

# WHAT DO LEARNERS AND INSTRUCTORS OF ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THINK ABOUT ETHICS IN E- LEARNING? : A CASE STUDY FROM ANADOLU UNIVERSITY

## **Assist. Prof. Dr. Elif Toprak**

Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty

E-mail: [etoprak1@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:etoprak1@anadolu.edu.tr)

## **Res. Assist. Dr. Berrin Ozkanal**

Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty

E-mail: [bozkanal@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:bozkanal@anadolu.edu.tr)

## **Instructor Secil Kaya**

Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty

E-mail: [secilk@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:secilk@anadolu.edu.tr)

## **Res. Assist. Sinan Aydin**

Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty

E-mail: [snaydin@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:snaydin@anadolu.edu.tr)

## **Abstract**

Ethics in education means, granting educational opportunities to anyone on equal basis; disregarding nationality, gender, ideological differences or mental/physical disabilities. Through this perspective, online learning environments have an important potential, owing to their nature to reach international audiences. Considering the number and diversity of students in e-Learning environments, policies balancing different expectations and studying how the participants perceive ethics in online learning environments are important. During online courses, like in the face-to-face classes; students have to show respect to their instructors and course mates. Taking ethical principles into consideration in e-Learning leads to (1) respect and tolerance among participants, (2) civil relations and interaction based on pre-determined rules.

Starting with this argument, the purpose of this study is to analyze the opinions of Anadolu University's Distance English Language Teachers Training (DELTT) Program instructors and 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> year students that take online courses. In line with the purpose of the study, (1) learner diversity (2) behavioral and legal regulations are parameters chosen for surveying the opinions of instructors and learners about ethical issues in the online learning environment they participate. Following the statistical analysis on survey results, the correlation between the opinions of the students and the instructors, as regards ethics in online learning environments are discussed. The research results are expected to shed light on discussion about ethics in free & open educational resources and

**Keywords:** Ethics, e- Learning, ethics in e- Learning.

## **What is Ethics?**

Ethics is about 'what people should do' (Schultz, 2005:1). So it is about the concerns on morality, value and justice. It is evaluated regarding the goodness of things and justness of institutions. The important point is ethical questions arise, when different interests conflict and there is need for higher level of principles to solve the conflict in the name of justness. What is justice then? (Schultz,2-3) It means being fair to all concerned through utilizing fair principles. These principles are fair in the sense that all members of the society accept them as binding in order to solve the conflict of interests. So the principles are shared by a community, for every one's well being. Even for those members that make sacrifices. Values are also specific to individuals and groups. We believe value of an e-Learning environment (whether it performs its functions well or not) depends on the general evaluation of the instructors and learners. So it becomes an ethical question whether institutions are just or not. When we think about ethics in information technologies and specifically distance education (online learning environments); speed of access to information becomes an issue of concern. Storage is another issue (Schultz, 4-6) and it is related with the availability of information and universal connectivity through the Internet.

The study of ethics is related with the way human beings systematize and defend "right" and "wrong", in a particular cultural context (Lengel, 2004, 85). Who is to say what is right and wrong? Higher level principles set by the institutions, that take different interests into consideration, can settle conflicts. Among different levels of higher principles, Kohlberg specifies punishment and obedience; interests of only oneself; conformity for social approval; law and order; social contract based on utility and universal principles. The principles that are determined for an e-Learning environment match with stages 1 and 2 as social norms that are prior to self interest and with level 3, social approval and 4<sup>th</sup> level which is obeying rules for preserving integrity and harmony (Schultz, 7).

Ethical relativism, the approach that all ethical views are equally good, makes social cooperation impossible (Schultz, 14). It is critical that there is someone to say what is right and wrong. This authority should have the most overall view. In a learning environment also, there is a social contract about norms and expectations (like certification). Having ethical principles means cooperative and rational principles are higher priorities when compared with self interest (Schultz, 16). Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher David Hume, it is believed that ethics emanates from sympathy felt among human beings (Schultz, 19). This is why ethics in a learning environment means multicultural understanding, tolerance and civility. For evaluating the justness of institutions we have our own values, individual ideas of right and wrong. John Rawl's social contract theory assumes that a justly ordered society is one, where individuals freely decide to obligate themselves (Schultz, 23-24). According to the theory, the inequalities must be overcome and the last advantaged members must be considered. Here again, certain criteria have to be set, in order to determine whether all inequalities are solved or not. According to Anadolu University's Guide for Science Ethics, the term stands for the principles in making scientific studies and research (2002). There are principles widely agreed upon in the field of research ethics. Instructional ethics has a special place since teachers bear the responsibility of teaching and applying ethics in their fields (Haynes, 2002, 16-17).

