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Ethical Challenges In Online Teaching: The Role Of Administrative Supervision In Upholding Teachers' Professional Ethics

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study investigates the ethical challenges that online educators face and the essential role that administrative supervision plays in resolving these challenges. Through expert talks and participant interviews, the study identifies important issues like upholding professional boundaries, guaranteeing impartiality in online evaluations, and protecting digital privacy. In their capacity as moral exemplars, administrative supervisors are essential in cultivating an environment of honesty and supporting educators as they navigate these difficulties. The results highlight the need for explicit guidelines, improved instruction, and proactive monitoring to uphold moral principles in online learning and guarantee a fair and impartial learning environment for all students. **Keywords:** Online Teaching Ethics, Administrative Supervision, Digital Inequality, Digital Privacy

Introduction:

Education is seen as a moral pillar of a community to survive as it provides moral-cum-spiritual light to its members, and teachers as the practical and grass root level stakeholders in education are considered as the principal transmitters, cultivators and regulators of morals including spiritual, moral, ideological and emotional values of pupils in and outside the campus (Monteiro et al., 2019). Since the last three years (2019 onwards) were most volatile in terms of fear of Covid19 transmission, there was no alternative to administration except closing schools. On the one hand it was not possible to make compromises with the Education of children, because compromising with children's education could ruin academic career of children and could result into unbearable losses, and on the other hand the situations were such that educational institutions had to had remain closed in order to break covid19 chain and save lives of students. Thus, administration was compelled to close institutions for a long time. As an alternative to, and tame the educational loss of the prolonged closure of educational Institutions, the offline teaching learning process was shifted to online mode of teaching. Online teaching was a new experience to most of the teachers and so was the online learning to most of the students (Nambiar, 2020). In this scenario, the shift in teaching-learning process from offline to online mode, from school to home, from classroom to bedroom, from book to phone and from knowledge dissemination to knowledge creation, posed many challenges to teachers in terms of adaptation to new modes and techniques of teaching on the one hand and maintaining professional ethics of teaching on the other hand (Pandit & Agrawal, 2022). Teachers' role in such circumstances evolved from mere lecturing to mentoring, motivating, caring and supervising the actions and reactions of students (Lucas & Vicente, 2023). The new situations demanded him to use any online platform for teaching, create an online links, assemble all the students by inviting them to join the link, receiving them on the online platform, introducing the topic using slides, communicating the subject matter, handling network issues, allowing and maintaining smooth online discussion among students and keeping record of attendance of the online learners and their feedback (Holik et al., 2023). While performing all these roles and responsibilities, teachers' professional ethics ought to be highly strong and rectified.

The connotation of ethics of a profession varies from situation to situation (Hoyle, 2008). Although Professional ethics of teaching profession is well defined, it is also determined by the context, needs and situation in a particular time (Bayne et al., 2020). The ethical norms, values and principles for a teacher while teaching in offline mode might vary when the same teacher will have to teach in the online mode. The teachers in online mode are supposed to manage the online platform very well and take extra pains for those students who are not acquainted with technicalities and issues of using online platforms for learning (Coppola, 2020).

Purpose of study:

What if a brilliant student who lives in low network area could join late, or an academically curious learner is relatively weak in picking up the concepts, or an economically poor student could not attend an online lecture due to unavailability of Internet pack, or a linguistically poor student is unable to understand the concept at once, or a culturally different student pronounce a word in a different dialect, or a student with impaired hearing is unable to listen correctly and asks for repeating the phrase already discussed, should a teacher get irritated and rushed? Should a teacher curse upon children and children- related limitations? Shouldn't a teacher show patience and commitment, and accommodate to the situation? What role an educational administrator should play so that a teacher will not escape from his/her ethical duties and responsibilities of the assigned job in online environment?

The purpose of the current study is to study the professional ethics of online teachers, and to enquire about the additional ethical considerations to be taken into account while teaching on an online platform. The study is an attempt to know to what extent these teachers fulfill their ethical duties and responsibilities and what role an administrative support and supervision can play to rectify their ethical weaknesses and uphold their professional ethics.

Rationale of the study:

A school's strategic and visionary plans which are laid down by school head and its team are implemented and translated into practice by teachers of the institutions (Gurley et al., 2015). So, there exists a sort of natural dependency and a mutualistic relationship between school administrators and teachers (Owan et al., 2020). For school administrators, it is therefore vital to take in hands their school teaching staff, not through absolute power, but through care and motivation, so that they can keep their schools academically in motion (Louis et al., 2016).

School administrators have enormous powers, and it is said that power has an inherent tendency to corrupt a person's heart and mind, and thereby the person in power may brutally exercise it over the subordinates. But history has provided countless pieces of evidence that the administrators who used their authority as per their choice could temporarily rule physically, but could never rule the hearts of their subordinates (Nye Jr, 2008). The way of exercising their power and authority largely determines teachers' consistency, interest, motivation, and curiosity toward their profession (S. M. Johnson, 2020).

