

VALUES AND ETHICS IN THE DIGITAL LEARNING SOCIETY

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Abstract

UNESCO declares Global Citizenship Education (GCED) as one of its responsibilities to empower learners of all ages and to become active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable societies (UNESCO). Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the digital/ e-learning is the need of the hour as a method of lockdown learning. In the context of our nation, NEP 2020 focuses on the idea of Digital India. In the aspects of digital learning, the concept of digital infrastructure, development of tools and platforms for online learning, creation of virtual labs and digital responsibilities are the attractions of the policy. There are many potential risks and dangers that should be addressed and wipe out in a digital learning society such as digital divide. This article tries to point out the value and ethical concepts of a digital learning society and the 'rationale' of the same.

Key Words : Global citizenship education, digital learning, digital divide

Introduction

The digital learning describes a set of technology-mediated methods that can be applied to support student learning. It includes elements of assessment, tutoring, and instruction (Wheeler, 2012). The philosophy of digital learning holds the idea of 'equity and quality education' for all. But it has some adverse effects while practicing. The digital divide, academic fraud, ethical misconduct is some of them. However, in a digital learning society the value and ethical perception addresses the barriers in some extent. Ethics refers to norms of conduct regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviours within a society or community -not necessarily from a legal perspective, but from a human or cultural perspective (UNESCO, 2015). The word 'value' has Latin origin, comes from the word 'valere', meaning be worth.

This article tries to explain the philosophical questions related to values and ethics in a digital learning society. It also attempts to give suggestions to foster values and ethics in a digital learning society through proper pedagogical techniques.

Objectives

This article is organized with the following objectives :

1. To point out the values and ethics of a digital learning society
2. Identify the problems/barriers in inculcating values and ethics in a digital learning society
3. To suggest interventions for making 'bonding' / attachment in a digital learning society

Value and ethical perception of a digital learning society

Values and ethics should not be taught directly to students (UNESCO, 1991) as some students may be sensitive and react in different ways. The values of a digital learning society can

be divided into three. Values associated with values of education, values of digital/e-learning and societal values. Ethical considerations in e-learning are derived from both communication ethics and instructional ethics (Toprack, Ozkal et.al, 2010).

The expected behavioural patterns and practices that appropriate to the users in a digital learning platform is termed as communication ethics. The instructional ethics indicates the morals and values to be followed by both the learner and the facilitator during academic transactions. It includes academic integrity, digital motivation, strategies to address different learning styles and so on.

History of inheritance of gap in technological advancements in educational perception

Prior to 20th century, the innovation of printing press is considered as a technological advancement in sharing text based resources. In the last two decades the technology enhanced and online learning has become very popular. The fact is that not all members of society have equal access to the printed resources when printing press was introduced. It means, some members of the society were marginalized due to lack of reading skills, in affordability to purchase printed resources and so on. This technological advancement and its societal effects are also inheritable since there is gap in the access of all technological advancements. One of today's manifestations of social inequality is a result of the advancement of information and communication technologies and the gap between those who have access to those tools and those who do not, more commonly referred to as the digital divide (Cruz, 2020).

Significance of values and ethics in the digital learning contexts

The equity and quality education for all is the philosophy of digital learning. Its aim is to facilitate learning through technological tools within learner's time pace. It serves as a substitute for traditional classroom setting. Moreover, it offers education with fewer space or time limitations. Education through digital platforms means, discrimination against age and race is almost non-existent, the record keeping much easier and discipline problems kept to a minimum (Njeng & Fourie, 2010). Specifically, digital learning is an umbrella term that has a global outlook for the access of education. Therefore, it should inculcate and foster the global citizenship values among all the stakeholders. The global citizenship learning is a form of learning to understand the interconnection and inter relationship between different communities and cultures. It should make aware of how to address and respect the diversity. Therefore, it is the urgency of the hour to develop constructive and creative methods, strategies and pedagogic practices to facilitate learning on track with a globally digitalized society.

Values and ethics of digital learning society

The world's largest educational and scientific computing society, Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) has developed code of ethics for online or digital learning.