## **Instructional Ethics and Student Diversity**

Teaching is based on moral and ethical principles (Haughey, 2007: 139-140). Some instructors are opposed to rigid rules and regulations. Macfarlane says that ethics that depend on detailed codes of rules and regulations are restrictive. Prescriptive codes take a professional's autonomy away. This also ends critical thinking about one's own practice. Starratt sees ethics as a study of the underlying beliefs, assumptions, principles and values that support a moral way of life. Then ethical leadership means acting according to

principles, beliefs, assumptions and values of the leader's 'espoused' system of ethics. It is relative to set such systems and the moral ideal is difficult to achieve. These authors argue that, using codified solutions, rigid rules does not lead to the real solution to the ethical problems that higher education institutions face (Haughey, 141). Students generally do not accept their responsibility to get beyond self interest while studying a course (Haughey, 142). Instructors and the institution need to determine their own ethical responsibilities in the design and provision of the DE program, considering the contexts the students find themselves in and be fair regarding course load, student performances. The expectations must be clear to students at the beginning of a course. Student evaluations on the instructor's performance are critical as well. Macfarlane says emotion as a legitimate part of ethics is neglected, meaning empathy and compassion. But what are the boundaries to personal perceptions then?

Starratt names three virtues: Responsibility, authenticity, presence. Students must accept their responsibilities regarding the courses they take, participate authentically, which means caring for the other members of the learning community. Problems arise since students are not aware of their ethical responsibilities (Haughey, 146). At the very beginning, the institution must determine what it expects from the instructors and students. On the other hand, collaboration of different professionals may ease solving ethical issues since the combination of different experiences and values can lead to better decisions (Loui, 1999).

Hartman and Stefkovich (2005) have enumerated the following principles as code of instructional ethics for educational administrators:

1. Making the well-being of students, the fundamental value for all decision making
2. Honesty and integrity for fulfilling professional responsibilities
3. Protecting civil and human rights of all individuals
4. Obeying the local, state and national laws
5. Implementing the administrative rules and regulations of the affiliated institution
6. Pursuing appropriate measures to correct regulations that aren't in conformity with sound educational goals
7. Avoiding use of position for personal gains
8. Accepting the academic degrees of the accredited institutions only
9. Maintaining standards and making research for continuing professional development
10. Honoring all contracts until fulfillment or release (Evin, 2007, 111-112).

### **Ethical Applications in Online Education**

During the 1990s, online education has grown tremendously. Though the instructors may accept the moral basis of their profession, when it comes to teaching online, there may be other issues of concern different from those encountered in teaching face-to-face (Zembylas and Vrasidas, 2005, 61). As the Internet erases boundaries to education, there are new challenges for distance educators.

Khan classifies ethical considerations in e-learning as (2005: 293):

1. Social and political influence
2. Cultural diversity
3. Bias
4. Geographical diversity
5. Learner diversity
6. Digital divide
7. Etiquette
8. Legal issues

The issues related with the subject research are learner diversity and legal issues. An e-learning environment should welcome *learner diversity*, thus different learning styles. Other than these individual differences, special needs of learners such as individuals with disabilities (Khan, 298). Bearing in mind that learners have their own styles for meaningfully gathering and organizing information for learning purposes, and have different learning needs as regards their background, experience and expertise; the instructor, course designer and discussion moderator must be sensitive. Instructors should be innovative about involving diverse learners in e-Learning environments. They can motivate learners to be patient vis-à-vis each other and through mutual respect create a great learning experience (Khan, 299). For online courses, multiple instructional strategies and activities that cater to different learning styles should be used.

Digital divide underlines the importance of information accessibility in e-Learning environments. This is the gap between those who have access to the Internet and other information technologies and those who do not (Khan 300). The reasons may be economic, cultural, physical disabilities, geographic locations...Digital divide may occur even regarding the speed of the Internet services. Loading speeds vary with Internet connection speeds thus multi media elements essential to content, should be used. Researchers accept bandwidth and speed of access, among ethical concerns. Other inequalities may be, being disenfranchised by differences in language, gender, age, physical ability, race and ethnicity due to access and marginalization, as regards the use of computer mediated communication (Lengel, 2005, 87). For an e-Learning environment, *etiquette* provides the framework for civility of interactions, by providing standards of considerate behavior. Respect, patience are among these principles. In both a/synchronous communications, participants shouldn't attack each other personally (Khan: 301-302). In order to prevent this, rules must be determined for forums.

Institutions also should have e-Learning policies, guides on legal issues like preventive measures for privacy, plagiarism, copyright (Khan, 303). The institution should inform the students about whether it shall share their personal information, text dialogs or not. Private e-mails shouldn't be forwarded to third parties, without permission. Plagiarism is stealing one's writing and presenting it as if one's own (Khan, 304), without giving reference. Students must be informed and encouraged about backing up their ideas with others' point of views (Khan, 305). Copyright refers to intellectual property rights of materials developed by academicians (Khan, 306). Instructors and students must be sensitive and get the necessary permissions when need be.

