

COVID-19 - Opportunity for online education: Do not forget the ethical considerations in teaching learners

Sir,

The new infectious disease of COVID-19 has been introduced as a pandemic because it has spread all over the world and has infected many people with different intensities and prevention is one of the best strategies to control COVID-19.^[1] Regarding of prevention, by creating social constraints to reduce the spread of COVID-19, condition has been provided for progress in a variety of field, including distance education, so that the COVID-19 threat has become an opportunity to promote online education also increased the use of online evaluations. Distance learning can be done without time and space barriers as this type of training has been reported to be useful in the COVID-19 era due to its accessibility and convenience.^[2] Therefore, the education even in medical sciences continues and has not been interrupted in the COVID-19 outbreak.

On the other hand, online education has many advantages, including the concurrent use of several learning methods, more time for interaction and discussion, creating learning chance through peers, providing more opportunities for introverted and shy people to talk, the ability to save and browse files taught, making it easier to get feedback from students.^[3,4] Therefore, in order to use the most of the benefits of online education, optimal conditions must be provided in distance learning environments. In this regard, learner moral considerations have a particular importance and should not be neglected and should not be focused only on the transfer of knowledge. However, when the word ethic is used in online education, prevention of cheating considered to be while ethics is not just about controlling cheat.^[5] Although there is a possibility of cheating in online education similar to face-to-face education.

To reduce cheating, various strategies have been proposed because learners must have the same conditions. Recommended strategies to prevent cheating include; use of connection systems by providing usernames and passwords just before the start of the evaluation, remind the institution's policies in dealing with cheating, randomizing the order of questions, using questions that require higher plane of thinking and analysis skills, using online control services during the

assessments, requesting more class assignments during the semester and reviewing their process, requesting group assignments, reducing the use of multiple-choice questions and increasing the number of assessments.^[4-6]

However, educators should not pay attention only to reducing cheat in online training, while also need to attend to other ethical considerations to maintain learner dignity. Among the ethical considerations that should be considered; informing to learners about the behavioral and legal provisions of the educational institution at the beginning of each course, obtaining permission from learners to share their drafts and personal information, considering the digital divide the use of educational media due to physical and cultural differences of learners, the use of key media parts in the design of e-learning environments due to differences in internet bandwidth for equal access, provide a glossary for learners, fair evaluations, reduce situations dishonesty and try to create the same condition between learners.^[7-9] Ethical considerations should also be observed in the preparation of electronic content, for example, the protection of the intellectual property rights of the content designer, mentioning the date of production and updating, obtaining permission for images used in the preparation of the content by mentioning the source and attention to ethical and legal provisions in content creation.^[10]

Although e-learning is not new, however, with the emergence of the COVID-19 outbreak has made the conditions for remote training to be used more than before, so this opportunity should be used and the way of providing virtual training and its shortcomings be checked and eliminated, until in case of prolongation of COVID-19 or other crises be provided with better quality. Therefore, one of the things that should not be neglected is maintaining the moral considerations of learners in online education, because, in the studies done in the present pandemic, less attention has been paid to it, except cheat. Hence, this letter was written with the aim of highlighting and reminding the topic of ethical considerations in online education.

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