

ETHICAL ISSUES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

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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. 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 paper, 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. This paper deals with ethics in general, its role in distance education and its significance to educational institutions.

Keywords: Ethical issues; Expectations and reality, Ethical Strategies.

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 (Bennett, J1998). 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 or better 'ignorance'. Due to lack of wisdom, the students, teachers or administrators cannot make right decisions <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Efficacy>, retrieved 2011).

Accordingly, we should strive to enrich our education with principles and values that contribute to the development of personality and create 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.

There is a need to deal ethically this global educational revolution. We are going to discuss learner's aspirations of open and distance education in an ethical manner (Hallam, (1998).

What is Ethics?

- "Ethics has to do with what my feelings tell me is right or wrong."
- "Being ethical is doing what the law requires."
- "Ethics consists of the standards of behavior our society accepts."
- "It is the capacity to produce an effect"

Formally Ethics is the power to produce a desired result or effect or the ability of an intervention to produce the desired beneficial effect in expert hands and under ideal circumstances.

These replies might be typical of our own distance education institution. Our article has confined itself to these four ramifications.

EMERGING ETHICAL ISSUES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION (REALITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION)

In the late 1990's Distance education has emerged as technology-based or online delivery (Fass, 1990). It is a core educational strategy and promises to thrive throughout the era of 21st century. The uses of the web, Internet and other networking technologies have opened different kinds of possibilities and opportunities through which distance learning 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 learners populations can be reached (<http://cpsr.org/prevsite/publications/newsletters/issues/2000/Spring2000/buchanan.html/view>, retrieved 2011).

The learner participations are based on these following reasons:

- **They are poor and socially disadvantaged;**
- **They are denied the opportunity to attend regular schools to acquire the desired**
- **Qualifications;**
- **They live in sparsely settled areas, too far from a university or other educational institution.**

Students participate in distance education programs for a different variety of reasons distinct from those named above (Hallam, 1998). The aforementioned reasons for participating in distance education programs may not coincide with contemporary circumstances of distance education (Buchanan, (1999).

The modern quality of distance learning is all inclusive of educational products, flexibility, multimedia technologies, learner favor administration and independent learning conditions. Modern means of information and communication technology are serving as information providers (Demiray and Ramesh, 2009).

The distance learners who have attended various courses are successful. They are employed in different strata of contemporary society (Demiray, U and Ramesh C. S. (2009). But distance learning in Open University has in-built weaknesses and lacunas. The high light of these weaknesses are listed below:

- **Intellectual property issues,**
- **Copyright material issues,**
- **Ownership of the course and materials,**
- **Data/media manipulation;**
- **Reuse of materials by other instructors,**
- **Displacement of teachers,**
- **Student support service,**

- Curriculum and instructions,
- Evaluation and assessments
- Library and learning resources
- Finances and Miscellaneous issues like

More Failures than Success

Experience shows that the distance education efforts account for many failures. Reasons for failure of these programs include lack of student acceptance, higher costs, the lack of enthusiasm, lack of interaction with both faculty and other students which can decrease motivation and responsibility in distance education courses (Smith, 1996).

Low Enrollment

By the low enrollment the program may lack traditional accreditation and name recognition,

Corporate Culture

Students pay for faculty reputation in traditional programs. The teacher has not cultivated personnel intimacy with distance learners in ODL system (<http://education.mapsofindia.com/recent-trends-education.htm> retrieved 2011). If this is enhanced both in quality and intimacy of both distance learners and distance teachers through a proper method of You & Me, then the ethical issue and propriety may be fulfilled. This is one of the expectations of distance learning process². Therefore one ought to keep these specific issues in ones mind. The ground reality of this inbuilt weakness can be transformed if a distance teacher is flexible and open in his mind to adopt ETHICAL STRATEGIES and thus has the desired effect, a dream of any nonformal educational system in contemporary global scenario.