## **Online Ethics**

### *Netiquette*

There is so much discussion as regards the question of ethics in communication. The area is new and controversial (Palloff and Patt, 1999, 43). Online ethics emanates from computer ethics and ethical implications of technology (Lengel, 2005, 85). The advent of computers has changed work environments of many professions including the methods utilized by teachers to educate their students. Communication channels have varied as well (Oz, 1994).

In order to understand online ethics, Code of Ethics developed by Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) may be investigated (Lengel, 86). ACM was founded in 1947 and is the world's largest educational and scientific computing society. For its 75.000 members from 100 different nations, ACM acts as a forum for exchanging ideas and information. ACM's Code of Ethics for online communication lists the general moral imperatives as (1) contributing to society and human well-being (2) avoiding harm to others (3) being honest

and trustworthy (4) being fair and taking action not to discriminate (5) honoring the property rights such as copyrights and patents (6) giving proper credit for intellectual property (7) respecting the privacy of others (8) honoring confidentiality (9) specific professional responsibilities (10) improving public understanding of computing and its consequences (11) accessing the computing and communication resources only when authorized to do so (12) articulating and supporting policies that protect the dignity of users and others affected by a computing system (Lengel, 86).

Normative ethics examines the choices people make and the values behind them, where the judgments about values are addressed (Gearhart, 3). Researchers are obliged to keep balance of maximizing the research benefits and minimizing the harms to the subjects concerned which lead to informed consent, protection of privacy and confidentiality. They should delineate the boundaries of private vs. public space on the Internet. They are faced with the ethical dilemma of keeping the anonymity of the subjects vs. the truthful reporting of the data (Gearhart, 4). This is then up to individual choices of the researchers based on their values. With an eye to netiquette, there are many breaches; like harassment, defamation, infringement of intellectual property rights. Users must review the guidelines developed by their institutions (Gearhart, 5), Internet service provider or resources they connect to. Netiquette issues are related with the psychological distance. During face-to-face interaction, one can see the results of inappropriate and unethical behaviors immediately. In case information technology is utilized in a way that does harm to others, this act feels less personal since the other person in the exchange is not generally seen or heard. Educational institutions can solve this issue in two ways: (1) set a policy that provides a model for students to follow and (2) involve technology ethics issues in the curriculum (Gearhart\_b).

Another important issue of concern is the copyright. This term refers to the legal right granted to an author, computer user, playwright, publisher or distributor to exclusive publication, production, sale or distribution of a literary, musical, dramatic or artistic work.

## **Online Ethics**

### *Academic Research*

Academic ethics isn't limited with research ethics, but is related with creating information, its transformation into technology, and finally dissemination including instruction. When we think in terms of ethical principles at universities; university administrations, academicians, instructors, students and technical personnel are all partners of academic ethics (Ortaş, 2007). This is an important responsibility shared in the cases of both face-to-face and distance education.

Academic fraud is an important issue with DE since it is a concern whether the distance student doing the work, assignments is indeed the student enrolled or not. Is the student cheating? Educational institutions should inform the students on collegiate ethics and academic honesty. Students coming from high schools do not understand these issues. Information about the following must be provided in distance program handbook/guide (Gearhart\_b):

1. Ethics of examinations
2. Use of sources on papers and projects
3. Writing assistance and other tutoring
4. Collecting and reporting data
5. Use of academic resources
6. Respecting the work of others
7. Computer ethics
8. Giving assistance to others

## 9. Adherence to academic regulations

There are many breaches of ethics with the Internet like harassment, defamation, infringement of intellectual property rights. The breaches may also occur unintentionally this is why users have to be made aware of policies. An institution's policy may involve the following (Gearhart\_b):

1. Attempting to hack into another computer
2. Using the institution's resources for personal gain
3. Sending threatening, obscene or harassing messages
4. Posting confidential material outside the institution
5. Repost messages without permission
6. Disruption or interference of network activities.

Each institution can prepare its own guideline for distance programs by considering different examples one can find on the web. It is important to keep in mind that in distance education, the student population is diverse. The policies have to be made accessible to students. They must be notified regularly.

'Providing information to the learners over and over again is critical. Everything must be spelled out in the syllabi and course web sites, assignments, examinations, how to use discussion boards, including netiquette used, how the instructor deals with plagiarism and cheating, how the instructor can be contacted and when/how assignments are to be submitted and so on.' Keeping an institution's policy ethical and current is a continuous process (Gearhart\_b).

Online interaction is important for distance learning researchers and instructors. They aim high quality online interactions for facilitation purposes (Hawkes, 231). There are two types of course interactions:

1. between instructor and learner in the form of motivational messages
2. between learners,
  - a. on the content and protocol of the course itself
  - b. on social exchange (Hawkes, 232).

Regarding the quality of the interaction, the ethical nature is important as well. Here, linguistic strategies may be used to compare and understand the ethical nature. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses can be utilized. Qualitative, text based analysis seems to offer more when compared with quantitative analysis, such as taking number and length of posted messages into consideration.

