An-Najah National University
E-learning Code of Ethics
2020-2021

Aauthors

Kifaya Sabbah, Kareema Naser, Mahasen Sehweil, May Juaidi,Yasmeen bu Much, Mohammed AL-qasim,Amal Z Sawalha

Supervised by

Dr. Saida Affouneh

Overview

Employing technology in teaching and learning is no more a matter of choice. After the pandemic of COVID-19, education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. Educational institutions have had to quickly adapt to the situation, as technology has become the only way to keep education running regardless of their capability or willingness to do so.

Transitioning from face-to-face to online teaching has raised significant challenges for the higher education community, and it has never been an easy task. These challenges include technology abuse, security breaches, cyberbullying, and so on. Such challenges stem from the newness of experience, lacking of knowledge and technical skills, or misuse. Most importantly, they stem from the absence of deterring moral values.

To resist the kinds of technological disruption and security breaches that we are now witnessing in education with online learning, I, being the instructor of the "Teaching Ethics" course for the PhD students in Teaching and Learning at An-Najah National University, assigned my students a final task for assessment in which they had to conduct analytical review of international e-learning codes of ethics, and then to adopt a scientific methodology to systematically prepare this code. The students worked hard with diligence and responsibility, following a scientific research methodology to prepare a preliminary document, then my student Kifaya Sabbah and I produced the final document. From that respect, I would love to thank all the expertise from the different Palestinian universities

who participated in reviewing the document, accepted to get interviewed, and participated in the workshop in which we presented the final document. I also would like to thank Dr. Yousef Sabbah for final revision and proofreading.

Special thanks are extended to my students in the "Teaching Ethics" course who presented a model of turning theoretical knowledge into productive practice and were so much active in addressing a contemporary issue without being only restricted to identifying and criticizing it. In other words, they have proven to be a practical example of the integration between learning and life context.

To conclude, Nations prevail as long as they preserve their morals. If their morals are gone, they perish.

Dr. Saida Affouneh

Deputy president for digitalization and eLearning,
Dean of the faculty of Educational Sciences and
Director of the E-Learning Center at An-Najah National University

Introduction

Education is considered the cornerstone of development, and a teacher is an essential element that achieves social enhancement and prepares a generation with ethical, emotional, and religious values. Indeed, a teacher with moral values affects the society even more than politicians and the military do; the teacher is capable of encouraging people, employing their powers, improving their skills, and investigating the human resources. According to Capli (2015), the most essential role of a teacher is an ethical one, which links an educational institution with the society, and which produced a human before producing a student. That's why a teacher's role in the society is a serious and exceptional one. Therefore, the teacher has to enjoy particular characteristics, which organizes his behaviour, maintains teaching a sacred profession, and promotes the role of teaching in achieving sustainable development (Deshach, 2014).

Based on what has been said so far, nations seek improving the teaching-learning process by employing technology for student-cantered learning model. E-Learning is one of the most important development in the world of technology enhanced teaching (Sa'eed, 2018). It is a method developed from distance learning, which promotes and facilitates learning at any place or time by using interactive networking techniques, and which uses the Internet to deliver 80-100% of the educational content. Melicherikova and Busikova (2013) define e-learning ethics as a code of conduct by virtue of which one can get education regardless of sex, nationality, ideology, or physical or mental disabilities. Principles of the code of ethical conduct in e-learning are represented in mutual respect, equity, tolerance, and goodwill. All the above create an ideal environment for learning and teaching, where each participating party knows his role, commitments, rights, and duties (Ng & Chuah, 2017).

E-learning requires improving individual's skills in using modern technologies. As a result, both positive and negative behaviours in using these techniques have appeared and many users have violated the ethical rules and legal constraints that regulate life (Al-Sayed, 2016). Various studies have shown that e-learning offers opportunities to act unethically more than traditional education does (Muhammad & *et al*., 2016). It is well known that one effective way to treat personal misuse in e-learning is making moral values an integral part of the technology-based educational process (Eftekhari, 2012). Capli (2015) believes the code of ethical conduct is required to control the educational process. Therefore, having a code of conduct is necessary for both teachers and students, and an educational code of ethics is one of the most important documents to produce.

