ACADEMIC ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF USING TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

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Abstract

In today’s information age, the use of information technology is universal. The aim of the paper is to highlight the principles underlying the ethical use of digital resources by students and university teachers. In nowadays society, the use of information technology by students can be both an opportunity and a threat. The role of university teachers is undergoing changes as a result of the ethical implications created by the increasing use of information technologies to carry out educational activities. The current context of online teaching and assessment has generated new issues regarding the ethical use of information technology. In the first part of the paper, on the one hand, the key concepts are defined, such as academic ethics, computer ethics and ethical responsibility, and, on the other hand, the main issues involved in the unethical use of technological resources are presented. In the second part of the paper, there are highlighted the principles underlying the ethical use of technological instruments in academia.

Keywords: information technology, ethics, higher education, responsibility, principles

1. INTRODUCTION

Information technology has caused and will continue to cause major changes in the approach to situations related to this issue, due to the fact that it has had a major impact like no other recent technology on every sector of society. “We live in a world of endless change” (Hargreaves, 2002, p. 189) and “in a complex and changing society” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, p. 693). The course of ethics and academic integrity has been missing for a long time from the curricula of the university study programs in Romania, so the authority of the person proposing such an approach can be controversial, whether viewed from the perspective of the ethical-philosopher or from the perspective of a framework teacher without philosophical training. As Mureșan (2009, p. 32) states, “ethical teaching for specialists without a philosophical training involves learning original and adapted methods of teaching ethics”. To overcome the subject of controversy, the author proposes the solution of a “moral consultant”, who will help the beneficiaries find unique answers to the ethical dilemmas they face, making them understand the life situation they are in. However, theoretical ethics continues to be important, as it provides a knowledge base for interpreting conflict situations from an ethical point of view, which we are facing.

The following objectives we pursue in this chapter are: defining the key concepts underlying the academic ethics course; presenting the specific problems in the area of the academic ethics and in the field of scientific research; analyzing the role of forming and developing ethical competences at university students and teachers.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF USING TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

2.1. Definition of terms

The term ethics comes from the Greek ethos which means character, habit. Ethics is a branch of philosophy. The object of ethics is morality, namely the understanding of the fundamental ethical categories (good, truth, beauty, justice, etc.), so ethics can be defined as the philosophy of morality, comprising the study of all moral values and norms in action. In the general sense, the concept of ethics is defined as “principle or standard of human behavior” (Jamil, 2013, p. 73). According to Pavel et.al., ethics is defined as „a philosophical discipline that “studies the practical and theoretical
problems of morality" (1978, p. 246). Leabu (2015) defines ethics as “a discipline of dialogue in which each party expresses its own beliefs, personal point of view and listens to the opinions of others”. Other important concepts for tackling ethical issues are deontology and moral duty. The word deontology, developed by theJeremy Bentham (1748-1832), derives from two words of Greek origin: deon (debt) and logos (science). In the original Greek sense, deontos signifies the science of what must be done, the science of debt. In their article, Alexander and Moore (2016) state that in contemporary moral philosophy deontology is a normative theory that shows which choices are morally required, prohibited or allowed. It reveals what kind of people we are or should be. Deontology is based on the concept of moral duty that takes different forms, depending on the era or the author trying to theorize it.

Technology is what makes computers unique, and this uniqueness makes the field of computer ethics unique (Moor, 2001; Tavani, 2002). Researchers in this field (Bynum, 2006; Floridi, 1999, 2007, 2008) use the term “information ethics” as a name for the metaphysical foundation specific to computer ethics. Information ethics “must be able to address and solve the ethical challenges that arise in the new environment based on the fundamental principles of respecting information, preserving and using it” (Floridi & Sanders, 2001). Computer ethics is regarded as a subfield of information ethics, the purpose of which is to determine what we should do in these cases. According to Moor (1985), computer ethics includes "consideration of personal and social policies for the ethical use of computer technology". Collins and Miller (1992) offer an innovative contribution to the issue of computer ethics. According with the authors, the software is different from the other products manufactured, thus implying different and difficult ethical problems. Mason (1986, p. 5) considered the privacy, accuracy, property, and accessibility (PAPA) as „four ethical issues of the information age”. Privacy may be best understood as the concern with the information one discloses and how best to protect that information. Accuracy can be understood as concerned with the veracity of information that we receive, send, and even modify. Property may be understood as the concept related to the ownership of information and the ability to determine compensation based on that ownership. Accessibility refers to the ability of an individual to gain access to information and the safeguards in place to ensure that the information is not compromised.

