

# Teaching ESL Students Ethics in the Digital Age

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**Abstract – This paper presents actual case studies involving certain basic ethical issues pertaining to the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the ESL learning environment. English language is an integral part of ICT. English is the most commonly used language on any ICT platform. So English and ICT are inseparable. Students tend to use Internet either for seeking entertainment or for learning purposes. Hence there may be many situations when they have to make ethical decisions while using digital technology. Teaching students ethics deserves special attention as there is a tendency to view the actions of the students in virtual world of technology as being less serious than their actions in the real life. As Ki and Ahn (2006) observe, “Unethical use of ICT in education is a serious problem in all educational settings.” Copying a book illegally is costly, risky and time-consuming but copying an image, document or PDF file illegally on the internet can be done quickly and easily at a negligible expense. Also, the traces of any illegal activity on the computer or a website can be wiped out easily. Piracy has become a global problem. Computer Software piracy creates loss of billions of dollars to software companies every year. Increasing cybercrimes in recent times, issues relating to violation of privacy, increasing tendencies of plagiarism among students and researchers are forcing educationists and teachers to look into various factors responsible for such growing tendencies among the student community in order to evolve suitable techniques that teachers can implement in the classroom to inculcate desirable ethical behaviours among the students. This paper intends to throw light on various ethical issues pertaining to the use of ICT and to explore the activities that help to inculcate desirable ethical behaviors among the students.**

**Key Words: ESL, ICT, Cybercrime, Ethics, Ethical Codes, Plagiarism, Privacy, Behavior**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Integration of ICT in learning process has become indispensable in today's technology-driven learning environment. ICT is playing an increasingly pervasive part in all aspects of our life including the ways through which knowledge and skills are acquired. Internet has brought information to the doorstep of the learner. A few years ago, ethical questions relating to the use of technology were of little interest to educationists and teachers. To make the matter worse, most of the teachers were not familiar with the advancements in technology and its scope. But as the use of ICT spread throughout society and engulfed every aspect of human life, the need to inculcate ethics among users was greatly felt.

Many studies have shown that persons involved in cybercrimes acquire both their skill and interest at an early stage of interest. Computer ethics, better termed as 'information technology ethics', is often over-looked and scarcely taught concept in educational institutions. ICT has brought about the need to adopt old values in new ways, and at the

same time, it may also require the incorporation of new codes of conduct pertaining to the use of technology.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This study has been conducted with the following objectives:

- ▶ To throw light on the ethical issues relating to the use of technology
- ▶ To find out whether higher education institutions insist upon following ethical codes with regard to the use of technology
- ▶ To examine a few case studies related to the issue of ethical codes
- ▶ To explore what activities help to inculcate ethical behaviours among the students

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY:

To fulfill the above objectives of the study, the researcher has explored various resources pertaining to the question of ethics in using ICT. The researcher has examined and analyzed a few researches and articles in the related field. Opinions from students and teachers have been considered. In addition, various secondary sources such as articles in magazines, professional, national and international journals, books and websites have been used.

### 4. ETHICAL CODES

For the purpose of this study, a few colleges of Karnataka State have been visited to study the situation regarding the use of ICT among the students. It was observed that almost all the institutions have developed ethical codes dealing with the use of technology and have adopted 'Acceptable Use Policies' incorporating rules for the proper use of information technology. However, it was observed that these ethical codes were not properly understood and adopted by students. In English Language Teaching classrooms, attempts are made to incorporate ethical codes of conduct regarding to the use of technology.

Many organizations have listed out ethical standards for technology use. One of the mostly widely used ethical standards comes from the Computer Ethics Institute.

The Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics developed by the Computer Ethics Institute are as follows. These commandments were introduced in the paper "In Pursuit of a 'Ten Commandments' for Computer Ethics" by Ramon C. Barquin as a means to create "a set of standards to guide and instruct people in the ethical use of computers."

1. Thou shalt not use a computer to harm other people.
2. Thou shalt not interfere with other people's computer work.
3. Thou shalt not snoop around in other people's computer files.
4. Thou shalt not use a computer to steal.
5. Thou shalt not use a computer to bear false witness.
6. Thou shalt not copy or use proprietary software for which you have not paid.
7. Thou shalt not use other people's computer resources without authorization or proper compensation.

8. Thou shalt not appropriate other people's intellectual output.
9. Thou shalt think about the social consequences of the program you are writing or the system you are designing.
10. Thou shalt always use a computer in ways that insure consideration and respect for your fellow humans.

The "moral imperatives" of the above imply that the user:

- ▶ shall honor intellectual property, property rights including copyrights and patents.
- ▶ shall be honest and trustworthy
- ▶ shall be fair and not discriminate
- ▶ shall respect the privacy of others and honor confidentiality
- ▶ avoids causing harm to others
- ▶ contributes to the well-being of the society.

For the purposes of this short study, I will be looking only at some common cases where the students need to make ethical decisions. I have categorized the issues under three major headings of privacy, property, and proper use. Two case studies can be found in each of these areas. These cases and others like them may be used to foster classroom discussion in such a way as to inculcate desirable ICT ethics among the students. Teachers of English Language can highlight these issues by linking them to the lessons taught by them in the class so as to create an awareness regarding the fair use of technology.

#### 4.1 Privacy

This involves the question as to whether a person's use of ICT violates the privacy of others or whether he is giving information to others that he is not supposed to give. The following case studies make this issue clearer:

Case study 1: A student finds the teacher's password to the school's database of exam-related information and uses it to copy the question papers of the forth-coming examinations stored on the system. He also steals some student-related information and later misuses them.