Each country has its own code of conduct that meets the students' and teachers' needs. Some codes did not cover the topic of technology and learning whereas others did enrich their codes with topics related to technology and e-learning. The risks of using technology

increase, and parents get worried about their children. Hence, this document represents a guideline for teachers, faculty members and students. It explains to them all the tasks they are in charge of toward e-learning ethics.

Significance of the E-learning Code of Ethics

This document aims to introduce people to the ethical and behavioural constraints regarding e-learning by promoting its use in a proper way that guarantees safety and security for all the parties involved in the educational process. The document also raise the awareness of the significance of the confidentiality and maintaining privacy and intellectual property. It emphasizes on the idea that a teacher's role is not limited to deliver knowledge and managing the educational process in a way that fulfils its goals. Rather, it extends to be a role model in following these ethical constraints when treating any of the involved parties as well as the digital educational resources. Finally, the document makes students aware of the risks that appear in the virtual learning environment.

E-learning Code of Ethics

Vision

The e-Learning Code of Ethics is dedicated to upgrading the moral values in e-learning and the acts of users and stakeholders, controlling the virtual educational process in accordance with specific and comprehensive e-learning standards.

Mission

Preparing a reference for e-learning ethics. This document includes all stages of the educational process to produce an outstanding educational content that enhances student performance by virtue of clear and determined criteria to measure complying with ethics when developing and using e-learning systems.

Values

Honesty, Justice, Transparency, Responsibility, Accountability, Following the Bylaws and Privacy.

Terminology

Code of Ethics: A written document formulated by a professional body for the purpose of guiding practitioners, protecting clients, and maintaining the reputation of the profession. This document encompasses codes of conduct and the ethical standards related to the

institution. It is usually formulated on the basis of collaboration among practitioners, developers, and expert scientists (Shapira–Lishchinsky, 2020).

Profession Ethics: A group of principles and professional rules needed for achieving excellence and efficiency in practicing a profession (Thoker, 2017).

E-Learning: technology enhanced learning, which focuses mainly on producing the educational content, performing educational activities using Internet, digital devices, multimedia, and online platforms (Sitzmann, 2015).

Privacy: A concept concerned with controlling and protecting users' personal information and their private areas, and disallowing unauthorized access to them in order to protect that information from violation and users from any potential harm (Birnhack, 2010).

Cybersecurity: A group of measures designed to protect networks, programs, and data from different electronic attacks by unauthorized people, in order to preserve information security measures including confidentiality, integrity, and availability (Yatman *et al*, 2015).

Cyberbullying : A form of bullying or harassment using electronic means to harm others. It is done using cell phones, computers, or any other digital device (Englander *et al*, 2017).

Intellectual Property Rights: Rights given to individuals for their intellectual innovations. One is given exclusive right to use his innovation for a specified period of time, to relate it to himself or the one who represents him, and the right to determine those who benefit financially and intellectually (Renner, 2015).

Digital Equity: The ability of all individuals and groups to have the digital technology needed to fully participate in society, democracy and economy; in civil and cultural life; employment and life-long learning. Having such technology, also, helps them obtain the basic services needed (Willems *et al*, 2019).

Digital Content: Any content in the form of digital data, it could be a text, an image, or a video, and it includes scientific, economic, entertaining, literary, and administrative content on websites; electronic services; software, database, and open educational resources (ESCWA, 2012).