Due to the increasing use of the Internet and digital technology in distance education, owners of copyrighted works seek to protect their intellectual property rights (Odabasi, 2003). Intellectual property means copyright, patent, trademark, trade secret, Internet law (cyber law). The doctrine of fair use means, the privilege in others than the owner, to use the copyrighted material in a reasonable manner, without consent, notwithstanding the monopoly granted the owner (Odabasi, 215).

The ethical problems that may arise when preparing online courses are:

1. Course integrity problem (course approval and revision needed for quality control)
2. Advising problem (if information on the web does not match the catalog, this is an ethical problem of misrepresentation)
3. Intellectual property problem and academic freedom (syllabi reflect the personalities of the instructors, when a faculty changes a course content, who owns the property is an ethical debate\*. If you are an employee of the institution then the institution owns the property since you are hired and paid. On many campuses in the US, content belongs to the instructors, syllabi to the institution)

4. Succession planning problem (who is to monitor the original course integrity while preparing the online interpretation?) (McMahon, 211-212)

For generating win-win solutions, institutional collaboration is advised. Workshops, seminars about campus plagiarism policy etc. may help prevent ethical harassment.

### **Culture and Ethics**

Most online learners need frameworks adapted to their culture (Gunawardena, Wilson and Nolla; 761). Eastern cultures value silence, reserve and formality while western cultures place more emphasis on speech, self-assertion and informality. Cultural assumptions of different societies can affect interaction, spoken or written (761). Suggestions for multicultural learning environments are: 1. using a facilitator 2. avoiding ambiguity 3. communicating expectations 4. providing feedback 5. being sensitive to verbal nuances 6. building a relationship.

Culture affects how learners behave and learn. Instructors need to take three factors into consideration:

1. universal principles of learning
2. cultural differences (beliefs, expectations and values)
3. individual learning style preferences (764).

In terms of *cultural diversity*, the flexibility of e-learning to reach students from different parts of the society and globe in general is important. This creates a responsibility for appealing to different social, cultural, economic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. The diversity of cultures and learning styles should be recognized while designing e-learning environments (Khan, 2005: 295). One important point here is cross cultural communication between learners and academic staff or among students since there may be different expectations as regards the communication. According to Khan, a mean of risk management in design projects may be asking opinions of individuals from various cultures on a certain website and provide feedback. Here various cultures may denote distance learners from different countries but also different social groups according to different demographic properties such as gender, age, occupation, location. Thus, this is not an issue to consider only for international programmes. For example stories, examples specific to a certain country, occupational group should not be used in online courses. With the same mentality, examples that may be offensive for different genders and age groups should be avoided as well. This also applies to the symbolic and iconic representations that may be understood in different ways. One way to prevent such misunderstanding can be preparing a guide specific for the online course at hand.

### **Case-Study: Anadolu University Distance English Language Teachers Training (DELTT) Program**

Ethics in education means, granting educational opportunities to anyone on equal basis; disregarding nationality, gender, ideological differences or mental/physical disabilities. Through this perspective, online learning environments have an important potential, owing to their nature to reach international audiences. Considering the number and diversity of students in e-Learning environments, policies balancing different expectations and studying how the participants perceive ethics in online learning environments are important. During online courses, like in the face-to-face classes; students have to show respect to their instructors and course mates. Taking ethical principles into consideration in e-Learning leads to (1) respect and tolerance among participants, (2) civil relations and interaction based on pre-determined rules.

Starting with this argument, the purpose of this study has been to analyze the opinions of Anadolu University's Distance English Language Teachers Training (DELTT) Program instructors and 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> year students that take online courses. In line with the purpose of the study, (1) learner diversity (2) behavioral and legal regulations were the parameters chosen for surveying the opinions of instructors and learners about ethical issues in the online learning environment they participate. Following the statistical analysis on survey results, the correlation between the opinions of the students and the instructors, as regards ethics in online learning environments were analyzed.

## **DELTT**

DELTT Program is a four-year undergraduate program offered at Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty. This program is in accordance with Turkish Higher Education Council mandate of 1998 on teacher training programs of Education Faculties. The aim of this project is to meet the demand for English teachers in the primary and secondary schools.

First two years courses are designed to improve English language skills, the last two year courses are designed to develop students' professional skills. The program is initiated in 2000-2001 academic year. Today, the number of the students attending the program has reached to 8179 in 2006-2007 academic years.

DELTT Program is administered by two separate units which work in coordination. Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages is responsible for academic activities whereas students' affairs are organized by Open Education Faculty at Anadolu University.

3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year courses are supported with online courses in DELTT Program. These online courses aim to simplify students' learning process in parallel to the course books. In other words, online courses are the supportive material, not the core materials in DELTT. So there is no obligation for students about participation to these online courses.