2.2. Fundamental ethical categories and ethical principles

The fundamental categories form in philosophy a conceptual system that represents the architecture of a philosophical conception. Among the fundamental categories of ethics are truth, beauty and good. Each of them is explained and interpreted differently by different authors, and their importance for each philosophical system differs. Thus, Georgescu (2011) analyzes Hegel’s conception of truth, starting from the statement of the great philosopher, according to which truth, that is, the perfect correspondence between a thing and its concept, can only be given in the form of the idea. In History of Philosophy, Erdmann (2013) appreciates that truth is the foundation of all ethics. The author explains the meaning of the term “truth”, stating that “we have the feeling that we should be or do it in a certain way” (p. 266). According to this acceptance of truth, man is determined by ethical considerations and only man has an ethical purpose before. If utilitarian theorists recommend that we maximize good in order to achieve moral happiness, for Kant's ethics, human dignity and "good will" are the most important, though not the only, values.

In the study signed by Beauchamp and Childress, authors who base ethical principles (Mureșan, 2009, p. 27) it is stated that ethical principles are a “set of widely accepted values that guide moral evaluations”. Among the general ethical principles, grounded in the field of bioethics, are respect for autonomy, harmlessness, doing good, justice and professional-patient relationships. The issue of ethical principles is a controversial one, because there are authors who support the existence of such principles, but also authors who deny their existence. Gülen, (quoted by Paya, 2007), defines morality as “a set of noble principles that originate in a high spirituality and lead human behavior”. However, Mureșan (2009, p. 27) demonstrates that the consideration of general ethical principles is due to “principleism”, which is a specific method of ethics applied to the analysis of moral facts. In time, the general principles have come to be considered the basis on which the moral rules, or the central values of a society can be formulated, criticized and interpreted.
At European level, the general ethical principles receive adapted or even new formulations: the principle of respect for autonomy, the principle of dignity, the principle of integrity, and the principle of vulnerability. These are included in the Report of the European Commission “Basic Ethical Principles on Bioethics and Biolaw” (1995-1998). To these are added the principle of precaution and the principle of solidarity. The significance of each of the principles set out in the European Commission Report is reproduced in the work of the cited author. Thus, the principle of respect for autonomy implies respecting the following capabilities of the individual: to create ideas and goals in life; from to understand you morally, and to have a private moral life; to act and reflect without being constrained; to take personal responsibilities, political involvement and informed consent capacity. The principle of dignity refers to the respect of the human being as a “moral being”, but also as a “specific human being” having “soul and body”. The principle of integrity provides respect for the private life of the individual, his condition of having a dignified life, mentally and physically, on which he must not intervene from the outside. It concerns the protection of individuals in relation to the public storage of personal data, the right to life, the right to decide your own death, etc. The principle of vulnerability refers to the “fragility of life”, referring to the care for the vulnerable (Mureșan, 2009).

3. THE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS IN THE AREA OF ACADEMIC ETHICS

There are many definitions and characterizations of academic ethics. In a first acceptance, that of Lobkowicz (1984), academic ethics is an application of ethics in general to the special situation of a particular profession and the institution in which the profession is conducted. The author considers that in order to correctly define academic ethics, a characterization of the academic community is required. Universities, says Lobkowicz, are “schools in which teachers are scientists actively involved in research” (p. 236). The idea of university compels teachers not only to train practitioners for those professions that require theoretical knowledge, but also to educate. Universities must contribute to the training of students, that is, to shape their character, giving them a perspective on the possibilities and limits of the human being.

In the acceptance of some Romanian researchers (Socaciu, 2017) the academic ethics brings together elements from the ethics of a profession and the research ethics. The academic community internalizes certain ethical standards that represent a response to the expectations expressed by the society towards this community. The idea regarding the responsibility of universities in shaping the character of students is also supported by Couch and Dodd (2005). The authors distinguish between ethical training of future specialists (doctors, engineers, lawyers) and ethical training of students as members of the academic community. Here, it is necessary to differentiate between the professional ethics and the ethics of the classroom activity of the teacher and her students. Thus, the ethics in the classroom and outside it aim, in the opinion of the authors mentioned, "maximum engagement of students in the learning process". Experiential learning can personalize and legitimize traditional classroom instruction, giving students the opportunity to consider the social and economic dimension of ethical issues.