Ethical Practices

 Teachers' Responsibilities

 1. **Responsibility towards students:**

- Design and create educational content that reflects the curricula and the available technological resources, and avoiding inappropriate content to students' culture and beliefs.
- Effectively contact with students during the online office hours.
- Providing students with the necessary feedback regarding assignments and discussion forums.
- Treating students fairly and equally, and offering a healthy and psychologically appropriate educational environment
- Offering the necessary support for students regarding their various needs and encouraging self-learning

2. **Responsibility towards colleagues:**
   - Cooperating with colleagues in design of the e-learning content.
   - Trust colleagues, enjoy mutual respect, and be open to different viewpoints.
   - Professional integrity and avoiding violating colleagues' intellectual or personal freedom.
   - Offering professional, psychological, and technical support to colleagues, and encouraging those who are new in virtual learning environment.

3. **Responsibility towards Institution:**
   - Being familiar with the institution's regulations and policies regarding ethical acts, and complying with them.
   - Respecting publication rights and intellectual properties of the institution and being committed to them.
   - Maintaining the confidentiality of the institution's data and digital resources, and not sharing them without approval.

4. **Responsibility towards Society:**
   - Respecting religious, intellectual, political, cultural, and social beliefs of all community members and institutions in content, discussion and comments.
   - Ensuring greater transparency in dealing with local community institutions that support e-learning.
   - Establishing communication channels with the local community based on mutual trust to promote efficient participation in developing e-learning.

Security and Privacy

- Teaching staff and students have to protect their personal data, and avoid using them for irrelevant purposes or sharing them without prior approval.
- The educational institutions must raise awareness among its teaching staff and students of risks or bad practices resulting from violating security and privacy.

- It should be assured that the electronic content is free from whatever violates ethical, religious, cultural, or legal aspects.
- Making students' or colleagues' contact details available to each other, which result from creating private groups on social media platforms, must be avoided.
- Publishing the educational institution's security and privacy policy and applying it to control its systems.
- The institution should raise awareness of internet security risks, how to avoid them, and the safety measures followed. Such risks include harassment, extortion, fraud, and plagiarism.
- The institutions should offer tools and precautionary measures to protect users from the potential security risks and threats in the virtual environment.
- Announcing the names of authorities who are in charge of following up with any security violations or threats a student or teacher may face in distance learning.
- The institution should offer safe internet for e-learning users, students or teachers, in collaboration with internet services providers.
- Sources of data, files, or links exchanged between students and teachers must be checked before opening and operating them.
- Links of online lectures should not be shared in public pages and announcements in order to avoid intruders, and they should be protected with passwords with taking into consideration changing the passwords periodically.

Intellectual Property Rights

- Making individuals aware of their rights and duties pertaining intellectual property, publication, and license
- Publishing a clear policy regarding the property of the electronic content and virtual meetings recorded and produced by teachers and students.
- Respecting colleagues' and students' right to publish their intellectual innovations by virtue of electronic publishing policies accredited by the educational institution
- Investigating scientific integrity in documentation, use, and transfer.
- Publishing the policy of using and licensing platforms, and maintaining authors' rights.

Cyberbullying

- Raising awareness of the concept of bullying, its dangers, methods of dealing with it, and how to address it

- Avoiding verbal and moral blackmail, offensive or embarrassing comments in electronic forums.
- Avoiding defamation and personal disputes in conversation, and sharing offensive comments.
- Expressing opinions without violating others, and respecting different points of view.
- Establishing policies to exclude abusive users from the electronic forums and virtual meetings.
- Avoiding publishing any inappropriate or embarrassing information, photos, or videos of colleagues or students.
- Avoiding discriminatory and hate discourses, false accusations, defamation, humiliation, ridicule, extortion, or alliance against others.
- Making sure the language of speech used, be it spoken or written, in the simultaneous and asynchronous virtual environment is appropriate, and morally and socially acceptable.

Information Access Rights

- Capacity Building of e-learning users in educational institutions.
- Verifying the information and decisions made by educational institutions regarding e-learning and their sources before publishing them in order to avoid rumors.
- Offering open platforms capable of hosting educational resources to guarantee the continuity of their availability.
- Offering flexible educational content for teachers and students and ensuring they have access to it at any place or time.
- Offering various alternatives of digital educational resources.