## **Objectives of Research**

The main aim of this study is to determine the opinions of Anadolu University's Distance English Language Teachers Training (DELTT) Program instructors and 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> year students as regards ethics in online learning environments. In this respect, we should find answers to the following questions:

- What are the opinions of the instructors and students with regard to the learner diversity within the online courses?
- What are the opinions of the instructors and students with regard to the behavioral and legal regulations within online courses?

## **Population and Sample Group**

The population of the research is 2767 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and 3461 4<sup>th</sup> year students. The population for the instructors is 31 instructors for the 2006-2007 academic year. For the students studying in each province, 10 % of the total student numbers have been determined for addressing the survey. Data collection about the instructors' opinions was realized without sampling. In other words, all the instructors that form the population were included in the survey.



## Data Collection and Analyses

The questionnaire related to the opinions of learners and instructors of online learning environments about ethics in e- learning was used as the mean of data collection. For preparing the questionnaire, Badrul H. Khan's "Ethical Checklist" has been referenced with the permission of the author. In this sense, two different questionnaires were prepared for students and instructors. Both of the questionnaires have two main sections: (1) learner diversity, and (2) behavioral and legal regulations.

The students questionnaire was uploaded to DELTT's web site and was answered by 250 students. Instructor questionnaires were sent to 31 instructors' e-mail addresses and 23 of the questionnaires were returned. Following the statistical analysis on the subject data, the opinions of the students and the instructors as regards ethics in online learning environments was questioned.

### Tables/Frequencies

#### *Opinion of students and instructors with regard to the learner diversity*

The evaluation about the questions concerning learner diversity has been made based on 250 students and 23 instructors. Frequencies calculated for each question are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Opinions of Students and Instructors with Regard to the Learner Diversity

	Student (n=250)										Instructor (n=23)									
	SD		D		FM		A		SA		SD		D		FM		A		SA	
LEARNER DIVERSITY	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Surveys to assess the learning styles of target population should be done.	5	2.0	19	7.6	17	6.8	96	38.4	113	45.2	1	4.3	2	8.7	0	.0	12	52.2	8	34.8
Surveys to assess the hardware ownership of target population should be done.	7	2.8	22	8.8	22	8.8	77	30.8	122	48.8	1	4.3	0	.0	3	13.0	8	34.8	11	47.8
Surveys to assess the physical disabilities of target population should be done.	9	3.6	23	9.2	31	12.4	88	35.2	99	39.6	0	.0	0	.0	5	21.7	10	43.5	8	34.8
Hardware ownership of the students should be taken into consideration during the design process of online courses.	6	2.4	13	5.2	14	5.6	78	31.2	139	55.6	0	.0	1	4.3	3	13.0	12	52.2	7	30.4
Only the essential multimedia elements should be used in the course to reduce bandwidth problem.	13	5.2	26	10.4	42	16.8	74	29.6	95	38.0	3	13.0	5	21.7	6	26.1	7	30.4	2	8.7
The course should allow students to remain anonymous during online discussions.	53	21.2	47	18.8	34	13.6	57	22.8	59	23.6	11	47.8	7	30.4	0	.0	4	17.4	1	4.3
The interpretations of jargon and terminology should be explained within the online courses to facilitate the student understanding.	4	1.6	3	1.2	6	2.4	71	28.4	166	66.4	0	.0	1	4.3	1	4.3	14	60.9	7	30.4
The courses should have links to resource site(s), a glossary, where interpretations of jargon and terminology are available.	4	1.6	6	2.4	8	3.2	85	34.0	147	58.8	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0	16	69.6	7	30.4
The courses should be designed to accommodate the needs of visually impaired.	8	3.2	9	3.6	15	6.0	80	32.0	138	55.2	0	.0	0	.0	6	26.1	8	34.8	9	39.1
Multimedia elements (graphics, audio, video) should be accompanied by text equivalents to be accessible by people with disabilities.	7	2.8	6	2.4	11	4.4	89	35.6	137	54.8	0	.0	0	.0	4	17.4	9	39.1	10	43.5
The courses should offer equal opportunity of access to interaction among students and with instructors.	3	1.2	3	1.2	2	.8	52	20.8	190	76.0	0	.0	1	4.3	1	4.3	10	43.5	11	47.8
The synchronous counseling schedules should be determined in view of the fact that the students' working hour.	5	2.0	13	5.2	9	3.6	89	35.6	134	53.6	0	.0	4	17.4	6	26.1	10	43.5	3	13.0
The synchronous counseling schedules should be determined in view of the fact that the students' opinions.	5	2.0	8	3.2	10	4.0	91	36.4	136	54.4	0	.0	3	13.0	7	30.4	12	52.2	1	4.3

According to the Table 1, it is seen that the opinions of students and instructors are similar about conducting surveys related to learning style, hardware ownership, physical disabilities of students. Otherwise, more than 90% of the students and instructors mentioned that the jargon, idioms, humor and acronyms must be explained in the course content to make it more understandable and facilitated. All of the instructors (100%) mentioned that links to the

resource site(s)/glossaries, where interpretations of jargon and terminology are available, should occur within the online courses to facilitate the student understanding.