In the context of academic ethics, students are taught to think about ethical decisions, learn to recognize the ethical issues of real life, through reflection and dialogue (Couch and Dodd, 2005). In contrast to this approach, professional ethics, argue Eirich, Cranston, Kimber and Starr (2012, p. 102), is the extension of everyday ethics to the nuances of professional practice. It encompasses the values and beliefs that guide a group of professionals in their relationships with clients. Professional ethics is closely related to professional codes of ethics, different from one profession to another. This category of problems concerns the behavior of both the university teacher and the students. In this case, the relationship between authority, power and deontology is questioned. The moral essence of a relationship of authority is that it is established between people, equal in rights and obligations, free from each other, with the same rights to existence and personality development.

By extrapolating these features to the situation of the relationship between the teacher (the bearer of the authority) and the student we can identify some specific aspects of this relationship. The teacher's
teaching authority is based on the strength of his speech. The didactic legitimacy is conferred by the competences certified by the specialized studies and by the psycho-pedagogical ones. The relationships of the authority bearer manifest themselves horizontally, with colleagues, or vertically, with the manager or students. The relation of the authority bearer (teacher) with the manager (the power holder) is materialized by the fact that the latter performs the transmission of the tasks, the guidance, control and evaluation of their fulfillment, grants sanctions, and rewards, approves promotions, applies relegations. The relationship between the authority bearer and the students is materialized in the transmission of knowledge (information), training of skills and attitudes (opinions), evaluation (measurement and appreciation), exercise (training).

We consider that the issue of the relationship between authority, power and deontology also brings into question the more sensitive aspects of the ethics of care that should be reflected in the classroom activity of the teacher in the university environment. Erich et al. (2012) consider that the ethics of care should be the basis of the relationships between the teacher in higher education and students. Trying to characterize "good teaching" from the perspective of ethics of care, the authors argue that "good teaching" in the university context concerns the moral nature of teaching based on honor, respect and care in the relationship with students. Truthfulness and fairness as well as personal commitment to being fair and just are other necessary features of such a relationship (Erich et al., 2012).

Couch and Dodd (2005) point to “mutual responsibility” as one of the ethical principles that should govern this relationship. A conclusive example of ignoring ethics of care could be the mismatch between the ethical requirements expressed explicitly in the classroom by the teacher and the implicit values that he or she demonstrates through his / her behavior during classroom activities. Therefore, one of the learning activities proposed to the students at the seminar on academic ethics aims to understand an extract from Levinas's ethical theory.

In the classroom we have total control and our responsibility is to transcend the other. If we ignore this responsibility we can commit some kind of violence against those who have believed, innocent, in our self. Partial denial is violence, it denies the independence of being. This denial happens when we refuse to allow the other to transcend us. Faced with this denial the other falls. The face is closed and the educational experience is compromised (Levinas, quoted by Carriere, 2007, p.5). One problem that may have negative effects on the relationship between teacher and student is the concept of cheating, academic dishonesty, reported in most articles on academic ethics.

By linking this issue to the principle of academic integrity, several authors (Sousa, Conti, Salles, Mussel, 2016; Thomas A., Zyl, 2012; Şercan, 2017), point to some of the common forms of academic dishonesty: inappropriate use of academic materials or help unauthorized third party, when a student reads his colleague's test answers, uses unauthorized written materials, equipment containing digital messages; passive deception when a colleague provides written materials for copying; plagiarism with its forms; segmented group work, when the teacher expects each student to gain a global understanding of the entire paper, and the student sends only his part, without demonstrating the global understanding; concealment, when the student commits a willful error, of which he may have advantages: taking a higher grade, passing an exam at which another colleague has taken his place; lie and manipulation, the use of false information that generally includes emotional involvement: nonexistent health, family problems; presentation of papers: essays, reports, laboratory experiments, carried out partially or completely by another colleague; covering the absence of a colleague who is not present at the course; sale of essays, reports, bachelor's or dissertation papers.

