Building an Ethical Framework for E-learning Management System at a University Level

Dr. Ahmad Qasim AlHamad, Dr. Khaled Issa Al Qawasmi,
Zarqa University, Zarqa, Jordan
aqd14@yahoo.com, kqawasmi@zu.edu.jo

Asma Qasim AlHamad
Dammam University, Dammam, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
asma_toubassy@yahoo.com

Abstract
The use of the e-learning systems at a university level has increased and received wide acceptance all over the world. The academic community at higher educational organizations has recognized the potential advantages of using e-learning system to enhance the learning process. Despite this high academic interest in the subject there are some important issues that have not yet been tackled. At the top of these important issues comes the ethical debate [1]. Embedding ethical standards in the e-learning process can help enhance the learning process, failing to address ethical issues in the e-learning environment may minimize the effectiveness of e-learning implementations and therefore decrease the value perception of these systems. The main aim of this paper is to propose an ethical framework to be used by both students and tutors in Learning Management Systems at a University level. The ethical framework can help in establishing common ethical standards in e-learning environment among both tutors and students.

Keywords: LMS, Privacy, Cheating, Copy right, Creative commons, Standardization.

Introduction
Learning is essentially a social process, which needs to take place in an environment where learners can share resources, communicate with each other and their tutors, and provide mutual support. E-learning perceived as the use of electronic devices or information technology IT for the purpose of education. The term “E” is most likely but not limited, implies the e-learning process to be conducted over the Internet. But it could imply also the use of e-learning in distant learning or in Campus College [2, 3, and 4]. It further could be include different aspects of technology that encompasses the use of mobile devices or smart devices on what is known as mobile learning (m-learning) or the new term called smart learning (s-learning).

E-learning transforms teaching and learning relationships, opportunities and outcomes. For example, a change in the education at a University level which is brought by the use of technology concerns the roles of the players. Basically, the use of IT will require new skills to be acquired by both tutors and students which consequently will mean a transform in the traditional roles [3]. Another ethical debate that will be of interest in any e-learning system is the traditional sort of interaction and communication between teachers and learners that will be Affected by adopting the Information Technology.. The teacher's role changes from that of the authority to that of the mediator, of the moderator of discourse [5].

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Many educators want to take advantage of the benefits offered by Internet and new technologies like e-learning systems to support their teaching activities [6]. One of the threats that can affect e-learning is the ethical issues, so, there is a need to propose ethical polices and standards to be embedded in e-learning systems in order to support students to participate in e-learning systems and to help tutors control the students’ behavior in the e-learning systems.

No ethical standards or procedures are ideal for all the so many e-learning environments available. But an ethical criteria or framework has to be chosen so that a one can decide the best ethical practices and strategies for the e-learning environment available on his/her organization. Even if there are so many common standards that could be shared, the ethical framework to be chosen should take into account the differences between different cultures. The one to be recommended in this paper also is not new; part of it is being used in some form in many colleges and universities worldwide. A list of ethical practices proposes an ethical framework to be implemented within any learning management system available at a University level. The issues of cheating, plagiarism, and copyright violation are to be discussed and considered within the proposed framework.

**Learning Management Systems**

As more e-learning systems become available for online education, educators and other professionals try to get the most value and benefits from the application of these systems in the teaching process. Many Universities and higher education institutions have implemented Learning Management Systems to manage online learning and teaching by providing support to staff and students to improve the speed and effectiveness of educational processes and communication among learners as well as between staff and students. Example of e-learning systems which are used in these universities and educational institutions are: Moodle, WebCT, Eduwave, and Renzoli. Some are commercial and some are open source [7]. A good e-learning system usually includes: course material, assessment facilities, chat and conferencing software and management tools for student administration and monitoring, various learning styles accommodation, should develop written and oral communication skills, should clarify the role of teachers as facilitators and mentors, should support teamwork experiences, encouraging peer reviews, develop interpersonal communication skills when students are separated geographically, support the entire educational process when they are separated both geographically and temporally, and handling time management, including meeting deadlines [8].

The general features of a good delivery system are divided into three main headings: The first is student features, which includes: course contents, course conferencing system, synchronous communication or chat, e-mail, notebook, white board, objective tests, student presentation areas, grading information and calendar. The second is tutor features, which include progress tracking, timed automatically graded quizzes and student management. The third is design features, which includes a standard interface, customization and site management features [7].
Moodle is one of the well-known e-learning systems which are used in many academic institutions worldwide. Moodle is an open source course management system (CMS) that universities, community colleges, K-12 schools, businesses, and even individual instructors use to add web technology to their courses [4]. Reference [9] mentioned that “more than 30,000 educational institutions are using Moodle all over the world to deliver online courses to supplement the delivery of traditional face-to-face courses”. The word Moodle stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment, which is mostly useful to programmers and education theorists [10]. Because it is being widely used in many universities worldwide, it is used in the ethical framework followed in the next section as an example of those Learning Management Systems used at a University Level.

