribute to the development of personality and creates such an environment in educational institutions that they become ideal places for learning about the diversity and wealth of cultural identities and respect of others. The education plans and policies should be a tool to promote understanding, knowledge, values and attitudes among all. There is an urgent need to establish a synergy between formal educational systems and different sectors, or nonformal education, including open and distance education, in conformity with the aims of "Education for All."

Over the last few decades, the world of open and distance education has changed dramatically. It has come a long way, starting from simple print-based instructional delivery to media-based to satellites to Web-based and mobile learning and Web 2.0 technologies. As with any other new phenomenon, Web-based instruction and communication systems for education have 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. The electronic communication occurs through synchronous and asynchronous means like e-mail, discussion forums, list-serves, electronic chat, bulletin board systems, Web-based, Internet-based, and so forth. Thus, the virtual classroom faces issues like humanizing, roles, norms, ethics, privacy and socio-psychological. The ethical issues become significant, and we keep reading in magazines and newspapers about misuse of Internet and e-mail. The university administrators, teachers and students are often faced with such issues where the commercial use of institutional resources, illegal use of Internet facilities and invasion of privacy are reported. Sexual issues are perhaps the most common breaches of this medium.

ETHICS

The most striking feature of IT in education is to open the 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; this is a world which is based on mutual trust and respect. These ethical concerns have been carried on from the traditional education to the online education, and thus form a very significant base for the future of online education. Ethics has become a buzz word as each discipline of

work, say, engineering, medicine, or education, is trying to create standards of its own, thereby aiming to keep an edge over the competitors and peers. One is aware of various jargons like situational ethics, business ethics, business to customer ethics, management ethics, engineering ethics, medical ethics, and educational ethics to name a few. The simplest meaning of "ethics" is "moral principles." The word "ethics" is derived from the Greek "ethos" which implies "custom or character." The Oxford English Dictionary explains ethics as the moral philosophy or (set of) moral principles. It pertains to what and what not to do of behaviour by an individual in a right and righteous manner. An individual is expected to conduct himself in a manner so as not to be looked down upon by society.

The Greek philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle, have been very instrumental in pondering deeply into the ethics. Plato argued that people try to be good and seek happiness, and the only dilemma was how to make people aware of how to bring that goodness in them. In case exhibition of any undesirable behavior, the reasons would be epistemological and not behavioral. Plato pointed out four virtues: wisdom, courage, justice and temperance. Aristotle added other virtues like generosity, truthfulness, friendliness and prudence. Barnes (1979, p. 16) defined ethical factors as those which arise when we try to decide between one course of action and another, not in terms of expediency, but by reference to standards of what is morally right or wrong.

RELEVANCE OF ETHICS

The education of the 21st century is facing some challenges. Overall, world population is increasing. New means of information and communications are being developed due to innovations of science and technology. The unemployment rate is increasing among educated youth. Politicalisation of education can be noticed in various spheres of the educational arena. The students are under great pressure to achieve excellence and expertise. The teachers are under pressure to meet the demands of students. It is high time that moral and ethical values be put in proper place in the education to make it character-oriented, instead of information-oriented. The Daler's Commission report, while advocating four pillars of learning: (1) learning to know, (2) learning to do, (3) learning to live together, and (4) learning to be, identified some challenges which create tension, anxiety, frustration and depression in a person. Other threats to the educational system are due to knowledge and technological advancements, attitudinal changes in the society, and the changing nature of social institutions, like the family system.

In the technology driven world, where each human is considered as a mere number and an object filling this planet earth, the significance of ethics is felt especially in the field where the value of the individual has to be highlighted, and reaching out to the differently challenged and underprivileged is the sole motto. The education sector is a service sector in which the ethics should be intertwined in every aspect, and the newly evolved distance education system is no exception.

