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The Fullfillment of Ethical Duties Required in overcoming obstacles to E-Learning in a PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that education is a fundamental human right for everyone. In this time of crisis brought about by the outbreak of Covid-19, caused by the Corona Virus (SARS-CoV-2), educational institutions (schools, colleges, and universities) across the globe have discontinued in-person teaching and have switched to blended, and in many cases, solely an online mode of teaching. This conversion

from face-to-face learning in a classroom to online learning has been beneficial, yet concurrently has raised a number of challenges.

In the UK there is a legal duty on local educational authorities, to ensure, amongst other things, that there is an efficient provision of education to meet the needs of the local population, that this service promotes high standards, ensures fair access to opportunity for education and learning, and promotes the fulfilment of learning potential. The UK government introduced a new legal duty on schools, in England, to provide remote education to pupils unable to attend school due to Covid-19.

It is widely acknowledged that law and ethics do have in common certain key principles and obligations. Therefore, the law will clearly apply and lead directly to the appropriate ethical conclusion. However, to rely solely on law as an ethical guideline is clearly dangerous because in certain circumstances bad laws exist, and history is littered with many examples. Inadequate laws may bind rules on society that fail to provide ethical guidance. Such laws may, in some instances, excuse a society from fulfilling certain obligations and duties, or allow a society to justify their unethical behavior.

It is necessary to consider whether stakeholders (e.g., governments, teaching trade unions, educators, parents, guardians, pupils) were or are under an obligation or duty to have done or not have done something. In order to identify these ethical duties, this paper presents a framework, which sets out generic traditional ethical concepts that can be used to flag potential ethical obligations. These are: 1) Quality of life; 2) Use of Power; 3) Risks and reliability; 4) Property Rights; 5) Privacy; and 6) Equity and Access.

A lens is a tool used to bring light to a fixed focal point, and by analogy this framework will be applied to the arguments that present the challenges of deploying e-learning, in order to bring light to a set of ethical duties, a focal point, that will be a set of obligations for various stakeholders. Fulfilling these ethical responsibilities will allow for education, in this crisis brought about by this pandemic, to address the issues of accessibility, affordability, flexibility, life-long learning, learning pedagogy, and have educational policy and law that is truly imbued with humanity and unity. This presentation will argue that it is naïve and simplistic to suppose that a solely technological solution will enable the learners to surmount obstacles to online learning in order to improve their life chances. What is required is a more holistic approach, which requires the construction of ethical, cultural, and economic infrastructures. There is evidence that pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities, for example, access to resources such as WiFi, learning spaces, tutoring, were exacerbated or bought to the fore during the pandemic.

Keywords: E-learning, Ethics, Obstacles to online Learning.

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