Digital Equality

- Ensuring equal access to the internet and platforms and the educational content among teachers and students.
- Ensuring that teachers equally have the technical and teaching skills needed.
- Promoting effective and innovative use of technology.

- Contributing to enhancing the quality of services offered by the internet.
- Taking into consideration students of limited income and marginalized places where no internet connection is available.
- Considering equality in designing the educational content so that it meets all students and takes into account individual differences.
- Considering the needs of people with physical and psychological disabilities when designing the content.
- Providing students with feedback on their works and with the assessment criteria of the activities to guarantee a justice assessment.

Partnership and Cooperation in E-learning Managements

- Partners' ethical commitment in the learning-teaching process to offer a mutual online environment.
- Cooperating in improving the online educational content and bringing forward development proposals.
- Contribution of the educational institution to bridging digital divides in collaboration with localities by offering free computer laboratories provided with internet and open to all students and employees, especially in remote and marginalized areas.

Accountability

- Students and teachers alike should consider transparency, objectivity, reliability, and responsibility during distance and e-learning.
- Students and teachers are subject during distance and e-learning to academic, administrative, and judicial accountability in case they violate e-learning ethical rules regarding privacy, intellectual property, bullying, etc.
- Academic control committee/ Academic Discipline Committee is entitled to follow appropriate administrative procedures against those who violate the code of conduct via educational platforms and other related websites.
- Anyone who violates the code of conduct has the right to appeal against the administrative procedures taken by the academic control committee to defend himself with solid evidence.

Methodology

This document is produced by a group of students from the "Teaching Ethics" course in the PhD Program in Teaching and Learning under the supervision of Dr. Saida Affouneh, the course teacher, as one of the tasks assigned to the students to complete this course. The students followed a systematic scientific methodology and reviewed the analysis and study of theoretical literature to extract and conclude the general themes of this document. To apply that, many studies have been reviewed to extract the main themes and place them in a Palestinian context. Then, personal interviews have been conducted with e-learning experts in Palestinian universities. Besides, we drafted a preliminary document that included most important fields and standards, and it was then refereed by experts and specialists in the e-learning. Further, a survey has been conducted to find out how much university students' and teaching staff' need to prepare such a document and the difficulties they face during the e-learning. Finally, to present the document in its final and current form, a workshop was held to present the document draft in order to get feedback from the participants who included experts, specialists, interested faculty members, and students from higher education institutions.

Conclusion

This document represents a reference framework for educational bodies in higher education institutions to be followed by teachers and students during e-learning, which has become the only link between them, especially during the pandemic of COVID-19.

Also, this document represents the only resource that teachers can refer to in order to know how to fulfil their duties towards their students, whereas, for students, it represents an opportunity to continue their learning in the proper way. Since all students and teachers spend their time in e-learning, it has emerged an urgent need to provide them with a safe and encouraging e-learning environment that includes the standards of ethical security, set by standards of the e-learning profession ethics' document, and guarantees safety for all students and teachers. The international experiences that we used and benefited from in preparing this document, played a fundamental role in identifying the challenges, risks and threats facing e-learning, as well as the effective methods of avoiding and addressing them.

Disseminating this document contributes to reducing and limiting stress among students and teachers resulting from using technology during distance learning. Also, it increases ethical and educational competence in the digital environment. All that controls the teaching-learning process, creates balance between reliability and quality in managing this process. The document is also considered a reference for explaining behaviours of the parties and partners involved in the teaching-learning process, which evokes a feeling of cooperation, belonging, and responsibility among them for applying its articles. Disseminating the document provides explanations for students' and faculty members'

behaviours in the virtual environment in accordance with the e-learning's ethical values that are agreed upon socially, legally, academically, religiously, and educationally.