After the four decades of experimentation and utilization of the distance education system in the world, the moral principles are more highlighted as globalisation and business types of management and implementation of the policies in the distance education system seem to creep up. Ethics is what individuals do, irrespective of whether or not they are a part, without succumbing to peer/monetary/superior/family pressure. The demand for the distance education system is enormous as it has no boundaries and its potential for growth is without any limit. Peters (1966, p. 91) indicated that all educational are ethically driven to some extent. The problem arises when there is a conflict between two principles. What becomes important here is to see how one overcomes those conflicting situations by making decisions about the best alternative. Garrard (2006) examined

ethics from the society point of view that ethics is what a society thinks morally right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, permissible and impermissible. One of the repercussions of this would be that ethical values may differ from culture to culture and even what is wrong or right may change with passage of time, due to social changes or needs of society.

ETHICS AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

Whether it is ethics in distance education or ethics of distance education, there is interlink between the two, and coexistence prevails among these two in standardized situations. If quality has to go hand in hand with the increasing quantum of work, then ethics has to be maintained right from recruitment of students and staff, to conferring degrees, to generation of reports. Concurrent results can be obtained in all activities, only if ethical standards are first standardized. Amid the various reforms committee which say what has to be done in the educational sector, the integrity of the individual sitting in the chair responsible for making the decision matters a lot in the distance education sector, as it deals with the molding of the character and personality of the individual who may either have a positive or negative impact on the day-to-day activities in the society. A detailed analysis of the moral controversies and the social responsibilities will help to set standards in ethics, which in turn will become a milestone in education. Macfarlane (2004) suggests instituting an ethical relationship between the learner, instructor and institution in distance education. He recommends building professional virtues like moral character, duty to learner and critical self-reflection. Similar kinds of sentiments were echoed by Starratt (2004). He reflects that intellectualism and morality be accorded priority by the educational leadership. According to him,

the work of leadership should be humanly fulfilling and socially responsible wherein the human, professional and civic concerns are blended.

Gourley (2007) has pertinently identified the timely need of ethical practices in distance education. Keeping in view the exponential growth of ODL during the last 4 decades, certain concerns like equality of access, digital divide, equality of services and resource provisions, quality control, ownership of courses and material need to be taken seriously. Owing to the distinct nature of distance education where isolation of the learner is unique, effective student support forms the basis of the success of the ODL. To overcome the barrier of isolation in distance education, the learner needs to be provided adequate experiences of interaction with the instructor and institution. The ODL systems can overcome the barriers of geography, society and economics, and broaden participation by generating their own dilemmas (Kelly & Mills, 2007). Kelly and Mills (2007) had experiences where when some decisions were taken (either by individuals or through institutional committees), issues related to equity, fairness or responsible behaviour were raised, leading to the nonachievement of goals by staff or students.

Building support services around ethics has a direct relevance to this success. One such support to the learner is through library services. Needham and Johnson (2007, p. 119) proposed 10 ethical principles for providing library services to the distance learners:

1. ensure that each originating institution takes responsibility for providing library support to its own distance learners;
2. provide distance learners with access to equivalent levels of library services, resources and support as students at campus-based universities;
3. treat all information users equitably: all users receive the highest quality service possible;

4. acknowledge the reality that distance learners may need library services that are more personalized than those for on-campus students;
5. respect and provide for user diversity;
6. promote awareness of distance library services and resources;
7. respect confidentiality, privacy and dignity;
8. defend intellectual freedom, and avoid bias;
9. respect the integrity of information and intellectual property; and
10. ensure that professional development of distance education librarians is an ongoing process.

ETHICS AND UNESCO

Realizing the significance of ethics, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2002 designated ethics as one of the five priority areas. The establishment of the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) was another significant development which has an advisory role in areas like ethics and space technology, ethics and energy, and ethical issues related to water use. Another milestone was achieved in December 2005 with the launch of the Global Ethics Observatory (GEObs) to deal with emerging ethical challenges in science and technology (http://www.unesco.org/shs/ethics/geobs).

GEObs comprises of three databases. The first database contains details on experts in various areas of ethics in the form of "Who's who in ethics?" The second database includes data of institutions such as ethics committees (at local, national, regional, and international levels); departments and centers in the area of ethics; and associations and societies in ethics. This database covers all areas of applied ethics: bioethics, nursing ethics, law and ethics, social sciences and ethics, science ethics, environmental ethics, engineering ethics, and so forth. The third database possesses information of ethics teaching programs.