Investigating the issue of academic deception as perceived by students, Erich et al. (2012) have also noticed other problematic situations that refer to both the behavior of students and teachers. These include: the phenomenon of bullying manifested by the university staff towards students through threats regarding evaluation if the students refuse to meet certain unjustified requirements of the teacher; the phenomenon of favoritism towards students close to the teacher who are not evaluated according to official standards; sexual harassment; the lack of professional ethics and care ethics in the relationship between teacher and students, which is manifested by the teacher's refusal to talk to students about the grades given, or by the exaggerated confidence in the notes given by an inexperienced member of the professional group, the lack of confidentiality in discussions between
teacher and students. Giving and taking bribes for exams, drinking alcohol during the program, misogyny are other problems that alter the teacher-student relationship, reported by Romanian researchers (Mureșan, 2009).

According to some of the researchers (Sousa et al., 2016) academic deception seems to be rooted in the academic culture of many learning environments, students do not hide their deed, or even pride themselves in the circle of friends. The students who do not share this attitude are stigmatized. For these reasons, in pedagogical and institutional contexts, the academic dishonesty should always be in the attention of teachers, as part of the daily process of shaping the students' characters. The argument made by the authors is especially important from an ethical and pedagogical point of view, with long-term implications (Sousa et al., 2016, p. 463): “the problem is that what [students] learn in the field of morality will manifest in their behavior, years after they have graduated from the institution”.

4. THE ETHICS ISSUES IN THE FIELD OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

A special area of academic ethics is represented by the ethics of scientific research. This branch of academic ethics encompasses a diverse issue. The paper “Academic deontology. Curriculum framework” (Papadima, 2017) addresses a large part of the issues that must be taken into account in the ethics of scientific research: the originality of the research, the scientific dialogue, the teamwork, the correct writing of the scientific papers. Thus, an original research represents "an answer of its own, anchored in current literature study, following methodological standards disciplines” (Papadima, 2017, p.15). The originality of a scientific work can be recognized for the stated purpose of the research, in the synthesis on the specialized literature, in the techniques and procedures used during the research, in the processing and interpretation of the data obtained or in the experience of the researcher.

The scientific dialogue is realized by the correct citation of the sources. The order in which the authors are cited may differ, according to the research, and may be displayed alphabetically, depending on the importance of the authors’ contribution to the elaboration of the work or their position in the group of authors (first author, research coordinator, etc.). The behaviors that do not respect the ethics of the research, mentioned in the cited work, are the inclusion in the collective of authors of notorious persons, without their knowledge, to artificially increase the value of the work, or to publish works performed by students, masters, doctoral students, without their knowledge and without recognizing their merits. Data falsification is the presentation of fictional data in order to conduct a research (Papadima, 2017, pp. 15-24).

Plagiarism is defined in the specialty literature as "the act of using someone else's work without proper recognition or unauthorized, unacceptabe use of someone else's ideas as if they were original or common knowledge" (Thomas & Zyl, 2012, p.144). The Romanian researchers synthesized the attempts to define plagiarism in the specialized literature, showing that they "focused on the idea of stealing words or ideas" (Șercan, 2017, p. 21). The members of the National Council for Ethics of Scientific Research, Research and Innovation also formulated a comprehensive definition of the notion, according to which "plagiarism is the taking over by an author of elements of the intellectual creation work of another author and presenting them in the public space as components of one's own work "(Șercan, 2017, p. 23). Plagiarism refers to the work generated by illegitimate takeover, whether intentional or not, from a deontological point of view (Șercan, 2017). The subject of plagiarism is approached in a very large number of specialized works in international and Romanian literature. Speaking about the forms of plagiarism, Sousa et al. (2016, p. 460) identifies complete plagiarism, which consists of the literal transcription of an entire text, without citing the source, partial plagiarism, when someone copies certain phrases or paragraphs from different sources, and conceptual plagiarism, when someone adopts certain concepts or theories as being his.