Although 67,6% of the students stated that only the essential multimedia elements should be used in the course to reduce bandwidth problem; 39,1% of the instructors agree with this idea. The higher participation degree of students can be related to the technological opportunities they have. Students can face bandwidth problems if their technical infrastructures are insufficient. So, while determining the online course media, they think that multimedia elements used in online courses and the problems about their use should have priority in the design process. But instructors firstly think about the educational characteristics and the advantages of the multimedia elements; so their priority is not the bandwidth problem.

By the same token, almost 90% of the students mentioned that the synchronous counseling schedules should be determined with an eye to the students' working hours and opinions while the instructors' participation degree to this suggestion is 56,5%. This demonstrates that opinions of the instructors about criteria used in determining the schedules do not attach importance to the students' working hour and ideas as much as the students demand. But the importance of students' opinions in distance education organization is emphasized frequently. These results are not compatible with these warnings. On the other hand, when the number of students in distance education programs is taken into consideration, it is easily seen that the students have the majority in this system; so this advantage of them should be taken into consideration. This can be accepted as a subject that the instructors can be informed about.

Another subject that the students and instructors do not share the same opinion is the use of anonymous names during online discussions. Although 46,4% of the students mentioned that the students should remain anonymous during online discussions; 21,7% of the instructors mentioned that the students should not remain anonymous.

#### *Opinion of students and instructors with regard to the behavioral and legal issues*

The evaluation about the questions concerning behavioral and legal issues was made based on 250 students and 23 instructors. Frequencies calculated for each question is given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Opinions of Students and Instructors with Regard to the Behavioral and Legal Issues

BEHAVIORAL AND LEGAL ISSUES	Student (n=250)										Instructor (n=23)									
	SD		D		FM		A		SA		SD		D		FM		A		SA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Students should be clearly informed about the behavioral issues (superior communication and interaction issues) in the online courses.	5	2.0	9	3.6	3	1.2	91	36.4	142	56.8	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0	5	21.7	18	78.3
The course should clearly inform students about their responsibilities within the online courses.	4	1.6	4	1.6	8	3.2	81	32.4	153	61.2	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0	7	30.4	16	69.6
If a student fails to follow the etiquette of the course more than one time, he/she should get warning and punishment.	20	8.0	31	12.4	54	21.6	76	30.4	69	27.6	2	8.7	1	4.3	2	8.7	5	21.7	13	56.5
If a student fails to follow the etiquette of the course more than one time, he/she should put on probation.	16	6.4	28	11.2	49	19.6	106	42.4	51	20.4	2	8.7	2	8.7	8	34.8	6	26.1	5	21.7
If a student fails to follow the etiquette of the course more than one time, he/she should be penalized by lowering grades or points.	14	5.6	44	17.6	30	12.0	12	4.8	22	8.8	4	17.4	4	17.4	10	43.5	4	17.4	1	4.3
If a student fails to follow the etiquette of the course more than one time, he/she should be removed from the discussion forum	38	15.2	42	16.8	55	22.0	63	25.2	52	20.8	3	13.0	1	4.3	4	17.4	9	39.1	6	26.1
The students' participations to the online courses should be taken into consideration while determining the students' marks.	99	39.6	39	15.6	22	8.8	43	17.2	47	18.8	3	13.0	5	21.7	8	34.8	2	8.7	5	21.7
The course should comply with the University's privacy policies and guidelines for online postings.	22	8.8	20	8.0	49	19.6	72	28.8	87	34.8	0	.0	0	.0	3	13.0	10	43.5	10	43.5