ETHICS DIMENSIONS OF RESEARCH

Every research has some ethical implications. Ethical issues can significantly affect any stage of research. Oates (2006, 2007) commented, "*it is possible to do research that is legal but not ethical*" (p. 55). Out of the 6Ps of research (*purpose*, *products*, *process*, *participants*, *paradigm* and *presentation*) defined by Oates (p. 11), he gives due importance to *participants*. Participants include the respondents who would be interviewed or observed; the researcher; and a member of an academic community or the people affected by the products of research. It is very important that everyone who is involved in research (directly or indirectly) be treated fairly and with honesty (p. 54). Therefore, the ethical issues must be set outrightly while designing the research, in terms of any ethical clearance either from the institution or parents of respondents/participants and so forth. The participants need to be informed of their rights like they have the right not to participate in the research, the right to withdraw, the right to give informed consent, the right to anonymity, the right to confidentiality, and so forth. Oates (p. 60) describes the responsibilities of an ethical researcher, such as he should not intrude unnecessarily into the activities of the participants, he must be open and honest in recording the facts, he must follow appropriate professional code of conduct, he must not resort to plagiarism and he must review the research work of others ethically.

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996, p. 77) identified situations where ethical issues may arise.

- The research problem (e.g., determinants of intelligence or child sexual abuse)
- Settings in which research would take place (e.g., school, hospital or prison)
- Research design (e.g., an experimental research design affecting its subjects psychologically)
- Methods of data collection (e.g., secret means of data gathering)
- Sample of the study (e.g., the participants or respondents would be children, or homeless people or mentally retarded)
- Nature of data collected (e.g., personal or private information about respondents)
- Publication of research findings (would there be any attempt to withhold any or all part of research findings that do not conform to the policies or practices or objectives of the funding agency?)
- Influence exerted by some external source on the research participants (e.g., pressure by the employer or government)
- Misrepresentation of other's experiences (may be due to cultural differences or wrong interpretation of data)

While studying human behavior, there may be some inherent ethical dilemmas. Such dilemma pertains to consent, privacy, consequentiality, harm, confidentiality and anonymity of the research respondent. Burgess (1984, p. 185) raised the following ethical questions.

- What would be the risk and benefit of research for the participants?
- The state may like to take some gains from the findings and thus produce such findings suited to its political needs. How can this influence be controlled?
- What information should be given to participants about the conduct of social research?
- Is secret research justifiable?
- How should the finding be disseminated?

- What protection would be extended to the participants?

Barnes (1979) found that much of the concern for ethics in social research has recently been shown due to a shift in the balance of power from the research establishment toward ordinary citizens. It has only been after the civil rights gained momentum that social research was viewed from ethical and legal angles. Prior to this, ordinary citizens had little say in what should be investigated, by whom and how. Deployment of computer technology has changed the way the data is collected and analyses are done. As a result, the scope and the potential of social research has widened. Punch (1998) cites three developments in the research field that have strengthened the ethical dimensions of social research.

- Scholarship arising due to influence of feminist methodology (based on trust, openness and nonexploitative relationships);
- shift from "subjects" of research to "participants" or "respondents;"
- signing of an agreement based on ethical standards by the researchers who get their research funding by the public bodies.

ETHICAL CODE OF CONDUCT

Ethical code of conduct is often discussed across disciplines like physical sciences, medical sciences, social sciences, anthropology and so forth. While a physical scientist undertakes his work in closed laboratory, for a social scientist it is the open society itself. It has been argued in favour of physical scientists that the results of their experiments may bring solace for mankind (e.g., cure for pain or a disease), but such immediate results in case of social sciences are not easily available. This makes ethical dilemma predominant here. Unlike physical scientists, social researchers establish personal contact with their subject, which