**Proposed Ethical Framework**

Students and tutors initially register to the e-learning system (MOODLE) through the e-learning unit or IT center available at the University; the IT professional’s assigns usernames and passwords for both students and tutors with different privileges. In the proposed ethical framework this happen through the first stage (MOODLE Registration). Because of the different privileges that assigned to students and tutors, the system is then divided into two parts. The first part for students which encompasses an ethical standard agreement that has to be introduced to them. It could be part of the privacy agreement policy or any other way like adding a file (PDF or Word) to the system to explain the expected ethical behavior expected from students during their participation to the system.

![Proposed Ethical Framework](image)

Figure 1. Proposed Ethical Framework

The students then practice these standards through the course production. Tutors firstly also encompass the same stage (Ethical standards agreement) like students but with different ethical standards. Then they should practice these ethical standards while producing the content for
students. During these stages a tutor monitoring for applying the ethical standards could be conducted. This can be achieved by a third party (could be the quality assurance department) or even self-monitoring to ensure that the standards have been followed. Also the same process can be done for students and can be achieved through tutors themselves. After that, a review for standards can be done by different teams to create the final ethical standards recommendations. The introduced framework is a revised framework introduced by [11].

Examples of Bests Ethical Practices

Different examples could be introduced for best ethical practices; the following are some examples that can be refined after getting feedback from both tutors and students.

For Students

- In general terms, ethics is about ‘what people should do’. Set the rules first; put them in a clear way. Encourage students to participate in the online discussions and chat groups, the tutor can advice them about the type of language that should be used in these discussion groups; advice them to choose the suitable words when they discuss any topic related to the course. Multi-cultural students can easily found in an e-learning environment, especially in distant learning. These differences should be respected.

- Intellectual property, plagiarism, and copyrights violations are important issues in unethical behavior. Tutors should teach students on how to use citation and quotations to the material being referenced. Training could be given to them how on how to use copyright materials from online resources and within the online course.

- Don’t do everything online, require students to take some paper-based exams, at least could be the midterm or the final exam, also assign when possible, homework frequently within the course and give some online short quizzes during the chat sessions”.

- When you are designing an online test that contains multiple choices, T/F, short answer or essay type questions, the tutor can make the online test available for only specific period of time, could be one day. Also, the tutor can limit the time assigned for the test, and can assign time for each question if possible. In addition, the tutor can create an exam questions database, sometimes called ‘questions bank’ let the system to post different exams to different students, make it random. Finally, the tutor can if possible, measure the time needed for answering each question by students, this may give an implication if the student has got a help or not (to prevent cheating) [12].

Don’t rely only on online quizzes, tests and exams to measure the performance of students. Consider alternatives; Use several methods of measuring performance, mastery and skills. For example, give the students group tutorials.

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For Tutors

When discussing the ethical issues on the e-learning environments, not only students are targeted to apply to them the ethical procedures, but also tutors have to practice them within the e-learning system, the following are some recommendations that may help tutors to best adopt ethical implementation before getting involved with any online course.

- Privacy is a major issue, tutors should ensure students’ privacy, all information about students’ records or what is being mentioned in the chat groups should remain secure and protected.

- In the case of acquiring news skills to tutors, training should be given in a way that takes care of differences in capabilities. No tutor should be forced by his university to practice the new experience of having online courses, especially for those who are face-to-face oriented, the university can encourage them to use the system, the university can explain the benefits of using e-learning systems, also they may give some rewards for those who like to participate or sometimes it can give training courses.

- Tutors should guide students to online resources and if they want to integrate any material to their online course, then they should have to ask for permission, and this will lead to deal with copyright issues, for example, this can be achieved by asking for a “Creative Commons” License which gives the user many choices for the material to be used like Attribution, non-commercial, no derivative work, and share alike [13]

- Tutors should ask students and have permission from them before conducting any new study or research or exposing them to any new system, also they should ask for a permission to introduce any questionnaire to them, because students should be aware of the fact that their online course understanding outcomes may vary according to that, for example if a new technology is to be integrated to them, students should accept to participate.

- Teach students how to use citations and quotations to the material being prepared. Also, teach them how to ask for permission to quote and use copyrighted materials from online resources and within the online course.

Conclusions and Future Works

Integrating e-learning systems have enhances the teaching process but does not come with no side effects. It created new challenges and issues around like ethics. Failing to address these challenges may affect the quality of learning outcomes achieved by students. Introducing ethical polices and standards can help in strengthen these e-learning systems.

Future work may concentrate in conducting surveys to apply the proposed ethical framework into the Learning Management System (MOODLE) available at the university and trying to evaluate the system for the benefit of both students and tutors.

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