The course should get previous students' permission to use their online discussions, postings or any other data that belong to them	29	11.6	23	9.2	32	12.8	93	37.2	73	29.2	0	.0	1	4.3	3	13.0	13	56.5	6	26.1	
The course should get students' permissions to share their projects with other students	19	7.6	22	8.8	26	10.4	108	43.2	75	30.0	1	4.3	2	8.7	1	4.3	15	65.2	4	17.4	
The course should gets students' permission to share their personal web documents with other students.	14	5.6	20	8.0	19	7.6	113	45.2	84	33.6	0	.0	1	4.3	2	8.7	15	65.2	5	21.7	
The course should gets students' permission to share their e-mail addresses with other students.	6	2.4	10	4.0	16	6.4	105	42.0	113	45.2	1	4.3	0	.0	4	17.4	10	43.5	8	34.8	
The course should gets students' permission to share their telephone numbers with other students.	5	2.0	7	2.8	12	4.8	82	32.8	144	57.6	0	.0	1	4.3	1	4.3	7	30.4	14	60.9	
The course should gets students' permission to share their posting addresses with other students.	5	2.0	9	3.6	13	5.2	98	39.2	125	50.0	1	4.3	0	.0	2	8.7	9	39.1	11	47.8	
The course should clearly inform students about the consequences of any forms of plagiarism.	8	3.2	9	3.6	12	4.8	111	44.4	110	44.0	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0	7	30.4	16	69.6	
Cheating/ plagiarism interferences of the students should punished by assigning a failing grade in the course.	51	20.4	61	24.4	64	25.6	35	14.0	39	15.6	2	8.7	1	4.3	9	39.1	5	21.7	6	26.1	
Cheating/ plagiarism interferences of the students should punished by assigning a failing grade on that particular paper	43	17.2	52	20.8	59	23.6	57	22.8	39	15.6	1	4.3	1	4.3	3	13.0	9	39.1	9	39.1	
Cheating/ plagiarism interferences of the students should punished by dismissing from the University.	12	3	49.2	57	22.8	34	13.6	17	6.8	19	7.6	1	4.3	9	39.1	10	43.5	1	4.3	2	8.7
Cheating/ plagiarism interferences of the students should punished by assigning showing up their names on the list of cheaters in the University.	73	29.2	61	24.4	42	16.8	37	14.8	37	14.8	2	8.7	5	21.7	5	21.7	5	21.7	6	26.1	
Cheating/ plagiarism interferences of the students should punished by sharing the student's cheating record with other academic institutions.	50	20.0	52	20.8	62	24.8	55	22.0	31	12.4	2	8.7	6	26.1	5	21.7	6	26.1	4	17.4	
The course should provide a mini lesson on plagiarism that involves examples of plagiarism.	8	3.2	4	1.6	20	8.0	129	51.6	89	35.6	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0	8	34.8	15	65.2	
The course should provide appropriate information about copyright laws concerning learning activities on the Internet.	7	2.8	4	1.6	26	10.4	125	50.0	88	35.2	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0	6	26.1	17	73.9	
Students' opinions about the ethical laws related to the online courses should be taken into consideration	5	2.0	7	2.8	14	5.6	124	49.6	100	40.0	1	4.3	1	4.3	3	13.0	14	60.9	4	17.4	
Surveys should be carried out researches about to what extent the students obey the ethical rules in online courses.	6	2.4	6	2.4	21	8.4	118	47.2	99	39.6	0	.0	0	.0	1	4.3	12	52.2	10	43.5	

According to Table 2, almost 93% of the students mentioned that they should be clearly informed about the behavioral issues (superior communication and interaction issues) and their responsibilities (exams, assessments, practices) within the online courses. Also all of the instructors (100%) support the same idea with the students.

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the opinions of students and instructors differentiate about the sanctions to be applied when the students fail to follow the etiquette of the course more than once. Although 78,2% of the instructors mentioned that punishments are required for the students who fail to follow the etiquette; only 52% of the students support the application punishments. In this sense, these findings demonstrate that students expect flexible approach from the instructors when they fail to follow the etiquettes. According to the these ideas, 62,8% of the students mentioned that they should be put on probation while only 47,8% of the instructors support giving probation to the students. This data can be explained by the instructors' opinion that emphasize students do not give the required importance to their online courses if they don't get dissuasive punishments.

It drives attention that almost half of the instructors (43,5%) are fair-minded about lowering students' grades and only 21,7% of the instructors support the idea of lowering grades. On the other hand, 13,6% of the students approved this opinion. One of the most preferred punishments for both students and instructors is removing students from discussion forum with 46% participation degree for students and 65,2% for instructors.

Students' and instructors' opinions are asked about taking into consideration students' participations to the online courses during assessment stage. 55,2% of the students mentioned that students' participations to the online courses should not be taken into

consideration while determining the students' marks. Also 34,7% of the instructors think in the same way.

When the items related to getting permission of students about their personal information are investigated in Table 2, it is seen that most of the students and instructors mentioned that the courses should get students' permissions to share their projects (73,2% for students and 82,6% for instructors), web documents (78,8% for students and 86,9% for instructors), e-mails (87,2% for students and 78,3% for instructors), telephone number (90,4% for students and 91,3% for instructors) and posting addresses (89,2% for students and 86,9% for instructors). Also 66,4% of the students mentioned that the course should get previous students' permission to use their online discussions, postings or any other data that belong to them and 82,6% of the instructors share this idea.

Table 2 also demonstrates students' and instructors' opinions about the consequences of any forms of plagiarism. It is observed that, although 47,8% of the instructors support the idea of cheating/ plagiarism interferences of the students should be punished by assigning a failing grade in the course; only 29,6% of the students support this idea. Students prefer to be punished by getting a failing grade on that particular paper with 38,4% participation degree. Also instructors prefer to punish students in the same way with 78,2% participation degree. The least participation degree both for students (14,4%) and instructors (13%) is about punishing students by dismissal from the university. This is one of the most intensive punishment for cheating or plagiarism interferences. So it can be accepted that both students and instructors are against such an intensive punishment. Another punishment for cheating/plagiarism is showing up the students' names on the list of cheaters in the University and only 29,6% of the students and 47,8% of the instructors support this punishment. Finally 34,4% of the students and 43,5% of the instructors stated that cheating/ plagiarism interferences of the students should be punished by sharing the student's cheating record with other academic institutions.