1. Contributing to society and human well being
2. Avoiding harm to others
3. being honest and trustworthy
4. Honouring the property rights such as copyrights and patents

5. Giving proper credit for intellectual property
6. Respecting the privacy of others
7. Honouring confidentiality

The issues on communication ethics in digital or e-learning learning is due to psychological distance (Gearhart, 2008). The instructional ethics requires granting educational opportunities to anyone on an equal basis, disregarding nationality, gender, ideological differences or mental /physical disabilities (Toprack & Ozkanal, 2010). Schultz (2005) states ethical issues arise when different interests of individuals conflict and thus there is need for a higher level of principles that are fair to the rights of all concerned.

Therefore, ethical code can be defined as the code of conduct to be practised by the learners and instructors in a digital platform. The institutions should have the responsibility to develop guidelines for digital learning. Every institution should take measures to inform the users about the rules and regulations based on ethical conduct. Through proper guidelines and motivation students must be encouraged to be aware of academic integrity, intellectual property rights, plagiarism and so on. Therefore, the encouragement and enhancement for digital literacy and digital equity access must be recommended and implemented in the governmental level through policy making, programmes and constitutional provisions.

Barriers to be addressed in the value and ethical aspects of a digital learning society

According to Gearhart (2010) netiquette (Internet ethics) issues are mainly related with psychological distance. She proposes some guidelines to be developed by the institutions to act against ethical issues in the digital learning and to rectify the academic fraud. The main aim of digital learning is to wipe out all the disparities. But, the issues such as academic fraud, plagiarism, breaking the confidentiality, forwarding one's e-mail to the third party, and citing or paraphrasing without acknowledgement may arise due to lack of proper physical disconnection.

Failure to address the diversity and inability to balance the expectations of learners is another barrier that should be addressed in this context. It is the responsibility of the education institutions to prepare the related frame works and monitoring them. This is crucial for both the successful functioning of the system and meeting the expectations of the users (Toprak&Ozkanal, 2010). The interest and individual differences of the learning community should be the necessity of the situation. During the classroom interaction there must be creative measures from the side of instructor. It will help in to prevent a chance for personal challenges from the sides of participants.

Digital divide is the most important and less addressed challenge in the new technology advanced education context. Advancing digital equity was presented as a wicked challenge, a challenge that is complex even to define, much less address (Alexander, et al., 2019). In a digital learning society, the institutions should be responsible to ensure and encourage all the users to be in tune with the material and ethical access of Information and Communication Technology.

Suggestions to make bonding in a digital learning society

Hawkes (2006) informs suggestions to foster bonding in a digital learning society in two aspects during the course interaction process. They are

1. between the instructor and the learner in the form of motivational messages.
2. between learners
 - A. on the content and protocol of the course
 - B. on societal exchange

Hawkes's suggestions indicate the quality of interaction and its ethical and psychological aspects during the course time. The ethical misconduct such as academic fraud and course integrity can be taken into account while considering the success of a course. By enhancing digital motivation access and the proper monitoring of the learners, facilitators and institutions can meet the ethical nature of digital learning to some extent.

To address learner diversity a digital learning society should respond to different learning styles. Besides individual differences, special needs of the learners such as disabilities need to be taken into consideration (Khan, 2005). Addressing different learning styles aims the instructors, course designers and moderators to be sensitive towards individual differences.

Digital divide is not a new form of inequality but rather exacerbates previously existing inequalities within society (Van Dijk, 2005). He mentions not only the digital disparities but also all kinds of disparities such as regional, gender, socio-economic, demographic and so on that are prevailed in the society. He tries to point out that the gap becomes wider as a result of these digital divide.

Conclusion

The practice of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) should indicate the ethical nature of digital equity. This should include material and psychological access of technological advancement. The instructors and curriculum developers must have a thorough knowledge in addressing different cultures and communities. As long as computers and internet continue to have a central role in our personal and professional lives, students who have not acquired basic skills in reading, writing and navigating in a digital landscape will find themselves unable to participate fully in the economic, social, and cultural life around them (OECD,2015). It means inequality in education remains as an issue that should be again addressed by further researches that highlights the ideas to respond against all disparities in the ethical and material access.

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