While dealing with teachers, a school administrative head is having an open choice of either to make or destroy the bond of trust, ethics, and honor between him and teachers. The extent of weakness or strength of the bond between the head of the institution and the teachers in turn determines the extent of motivation, dedication, retention, and productivity of teachers. The strong bonds may nourish the teachers' professional morale, commitment, and ethics, which have a high bearing on the smooth and effective functioning of the school system (Lanns-Isaac, 2024).

Research Questions:

1. What are the specific ethical challenges being faced by teachers while instructing via online platforms?
2. How can administrative supervision address the ethical challenges of online teaching to uphold teachers' professional ethics?

Methodology:

a) Participants
The participants of the study included the secondary school teachers working in higher secondary schools of north Kashmir, J&K concerned with teaching through online mode. In addition, the supervisory heads associated with supervision of these educators were also included in the study. A total 42 educators from 07 different higher secondary schools associated with online teaching and their respective 07 school principals took part in the study.

b) Sampling Technique
The study employed purposive sampling technique to select participants—teachers and administrators— having particular expertise and understanding of online teaching and the moral dilemmas that come with it. Purposive sampling assists in gathering specific insights from pertinent persons.

c) Data collection

The data was collected as a result of literature review, survey interviews and expert discussion. The collected data was subjected to thematic analysis to draw out relevant themes as answers to the research questions.

Discussion:

The collected data was subjected to thematic analysis. Following themes were extracted out of collected data after analyzing it thoroughly.

A. Ethical Challenges faced by online instructors
With the review of related literature and after extensive deliberation with the participant teachers and educational specialists, several themes have surfaced that underscore the moral dilemmas encountered by virtual educators.

1. Tackling digital inequalities
The term "digital inequality," sometimes referred to as "the digital divide," describes the difference between people who have access to internet and technology and those who do not (Heeks, 2022). A lot of students don't have equal access to internet and technology, which can hinder their ability to participate completely in online learning. It becomes an ethical challenge for educators working in the virtual learning environment to tackle these disparities while upholding justice and inclusivity (Imran, 2023). Online teachers have to deal with this moral dilemma by figuring out how to make accommodations for students who don't have online resources.
On interviewing several participants narrated that:

"One of the main ethical issues with online education is digital inequality. Despite having gadgets, many students face serious problems, such as erratic internet, a lack of private spaces at homes, and sharing gadgets with family. There is a greater disparity between accomplishments of those who struggle with fundamental digital abilities and those who are more tech-savvy. It's difficult, but as a teacher, we put a lot of effort to bridge the gap by developing freely available resources and providing additional support to those fall behind. Yet, it's challenging to strike a balance between academic standards and empathy, and there's still more work to be done before all students can fully engage in online learning environments."

2. Ensuring digital privacy in virtual setting
Safeguarding the digital privacy of students like protecting their sensitive data, academic as well as personal, is an essential ethical consideration in an online learning environment (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2023). Online educators are always supposed to ensure a moral balance between the necessity to keep an eye on their students' actions and their right to privacy protection (da Silva et al., 2023). Teachers must make sure they are not infringing on students' privacy rights even when digital platforms make it possible to track behavior and performance in great detail.
While discussing on the ethical challenges pertaining to online teaching, most of the participants mentioned that:

"One major issue with virtual learning is digital privacy. It might be difficult to protect student data, such as scores and private details, because not all teachers have received data security training. Concerns around consent and potential future uses of the recordings are also raised by recording classes. Furthermore, privacy concerns arise from digital footprints left by internet platforms that monitor student activities. It's challenging to strike a balance between respecting student limits and engagement monitoring. Portions of my private life become accessible during virtual sessions, which affect even my privacy. In online education, navigating these difficulties is like to walking a slippery slope."

3. Managing professional boundaries in online learning environments
Professional boundary between teachers and students has become blurred as a result of the shift to online learning (Taylor et al., 2020; Ball & Savin-Baden, 2022). More casual communication is frequently made possible by virtual platforms, which may result in improper behavior and inappropriate interactions. Upholding professional boundaries between teachers and students in digital learning environments has grown to be a more challenging ethical task (Chen, 2024). Maintaining professional integrity, avoiding ethical lapses, and preserving the mutual respect and trust depend on managing these limits.
While deliberating on the ethical challenges encountered during online teaching, a number of participants put forth their views as:

"Maintaining professional boundaries within the virtual learning environment poses a whole new set of complications. The boundaries we traditionally used to uphold are blurred when virtual intimacy replaces the actual distance between instructor and student. Personally we find it challenging to main professionalism while teaching via online platforms, where students feel relaxed to talk. Conversations appear more informal on these online spaces. Digital age demands greater self-control than needed in the past. All of us are still learning how to adjust while preserving our professionalism and the important ties we have with the pupils."