takes on a more ethical relevance. But whatever the field of research it be, and whatever life form be it (lower level organism, or animals or human beings), they deserve to be treated ethically and with dignity. This makes a fit case for following the ethical code of practice. Literature shows that "Nuremberg Trials" (popularly called The Doctors Trial) have been the earlier cases for the ethical code of practice. The actions of Karl Brandt (personal physician of Adolf Hitler) and other doctors caused psychological and physical harm to many people and even death when they performed experiments on human beings for the Nazis during the Second World War. The *Nuremberg Code* (a 10-point code) was laid down to guide involvement of human beings in medical research. The key areas of this code relate to informed consent of the participant, results for the benefit of the society at large, conducting research in a manner as to not let physical or mental suffering happen, freedom of participants to terminate their involvement at any point of time and even provision of termination of research by the researcher at any time the ethical concerns arise. Although the Nuremberg Code was put in place, some cases of unethical practices on humans were still reported, such as infecting Willowbrook School in New York with hepatitis between 1963 to 1966 as a part of a medical research. Katz (1972) reported of an experiment where the patients (at the Chronic Disease Hospital in New York) were not informed and were injected with live human cancer cells. The World Medical Association, by taking strong objections to such cases, came out with the Declaration of Helsinki in 1964 which is still in modified form. There also has been some criticism of such ethical codes of practice (Douglas, 1976; Punch, 1998). They argue that such codes are sometimes used to protect the powerful and do not serve the purpose.

Some of the organizations having codes of conduct can be found at the following locations:

- Association for Computing Machinery, www.acm.org
- Association on Internet Researchers, www.aoir.org
- Association for Information Systems, www.aisnet.org
- American Psychological Association, www.apa.org
- American Medical Association (AMA), http://www.ama-assn.org/
- American Sociological Association, www.asanet.org
- British Computer Society, www.bcs.org.uk
- British Psychological Society, www.bps.org.uk
- British Sociological Association, www.britsoc.co.uk
- Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions at IIT, http://ethics.iit.edu/codes/coe.html
- Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, www.ieee.org
- International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE), www.capurro.de/icie-index.html
- The Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS) code of ethics for authors, editors and reviewers, http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/jibs_ethics_code.html
- Market Research Society, www.market-research.org.uk
- National Association of Social Workers, http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp
- National Education Association, http://www.nea.org/aboutnea/code.html
- New Zealand's Teachers Council, http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/pdf/codeo-fethics.pdf
- Political Studies Association, www.psa.ac.uk
- School of Professional Hypnosis, http://www.hypnosisschool.org/hypnosis-school-code-of-ethics.*php*

- Social Research Association, www.the-sra. org.uk/ethics03.pdf
- World Psychiatric Association (WPA), http://www.wpanet.org/

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF INTERNET RESEARCH

The emergence of the Internet, (then called as ARPANET) in 1969 enabled researchers and academicians to collaborate and share research findings. Since then, the Internet has changed the way online research is conducted. Researchers have a whole range of different medium to conduct research like through e-mail, chatrooms, Web sites, blogs, social networking Web sites, instant messengers, online journals, multi-user environments and so forth. Web 2.0 technologies have added another dimension to Internet research. While the Internet has been a boon to researchers, it has brought legal and ethical problems too (Oates, 2006, 2007). "Some of the ethical difficulties in Internet research arise from not being clear about whether people in the online world are the subjects of research, as in, for example, medical research in the off-line world, or authors of works (e-mails, Web sites, etc.) which they have knowingly put into the public domain for information and comment" (p. 65). He explains that because the Internet is a global phenomenon, hence it cannot be bounded by the code of law of any single country. What can be a legal activity in one country may be illegal in another. Some countries have censor policies put in place to control the Internet. Capurro and Pingel (2002) argue that online research faces some serious epistemological and methodological questions. Some of the key ethical issues of online communication research are online identity, online language, online consent and online confidentiality (AOIR, 2001, 2002). Capurro

and Pingel argued that instead of dichotomy, the tension between face-to-face and interface communication must be the basis of ethics in online research. They point out that a person may lie in a face-to-face situation, whereas they speak the truth in a chat room, or vice versa.