NEED FOR ETHICS AND EXPECTATIONS IN DISTANCE

When we interact with others face-to-face we see the results immediately. When we use open and distance education, the act feels less personal because we can't see or hear the other person in the exchange (Smith, 1996). The report goes on to note that traditionally moral values were learnt at home and usually reinforced in school. We cannot count on that today. Values are not being learnt at home and schools are often restricted in their roles teaching social values.

Our young people are becoming psychologically distant in their interactions with others (http://cpsr.org/prevsite/publications/newsletters/issues/2000/Spring2000/buchanan.html/vie_w, retrieved 2011) educational institutions can do to address technology ethics: set policy that provides a model for students to follow, and incorporate technology ethical issues in the curriculum (http://www.ehow.com/facts_5841314_role-information-technology-distance-education.html retrieved 2011).

Today's college students have been raised in an era of decline of public morality, involving scandal and corruption by public servants, major corporations, and private citizens. These events must surely affect student's attitudes about ethical behavior. This is an increased concern of faculty teaching at a distance - that the distance student doing the work is indeed the student enrolled and that the student is not cheating (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/efficacy> retrieved 2011). It is also important to understand what leads to cheating, such as, pressure for grades, the testing environment, lack of understanding of academic regulations (<http://ww.col.org/pcf2/papers/sinha.pdf> retrieved 2011), personality characteristics, and development of moral reasoning and universities do not adequately spell out information on cheating in their handbooks and catalogs¹².

CONCLUSION

In Conclusion following expectations are required from distance education:

General responsible of distance education is upholding particular ethical principles, including honor the dignity of other individual, respect towards others, to be honest and transparent, awareness and respect of cultural and scientific sensitivity, fulfilling the vision-missions of the institutions, striving to enhance personal and intellectual development, and avoiding abuses of power and seniority¹³.

- **Use of sources on papers and projects**
- **Ethics of examinations**
- **Writing assistance and other tutoring**
- **Collecting and reporting data**
- **Use of academic resources**
- **Respecting the work of others**
- **Computer ethics**
- **Giving assistance to others**
- **Adherence to academic regulations**
- **Most distance education students are adults between the ages of 25&50. In order to effectively design courses for adult students it is necessary to understand how adults learn**
- **Sound instructional design in distance education will depend on a clear understanding of the what affects adult learner**
- **Provide adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support programmes**
- **Provide adequate means for resolving students complaint**
- **Provide non-ambiguous information which are adequate**
- **Help desk services that meet the needs of students in the programme**
- **Institution offering**
- **The institution offering the programme through distance education should ensure best quality of programme and instructions**
- **That the study materials, course programmes and courses are concurrent with current situation**
- **Rigour and appropriate training should provide for teaching faculty of distance education**
- **Be responsible for the assurance in terms of quality**
- **Programme evaluation is necessary to ensure the success of distance education so for offer orientation programme with students**
- **The students have access to and can effectively use of library resources**
- **Strict monitoring whether the students make appropriate use of learning resources in the library**
- **Institution should provide adequate laboratories and apparatus or equipments**
- **Reflect the facilities,staffing,resources,equipments and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of the distance education programme**
- **Enhancing the technological literacy and training to the learner I order to make effective use of technology in learning the lesson in easy way**
- **Course is to be on par with conventional universities**
- **Study material both in print and multimedia mode**

- The library of distance education should be digitalized and it displayed in its own website
- Pre recorded lecturers series can be provide in CD format to all the learners of distance education
- Feedback has to be obtained from the learner as well as teacher this is going to help for quality improvement
- Review the syllabi of different courses run by the institution and it should be made as comprehensive syllabus with the help of experts
- Distance universities should have learner grievances redressal wing
- Courses offered should be as per the requirement of the society and learner
- Have very clear policies concerning the ownership of materials, copyright issues, production of software,telecourse or other media products
- The provision of services to distance education students must be reconsidered and reevaluated so that all students have access to the same resources. These include advising, career placement, library and computing services offered on campus, and collegial gatherings. The technologies exist for all of these through networking, and it is imperative that schools recognize their responsibilities in providing equitable services to all students

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