The last section in Table 2 is about the copyright laws and ethical rules about online courses. The participation degree to the idea of appropriate information about copyright laws should be given in online courses are similar both for students and instructors. All of the instructors (100%) are agree with this item while 85,2% of the students agree with. Also the opinions of students (89,6%) and instructors (78,3%) are positive about the importance of students' opinions on ethical rules. On the other hand, both groups mentioned that the surveys should be carried out as research on the extent the students obey the ethical rules in online courses.

## **Conclusions/Suggestions**

The analyses of the first sub-problem reveal that, most of the students and instructors mentioned that conducting surveys related to learning style, hardware ownership, physical disabilities of students should be done. As Khan (2005) stated, learners have their own styles for meaningfully gathering and organizing information for learning purposes, and have different learning needs as regards their background. So instructors, course designers and discussion moderators must be sensitive about these students' characteristics and should be innovative about involving diverse learners in e-Learning environments. Also, hardware ownership and physical disabilities of students are effective on the design process of the online courses. Hardware characteristics can differ from student to student; so it is important to use educational medium that can be operated with most of the computers. These technological characteristics are also related with the bandwidth problem that students face. To reduce bandwidth problem, students think that only the essential multimedia elements should be used in the courses. So it is another fact that the technological and hardware students use are determinative for course designs. To design more useful and effective

courses, detailed research and surveys about hardware ownership and learning styles of the students can be realized in AU.

On the other hand, instructors do not support the idea of using only the essential multimedia elements within the online courses. Instructors think about the educational characteristics and the advantages of the educational media primarily; so their priority is not the bandwidth problem. They prefer to use the technologies that offer better educational opportunities; but it is a fact that all the students may not have the required technologies. This is related with the digital divide that underlines the importance of information accessibility in e-Learning environments. Khan (2005) defines digital divide as the gap between those who have access to the Internet and other information technologies and those who do not. The reasons may be economic, cultural, physical disabilities, geographic locations. Related to the economic problems, institution (AU) can support students to have better computers and technologies. Some campaigns in collaboration with technology firms that provide computers more economically can be realized. By this way, the students will have better technological opportunities and bandwidth problem decreases. Otherwise, some courses that introduce the basic characteristics of the Internet and computer literacy can be organized for students; so technological culture of the students can be improved by these courses. Physical disabilities are also effective on digital divide. Students with disabilities can not make good use of some educational medium as the other students. Most of the students and instructors support conducting surveys related to physical disabilities of students. In this sense, AU produces e-audio books for students with disabilities and the number of these e-Audio books are increasing.

The analyses of the second sub-problem related to the behavioral and legal regulations, students and instructors have some different opinions about assessing students' behaviors. Findings demonstrate that students expect flexible approach from instructors like having probation or removing students from discussion forum instead of lowering grades or points, when they fail to follow the behavioral etiquettes more than once. On the other hand, instructors think that students do not give the required importance to the online courses if they don't get dissuasive punishments. Related to this subject, the behavioral regulations applied when the students fail to follow the behavioral etiquettes more than once must be determined and announced to the students before the courses started.

Institutions also should have e-Learning policies, guides on legal issues like preventive privacy, plagiarism, copyright. In this sense, there are also some regulations for students' cheating /plagiarism investments. The students and instructors' opinions are different from each other about the regulation for cheating/plagiarism investments. As mentioned online courses are not the core material of the DELLT; so students don't have to attend to these online courses. Because of this, students don't prefer to be punished when they fail to follow the etiquette rules and/or cheat. Otherwise, it is a fact that developing online courses requires certain amount of time, money and effort. Also it is accepted that these courses have positive effects on the students' success. So it can be said that the instructors think some obligations are necessary for more effective and efficient online courses. In this sense, instructors think that students' participation to the online courses should not be taken into consideration while determining the students' marks.

Another subject within the legal issues is related with getting students' permission about sharing students' personal information. The institution should inform the students about whether it shall share their personal information, text dialogs or not. Private e-mails shouldn't be forwarded to third parties, without permission. In this sense, the opinions of students and instructors are supporting these ideas.

Finally, opinions of all the participants of online courses are effective on the design process; but not limited with the ethical issues. So more detailed research can be done related to the

online courses to improve more effective and qualitative courses. This study is realized to determine the opinions of students and instructors about the learner diversity and behavioral / legal regulations within the ethical issues. So some following surveys can be realized about cultural diversity, bias, geographical diversity, social and political influence. In doing so, some of the web-based courses can be renewed as new results are obtained.

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