MAINTENANCE OF ETHICS

Who is responsible for maintaining ethics? Is it a collective venture or an individual commitment? Can it be reinforced by rules and regulations? What is the extent to which it can be violated? These are the frequently asked questions on this subject. Generalizing the fact that ethics has to be established at every sphere of the life of the human being, one can say that each organisation/institution should have a mandate of ethical values to be practiced like their mission statement. It is the collective responsibility to be ethical in all the dealings. However, because individuals make the organisation/institution, the ultimate onus lies on each and every individual.

CONCLUSION

The ethical or moral values must be inculcated since infancy so that it becomes a part of the behavior of an individual and when re-introduced or re-inforced at the higher education level, it is carried over all along as a philosophy of life. Owing to their role in the society, the universities must act like "ethical beacons" (Watson, 2006, p. 2). Ethics may seem to be in the agenda of a philosophical individual, but in reality, it deserves to be made a component of each and every activity of every individual, be it in dealing with others or dealing with oneself. For example, smoking is not only injurious to one's health, but also to others.

REFERENCES

Barnes, J. (1979). *Who should know what? Social science, privacy and ethics.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Burgess, R. G. (1984). *In the field: An introduction to field research*. London: Routledge.

Capurro, R., & Pingel, C. (2002). Ethical issues of online communication research. *Ethics and Information Technology, 4*(3), 189-194.

Douglas, J. (1976). *Investigative social research: Individual and team research*. London: Sage.

Frankfort-Nachmias, C., & Nachmias, D. (1996). *Research methods in the social sciences* (5th ed.). New York: St Martin's Press.

Garrard, D. J. (2002). *A question of ethics*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from http://www.watton. org/ethics/subject/ethics/index.html

Gourley, B. (2007). Foreword. *Open Learning, 22*(2), 105.

Katz, J. (1972). *Experimentation with human beings*. New York: Sage.

Kelly, P., & Mills, R. (2007). The ethical dimensions of learner support. *Open Learning, 22*(2), 149-157.

Macfarlane, B. (2004). *Teaching with integrity. The ethics of higher education practice*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Needham, G., & Johnson, K. (2007). Ethical issues in providing library services to distance learners. *Open Learning, 22*(2), 117-128.

Oates, B. J. (2006, 2007). *Researching information systems and computing*. New Delhi: Sage.

Peters, R. S. (1966). *Ethics and education*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Punch. M. (1998). Politics and ethics in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 156-184). London: Sage.

Starratt, R. J. (2004). *Ethical leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Watson, D. (2006). The university and civic engagement. *Ad-lib: Journal for Continuing Liberal Adult Education, 31,* 2-6. University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education, Cambridge.

ADDITIONAL READING

AOIR. (2001). *Ethics working committee—a preliminary report*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from http://aoir.org/reports/ethics.html

Baird, R. M., Ramsower, R., & Rosenbaum, S. E. (Eds.). (2000). *Cyberethics: Social and moral issues in the computer age*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Bell, F., & Adam, A. (2004). Information systems ethics. In B. Kaplan, D. Truex, D. Wastell, T. Wood-Harper, & J. DeGross (Eds.), *Information systems research. Relevant theory and informed practice* (pp. 159-174). Boston: Kluwer.

Capurro, R. (2000). Ethical challenges of the information society in the 21st century. *The International Information & Library Review, 32*(3/4), 257-276.

Ess, C., & The AoIR Ethics Working Committee. (2002). *Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from www.aoir.org/reprts/ethics.pdf

Floridi, L. (2000). *Information ethics: On the philosophical foundation of computer ethics*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from http://www.wolfson. ox.ac.uk/~floridi/ie.htm

Johnson, D. (2001). *Computer ethics* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J., & Miller, T. (Eds.). (2002). *Ethics in qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Oliver, P. (2003). *The student's guide to research ethics*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Radoykov, B. (Ed.). (2007). *Ethical implications of emerging technologies: A survey*. Paris: UNESCO, Information Society Division, Communication and Information Sector.

Ryen, A. (2004). Ethical issues. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 230-247). London: Sage.

Tavani, H. T. (2003). *Ethics in an age of information and communication technology*. Chichester: Wiley.