4. Controlling e-cheating, ensuring objectivity and maintaining integrity in online evaluations

Undoubtedly online teaching learning system has its advantages in terms of accessibility and flexibility, but it also presents peculiar challenges to educators, especially when it comes to student e-cheating and the larger problem of academic frauds (Dawson, 2020). It is difficult to maintain academic integrity in a virtual setting since there is less physical supervision, which makes it easier for dishonesty to occur than it would be in a traditional setting (Holden et al., 2021). Chances of e-cheating and online academic frauds make it a challenging task for online educators to assess the pupils' actual knowledge, skills, and abilities impartially and fairly, putting aside any personal prejudices or outside influences (Ahmed & Sidiq, 2023). Moreover, problems like poor internet connections, technological difficulties, and the digital divide lead to gaps which also pose a great challenge on the part of examiner to assess pupils' actual performance impartially because students with more resources have an edge over those not possessing one, regardless of their academic ability (Lee & Fanguy, 2022).

Commenting on the objectivity of online assessments of pupils, several participants expressed their deep concerns as:

"We worry about the integrity and reliability of online assessment of learners' genuine talents. We are not always certain of the circumstances under which students finish their question papers. Do they operate on their own or seek assistance from outside resources or colleagues? Maintaining control over the online spaces during examinations is a challenging task. This raises questions about whether we're accurately gauging each person's contributions and expertise."

B. Role of administrative supervision to address the ethical challenges in online teaching

After a thorough review of related literature, conversation with principals and other educational specialists, several themes have come forth that emphasize the function of administrative supervision in addressing the ethical issues that online instructors face.

1. Monitoring and supervising teacher-student interactions

Teacher-student communication patterns have undergone a considerable transformation with the development of online education (Hartman & Morris, 2019). While digital platforms give educators and students new avenues for interaction, they also bring challenges for establishing boundaries, communicating clearly, and sustaining a professional learning environment. Teachers and students must communicate ethically in asynchronous online learning contexts. Administrators and supervisors need to create provide a positive online learning environment with clear rules for communication and make sure that teachers respond to the needs of their students (J. A. Johnson, 2022). Administrative supervision can support teachers in communicating politely and on time via emails, discussion boards, and forums while also honoring students' time and online personas. Maintaining an appropriate learning environment and securing ethical behavior depends primarily on the supervision of teacher-student interactions (Aluko, 2024). For ensuring an effective teacher-student and student-student communications in an online environment, administrators can put in use the defined policies, making use of strict guidelines, keeping an eye on communications via web-cam and offering a continuous guidance (Miao et al., 2022).

2. Fostering an ethical culture

Administrators serve as ethical guardians, ensuring that instructors meet the highest ethical and professional norms demanded in education. They can help teachers in dealing with intricate moral dilemmas by offering perpetual coaching, guidance, and appraisal (Vikaraman et al., 2021). Supervisors assume a key role in establishing an ethical culture within the institution, alongside enforcing policies. This entails instilling principles like respect, honesty, openness, and accountability in daily operations (Stoll et al., 2002). There should be an open and welcoming atmosphere wherein teachers are encouraged to talk about moral quandaries or concerns freely in order to avoid ethical breakdowns (Anisah, 2023). Educational supervisors are required to respond promptly and equitably to ethical transgressions. This entails looking into occurrences, imposing suitable penalties, and making sure that remedial measures are implemented to stop such infractions in the future. The way managers respond to moral transgressions is essential to reaffirming the organization's commitment to honesty. Discipline that is impartial, open and transparent shows that moral transgressions will not be accepted while also providing a chance for people to grow from their errors (Okimoto & Wenzel, 2014).

3. Practicing an ethical leadership

The art of ethical leadership involves upholding moral standards, encouraging justice, openness, and authenticity in decision-making, and persuading people to act morally (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Setting high moral standards for themselves and the people they lead, as well as promoting an environment where moral behavior is appreciated and projected, are all characteristics of ethical leaders (Ghanem, 2018). Administrative personals have to set a good example by acting ethically and making sound decisions themselves. Demonstrating ethical actions encourages others to follow suit, resulting in a setting where ethical behavior is accepted as usual or as a norm. A successful approach to address moral dilemmas in educational institutions is the practice of ethical leadership (Göçen, 2021). Ethical administrators establish a secure,

equitable, and courteous atmosphere for teachers and students by having unambiguous ethical guidelines, cultivating a culture of honesty, and proactively resolving particular ethical issues (Puyo, 2022). Ensuring that the principles of integrity, equity, reverence, and responsibility are ingrained in an institution, ethical leadership enables it to flourish in both the intellectual and moral spheres (Drinkwater & Waghid, 2024).

Conclusion:

The ethical issues that online teaching raises must be addressed immediately since it transforms the nature of education in the future. In the digital world, online educators should respect professional boundaries and ensure privacy and justice. Administrative supervisors play a crucial role in addressing these issues by serving as ethical guardians and coaches. Administrative supervision can equip teachers to walk along the moral line of online learning. To ensure that online classrooms continue to be places of equity, trust, and academic rigor for all, the way forward is in ongoing collaboration, transparent policies, and flexible tactics.

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