Case Study 2: A student observes the computer teacher using the password to gain access to the college website. He then uses it to paste a web link on the college website, which once clicked by the visitor takes him to an unsolicited website.

In both of the above cases, the privacy of the computer user is violated. Students should be made aware of the fact that business organizations use information to market products. Information given to one organization may be sold to others. There are many websites which collect personal information from users on the internet by asking them to fill a form to download or access what they want and secretly sell it to others. The user then gets business calls and emails from different organizations which he never sought. This results in violation of privacy. Every computer user must know that a stranger is a stranger, whether on the street or on the Internet. The same precautions which we are supposed to take about physical strangers apply to virtual strangers as well.

#### **4.2 Property issues**

This involves the question as to whether a person's actions while using ICT respect the property of others and whether he is taking the correct steps to keep his property safe.

Casey Study 1: A student downloads the 'trial version' of software. He then succeeds in hacking the key and continues to run it as genuine software even after the free trial period gets over.

Case Study 2: A student finds some useful article on a topic for his project on a web site. He copies the entire page and pastes it directly into his word file. He does not mention the title of the article and cite the source in his bibliography.

In the above cases, it is quite clear that the copyright law has been violated. Students need to know that every computer software is protected by copyright law. It is unlawful to make copies of computer programs without permission or payment of the producer. Plagiarism has become easier due to the advancement of technology. Students must know how to cite sources both in print and electronic formats.

#### **4.3 Appropriate use**

This involves the question as to whether the use of ICT has educational value and whether it is in accordance with the rules of one's family, school, government or society.

Case Study 1: A student is given the responsibility of taking certain photographs for college magazine using a digital camera. He notices that he can use a computer program to alter the photographs. He uses the program to make himself look like another famous personality and also modifies the image of others without their permission.

Case Study 2: A student opens up a mail account with a fake address and identity. He then sends

dubious mails to his classmates for fun without disclosing his identity.

Though this example seems to be funny, it should be kept in mind that journalistic integrity is a serious issue which students need to be aware of. Deliberate distortion of images may be viewed seriously by those involved in the event. It may lead to disputes as well. Even having a dubious mail account may invite certain problems. Disguise and impersonation are common childhood and adolescent tendencies. The students should have the knowledge as to when such activities are productive and when they might be counter-productive. They must also know that a considerable chunk of Internet content is offensive, misleading, invalid and lacking in educational value.

It is quite obvious that students need to understand and apply both rules of the family, institutions, nation and society that apply to the use of ICT, especially those related to privacy, property and proper use as described above. They must be aware of the consequences if they choose to act against such rules.

#### **5. What activities help to inculcate ethical behaviors among the students?**

Students need to understand both their rights and responsibilities related ICT use. Hence it is necessary to take a proactive approach to deal with ethical issues. For this purpose:

- ▶ A list of conduct codes must be clearly displayed to inculcate values.
- ▶ Role plays by students or teachers may be organized on the themes pertaining to the ethical use of technology.
- ▶ Ethical behaviours must be reinforced and non-ethical behaviours must be discouraged by suitable methods.
- ▶ Right way of ethical behaviours may be modelled.
- ▶ Technology environments that help students avoid temptations must be created.
- ▶ Discussions and debates on ethical issues may be arranged.

#### **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Since the children imbibe ethical values right from birth itself, the parents have to shoulder the primary responsibility of their child's ethical education. The schools and colleges where the children get admitted for study have traditionally the responsibility to teach and reinforce certain moral values, especially those which are directly related to

citizenship. Increased use of technology, as observed by Yamano (2004), "by younger children has caused increasing societal concerns about who bears the responsibility of guiding these children in the appropriate use of technology."

Most of the ethical issues concerning technology are related to learner behaviors and hence need to be a necessary part of the curriculum. Teaching students ethics deserves special attention in modern ESL classrooms due to a variety of reasons. Using technology to communicate and operate in a virtual world is a new phenomenon which is not experienced by many teachers in colleges before.

Teachers must be aware of the fact that creating a suitable climate of ethical behavior begins when the teachers plan their lessons to improve students' knowledge, skills and abilities. The lessons should be designed in such a way as to motivate students to learn, grow and develop. Davis and Ludvigson (1995) argue that increases in academic dishonesty might be tied to decreases in instructor standards. Teachers must design learning objectives and activities which suit the students' intellectual levels and abilities. The assignments must encourage learning. Teachers themselves must demonstrate ethical behavior in designing the lessons as a model for encouraging students to follow the same methods while writing their assignments. The scope of Information and Communication Technology ethics is very wide. Hence, finally, the following three P's of ICT ethics can be considered most important:

1. Privacy: To protect the privacy of the user of digital technology and respect the privacy of others.
2. Property: To protect the user's intellectual property rights and respect the same of other individuals.
3. Proper Use: To use technology in a constructive way and in such a way as to not to break the rules of the school, government and community.

ESL Teachers need to incorporate learning objectives and activities in their lessons which specifically address the issue of ICT ethics. If Communicative Language Teaching technique is employed, activities like role play can be designed for better effect. Opinions from students and teachers suggest that YouTube videos dealing with the theme of computer ethics are very effective in the ESL classrooms. It is also necessary to develop suitable evaluation tools to check students' understanding of ethical concepts in relation to the use of ICT.

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