We wish you a very safe online learning experience

Acknowledgment

References:

Abu Al-Hajj, Majdi Fatthi, Harb Khalaf (2018). Teachers' Compliance with the Teaching

    Profession Ethics in the Directorate of Education in University and Its Relation to the Low Performance of Secondary-Level Students, Journal of Educational Sciences, (45)

Ben Saleem, Nayfeh Abed (2014). Ethics of First-Stage University Students of Sultan

   Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman in Using Internet, and Employing Them Positively in Education, King Fahd National Library, 20(1), 240-306.

Basheeshi Waleed, Makhlaj Saleem (2018). Ethics of Teaching Profession and Their

   Impact on the Quality of Higher Education Outputs in Accordance with the Viewpoint of the Teaching Staff, University of Djelfa, Institute of Science and Technology of Physical and Sports Activities, Algeria.

Radwan, Abdulrahman Abu Al-Majd (2014). A Proposed Expectation of Awareness-Raising of Socio-

   electronic Communication Ethics for University Students: Field Stud, Journal of College of Basic Education, (56), 484-536.

Al-Sa'eed, Rida Mas'ad (2018). Blended Learning: Technological Introduction of the Development of

   Skills of Safe Use of Internet and Awareness of Contemporary Technology Ethics. Journal of Mathematical Pedagogy, 21(3), 6-39.

Al-Sayed, Yusri (2016). A Proposed Programme in Accordance with the Flipped Classroom Model for the Development of Concepts and Skills of Digital Domestication of Female Students of the Faculty of Education and Their Tendencies towards Complying with Its Ethics. The Arab Association for Education Technologies, (29), 105-229.

Ma'ari, Duha (2018). Societal Partnership and Its Role in Achieving Sustainable Development in the

   Palestinian Scoeity, Sustainable Development Conference in Light of a Changeable Environment. Nablus, Palestine.

.ESCWA (2012) .Status of The Digital Arabic Content Industry in the Arab Region. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western

Avni, A.; Rotem, A. (2011). Ethical literacy in the digital world from skill to worldview. An Initiative for

Birnhack m. (2010). Private space: the right to privacy between law and technology. Nevo Publishing.Ethics.

Bušíková, A., & Melicheríková, Z. (2013). ETHICS IN E-LEARNING - ERIC. International Association for Development of the Information Society.

Capli, F. A. (2015). The role of school principals in promoting teaching ethics among teachers from principals and teachers perspective in Makkah public schools (Unpublished thesis). Umm Al Qura University, Saudi Arabia.

Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysisnull, United State.

Deshach, N. (2014). The Profession of Education, Ethics and the Role of Teacher. Journal of Research and Humanities, 8, 218-237.

Eftekhari, S. (2012). E-Learning and e-Ethics. The Eighth International Conference on eLearning for Knowledge-Based Society, 23-24 February, Thailand.

Eftekhari, Seyed Reza (2013). E-Learning and e-Ethics. Islamic Azad University – Gonabad Branch, Iran, The Eighth International Conference on eLearning for Knowledge-Based Society, 23-24 February 2013, Thailand

Englander, E., Donnerstein, E., Kowalski, R., Lin, C. A., & Parti, K. (2017). Defining cyberbullying. Pediatrics, 140(Supplement 2), S148-S151.

Gluchmanova, M. (2015). The importance of ethics in the teaching profession. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 17(6), 509-513.

Grifoll, J., Huertas, E., Prades, A., Rodriguez, S., Rubin, Y., Mulder, F., & Ossiannilsson, E. (2010). Quality Assurance of E-learning. ENQA Workshop Report 14. ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). Avenue de Tervuren 36-38-boite 4, 1040.

Mohammadi, A., Mojtahedzadeh, R., Asadzandi, S., & Rashidi, H. (2020). Devising ethical codes for e-contents in e-learning. Medical Journal of the Islamic Republic of Iran (MJIRI), 34(1), 91-94.