



## ACADEMIC ETHICS

Ethical principles should be the basis for the behaviour of both teachers and students in everyday practice. The principles are constant and therefore provide consistent guidelines for application in any environment, including virtual ones.

### Ethical issues in online education

Codes of ethics should apply to all members of an educational institution that conducts distance education, including teaching and other academic staff, external collaborators, non-teaching staff, students, volunteers, developers, contractors, agents and others associated with the institution of online education. Ethical standards represent aspirations and expectations in the e-learning process, they are designed to articulate the attitudes and behaviours of staff engaged in distance education. They also express the expected behaviour in the distance education process, where there are two key parties involved - teachers and students.

When we talk about the teaching staff, they are expected to be responsible for distance teaching. They should adapt their work to ensure the professional development of all participants involved, and there should also be mutual understanding among those involved in distance learning.

According to Mohsen (2012), in distance education, in addition to common moral principles, following should also be taken into consideration:

- ▶ Principle 1: Commitment to the Student;
- ▶ Principle 2: Commitment to the distance education system;

- ▶ Principle 3: Commitment to the Profession and Commitment as a Professional Educator, and
- ▶ Principle 4: Ethical Commitment of Instructional Designers in Distance Education system.

For a code of ethics to be considered effective, it should be designed to influence the positive behaviour of all participants of online education. Therefore, the code should be understandable, detailed and easy to apply. The key to implementing ethical standards and overcoming the shortcomings of distance education is the creation of a relationship of trust between students, teachers and the educational institution that implements distance learning.

The importance of ethical behaviour in online teaching as a topic of concern has never been more relevant, particularly at a time when many classes in higher education are online because of the pandemic.

Five major reasons why ethical issues in online teaching are relevant include accreditation and compliance issues, the quality of the teaching and learning experience, equity in educational outcomes, student privacy concerns, and inclusivity issues.

Distance learning in pandemic conditions was a challenge for both students and teachers. The most common problems encountered by both groups were fatigue, exhaustion and technological problems. Suprabha Bakshi (2021) suggests that two basic reasons were discovered as the causes of fatigue are:

- ▶ Distancing
- ▶ Lack of resources

We address these next in addition to technological problems:

## Distancing

In the conditions of the pandemic, it was necessary to adapt to the new way of virtual studying in a very short period of time. However, this experience has shown that although e-learning has its advantages, such as less time spent on transportation, following classes from anywhere, and in the case of absence, later watching the lecture recording, on the other hand, entering the virtual world carries many dangers and traps. Unconsciously, we alienate ourselves, get used to a solitary way of life without personal communication with people and gradually lose contact with the real world.

Although the advantage of online learning is that a large number of students have access to various high-quality sources of information on the Internet, the knowledge they acquire in this way is often superficial, students become lazy and do not want to search for answers and solutions to problems independently. They also completely neglect writing and note-taking, resulting in their inability to write on their own. For teachers, the biggest challenge is the motivation of students, whom they often do not see in lectures because students turn off their web-cameras (which is their right because it enters the area of privacy protection), so personal contact is completely lost. These problems also raise serious ethical questions.

Living in the virtual world, students also turn to numerous sources of information available on the Internet. They usually cannot distinguish reliable from unreliable sources, and gradually stop using physical books.

Most teachers believe that distance increases the possibility of students cheating, with or without accomplices, on online tests and exams; either independently or with someone's help. They can

correspond by email or WhatsApp messages, which the lecturers have no way of intercepting. In some cases, students can also look up answers before taking the exam and share those answers with their peers. Despite the testing programs that detect and stop the use of search engines, they can look for answers on some other electronic media. Under these circumstances, ensuring the integrity of online assessment seems almost an impossible task. However, different strategies have been developed to help with this problem.

According to some authors (Mohsen, 2012), teachers can choose from three possible approaches to minimise cheating and plagiarism in online learning: the first is the “virtues approach”, which tends to support and develop a sense of honesty and responsibility in students so that they do not want to cheat. This approach can be applied to a part of students who already have a built-in sense of responsibility in their value system. The second is a preventive approach, which seeks to reduce students' opportunities to cheat. The preventive approach again provides various techniques and tools with which forms of cheating can be predicted and prevented. Finally, there is the so called “police approach”, which seeks to catch and punish those who cheat.

To conclude, cases of academic dishonesty in online learning can be significantly reduced with the great commitment of teachers, who should be well aware of all the challenges and create tests and exams in such a way as to prevent cheating, from creating questions with multiple choice items which require comprehension to project-based assessments which require not only knowledge but also creativity.

## Lack of resources

Motivating students to become active on the online platform, as we have already indicated, requires complex preparations and the creation of a variety of content as well as forms for lectures. During online classes, a large number of students do not want to respond to the discussion or participate actively. There are several reasons for these phenomena: sometimes students are tired or the lecture is monotonous, especially if they have online classes for a large part of the day. Then, if the students have not had the opportunity to meet in person, there is no connection between them, nor can close friendships develop in the virtual environment. Therefore, there may be a feeling of discomfort and even tension if the teacher fails in some way, reaching for means that encourage interactivity, to create a good atmosphere for learning.

There are two key approaches to help teachers overcome feelings of alienation and create a comfortable virtual learning environment - empathy and planning a well- structured lecture.

### A. Empathy and psycho-social support

Teachers need to build trust with their students, first listening to their problems in the virtual environment, worries and expectations and also, being open to communication, responding quickly to student inquiries via email, chat, or other media.

**B. Well-structured lectures** In order to overcome unpleasant situations and monotony, teachers should plan and structure their lectures well, using many online tools available in the virtual environment (video, quizzes, online games, interactive collaborative learning of small groups, etc.), so that students are willing to participate actively. Furthermore, it is necessary to accompany the theory with examples of good practice so that students can understand the material more easily and see the added value of the course.

## Technological problems

Technological problems can occur with teachers and their computers, but also with students, although the services of online platforms are constantly developing, so they should also be counted on. There are also barriers to online teaching that we have already mentioned, such as talking "into the void" while students have their cameras turned off. The teacher must maintain concentration and enthusiasm even though there is often no "feedback". This barrier is difficult to overcome, there is always a suspicion that some students are actually absent or doing something else and not listening to the lecture. The best strategy is to convince students that attending lectures is beneficial for them.

It is also necessary to take into account the diversity of students - while some are sociable, others are introverts, some are technologically knowledgeable, others are not, which limits their involvement in work. There may also be foreign students from other countries and regions, so problems such as different time zones or a bad internet network may occur. In such cases, it is good to overcome various difficulties by making it possible to record lectures that students can watch later.

## Resources



- ▶ [Discussing Ethical Issues in Online Teaching](#) (Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2023)
- ▶ [The Good, the Bad, and the Ethical Issues of Online Education](#) (Monella, 2021)
- ▶ [Ethical issues of educators and students in online learning](#) (Bakshi, 2021)
- ▶ [Ethics principles in distance education](#) (Mohsen, F. F. (2012).
- ▶ [Ethics and Distance Education: Strategies for Minimizing Academic Dishonesty in Online Assessment](#), *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration* (Olt, 2002).
- ▶ [Academic Ethics?](#) (Passmore, 1984).
- ▶ [Perspectives on Positive Academic Ethics: An Introduction.](#) (Pecorari, 2021.)