Ryan (1998) argue that old-style plagiarism was arduous, required some degree of skill, and was relatively easy to spot by knowledgeable faculty. As opposed to that, the Internet has made cyber cheating as simple as a mouse click and has raised the bar for instructors who may be struggling to keep up with tech-savvy perpetrators. The Internet is seductive with its ease and speed of access and sheer bounty. To a student under pressure to produce an assignment it may seem just too tempting:
"stealing or copying someone's work has become so effortless that students may be inured to the ethical or legal consequences, much like drivers exceeding the speed limit" according to Granitz (2007).

Baruchson-Arbib and Yaari (2004) conducted a study to explore the differences between plagiarism from printed sources and Internet sources. The research results indicated that potential information sources must be treated separately, in order to gain a full understanding of the phenomenon. In this context, there is important to prepare students how to cite Internet sources properly. By doing so, universities can reduce the extent of plagiarism, and particularly Internet plagiarism, committed by students. Woodson (2002) conducted a study to investigate students’ uses and attitudes towards computer and Internet ethics. One of its purposes was to determine the task based and non-task based use of computer lab Internet by sampled students. The study was descriptive and hence survey instruments were used; statistics, frequency distribution and percentages were used to conclude the results. They concluded that the university population that visits the computer lab shows higher usage of Internet for academic purposes. For non-task based categories i.e., chat, music and video download etc., the usage rates were on the low end of the survey scale.

Şercan (2017) specifies forms of plagiarism, identified after consulting the international literature. Thomas and Zyl (2012) shows that most of the time students plagiarize because they do not know or do not understand the citation rules. Another cause of massive plagiarism among students is the ease with which information is accessed on the Internet, as well as the digital skills of the current generation, for which the rules of behavior of the past become history, are no longer understood or are no longer accepted. Thus, when questioning students about these reasons, Thomas and Sassi (2011) found that young people accustomed to surfing social networks such as Tweeter, Facebook, or video, believe that what the teacher wants students to learn can be considered, by the latter, a common interaction, that the information published on the Internet is the property of the community and does not require any citation. Students also appreciate that the values have changed a lot compared to the previous times when the teachers were trained.

5. THE ROLE OF FORMING AND DEVELOPING ETHICAL COMPETENCES AT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

According to the current pedagogical paradigm by teaching in any discipline we aim to train students with certain competences. In the case of the academic ethics course the aims should be represented by ethical competences. In broad acceptance, competence is defined as the set of knowledge, skills (abilities) and attitudes that the learner assimilates. However, the complex structure of academic ethics requires a nuanced approach to the ethical competencies that we should strive for by teaching this discipline. It is about a pedagogical competence of the academic ethics that deals with aspects of the teacher-student relationship in the classroom, but also about a competence of the academic ethics that aims at the scientific research. We will insist, in the following, only on the pedagogical competence of the academic ethics, which emphasizes the pedagogical relation between teacher and student.

Ghiatău (2015) argues that this represents a complex structure of knowledge, capacities, values and attitudes that provide support for the complex ethical role of the teacher, as a moral model for his students. According to the researcher mentioned, the ethical competence of the teacher includes knowledge about, and respect for moral norms, the ability to recognize moral situations, the ability to correctly evaluate solutions from a moral perspective, the ability to overcome obstacles to promote moral goals. Ethical knowledge, Ghiatău argues, is an intuitive, tacit, type of knowledge based on experience. The intuition involved in this type of knowledge can be instantaneous, purely emotional or informed, based on analytical thinking about the choices the decision maker has. Both types of intuition, the author asserts, provide material for ethical judgment and decision making. Knowledge that contributes to the formation of ethical competence includes ethical theories, knowledge of the normative foundations of the field, knowledge of professional laws and codes, knowledge of the structure and culture of the organization. Experience-based knowledge is another facet of the ethical knowledge that the teacher should use.
6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, from the point of view of the contents addressed throughout the academic ethics course we aim to combine traditional themes, aiming at the great ethical theories with practical themes, of analysis or application of the studied theories, but also with topics that aim to develop students' creativity in the field of ethics. Authors who have studied ethics closely offer specific strategies and methods that can be used by non-ethics specialists for teaching it as an academic discipline. However, careful analysis of the various ethical methods indicates that most of them find their correspondence in the strategies and methods currently used in contemporary pedagogy. Creativity for the development of ethical skills is also encouraged, regardless of the ethical method we apply at a given time to justify decisions.

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