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Ethical Challenges of Designing on Application for Reading Instruction Management System (RIMS): A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This study aimed at identifying the ethical challenges encountered when developing a language education virtual environment that acts as a smart platform for managing reading comprehension instruction for EFL/ESL learners. Since Reading Instruction Management System (RIMS) is going to observe, monitor, and supervise the learners' out-of-class activities and help teachers improve their teaching quality, it has to seriously handle humane elements which have not been seriously debated in the related literature on language education software development so far. To this end, this study has devised a qualitative study to further explore the aspects of ethical considerations that have to be considered when developing technological aid. Accordingly, 14 teachers and 14 students were selected based on the purposive sampling method concerning the condition that they will be among the teachers and learners who will use RIMS when it is officially launched in the institution. They were asked to take part in interviews which were held on a one-on-one basis and in Persian, the participants' mother tongue. The data were codded and the emerged ones were then classified under four themes including the challenges related to the teachers, learners, and institutions. Each of these has several aspects which are discussed, accordingly.

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Introduction

The move to new approaches to L2 instruction has required many schools and private institutes around the world, in general, and in Iran, in particular, to use computer-assisted or mobile-assisted learning technology in their off-line or online courses. Under these conditions, the form and type of individual-social relations have changed and power relations, the hierarchy between students and teachers, realization of individuality, expansion of classroom walls, and new relationships, in general, have been deformed. Similarly, the application of these technologies in Eastern and developing societies such as Iran, which has different socio-cultural values, causes different types of learning in users (Kian, 2014).

The fact is that the introduction of learning management systems (LMSs) which are based on information technology not only has changed the nature of the teaching-learning process (Zarghami, 2009) but also has expanded its boundaries beyond physical classes and learning environments. Accordingly, instructional environments have created new learning opportunities and have undergone fundamental changes and modifications over the past few decades (Carliner & Shank, 2008).

Anohina (2005) considers the manifestations of ICT-based education to include: computer-assisted education, distance learning, Internet-based education, resource-based education, web-based education, technology-based education, and online education. Online education as a new manifestation is a special type of education that uses the Internet and other technologies based on the Web to provide learning experiences (Stewart, 2004). Although the popularity of this mode of education was on the rise in the past decades, the breakout of the Corona pandemic in 2020 catalyzed the shift to online education.

During the past year, students and teachers witness an unimagined situation in which they had to interact virtually on commonplace platforms and unfamiliar virtual learning environments developed for managing their students' learning processes and teachers' instructional methods, as well. This situation was a fertile field of unexpected teaching-learning problems. In this regard, one of the problems encountered in L2 classrooms is teaching reading comprehension on a distant learning platform. This challenge was the motive for the researchers to design an app that could intelligently manage the learners while they were doing reading comprehension activities, either online or off-line, far from their teachers.

In fact, developing a smart application and an intelligent learning management system for L2 reading comprehension is the unprecedented mission in the field of L2 instruction in Iran and most other contexts, to the best knowledge of the researchers. Accordingly, the lack of sufficient background knowledge on the possible consequences of the introduction of such an application into an L2 instructional program, the researchers decided to explore the operational aspects of putting such an educational technology into practice prior to its final design and implementation. That is, the rationale for conducting this study was to explore the non-engineering and educational aspects of using such an LMS for L2 instruction.

There have been some attempts to introduce ethical challenges of computer-assisted language learning (CALL); however, they either considered the challenge from a general perspective, such as Heffernan and Wang's (2008) study on English teachers' perceptions of copyright issues or focused on specific e-learning cases (Wang & Hefferman, 2010). Akbulut

et al. (2008) claimed that learners' gender, course content, and users' previous ICT experience impact their ethical computer behavior in terms of hardware and software use, and do not cover e-learning ethics. Additionally, most of the studies in the past two decades concentrated on learners' privacy, such as Jerman-Blazic and Klobucar (2004) and Tu (2002), and the results were based on an outsider's observation, taking Kano (2008) and Schultz (2006) for examples. Although there has been a dearth of data regarding ethics, and opportunities to study English teachers' and students' conduct in traditional or virtual classrooms using CALL, there has been very little research including both English learners' and teachers' perspectives to the issue. This may be due to the fact that "different countries usually have different standards of e-learning ethics. Further, for the sake of expedience, many CALL teachers simply do not want to tackle these issues, as doing so would inhibit them from developing and using e-learning materials" (Wang & Heffernan, 2010, p. 798).

Based on the aforementioned rationale, the researchers approached the problem from different perspectives including the learners' or teachers' attitudes and perceptions of LMS. However, one of the less frequently investigated issues in the use of educational technology in teaching contexts, in general, and L2 instruction, in particular, is the ethical aspects of LMS implementation which is the main issue under investigation in this study. It was assumed that since the participants in this study had at least a unique experience of using LMSs, their perspectives will be of high value for developing a smart reading comprehension software that is going to manage the learners reading comprehension development virtually on both offline and online platforms. In the vein of the aforementioned rationale and purpose of the study, the following research question was developed:

What are the ethical challenges faced by the L2 learners and teachers of English as a foreign language concerning the potential implementation of a smart reading instruction management system (RIMS)?

Literature Review

Developing a Reading Instruction Management System (RIMS)

According to Stanovich (1980), reading issues arise as a result of each student's inadequacy in the reading method. As the explanation of both the top-down and bottom-up reading implies, and according to the recommendations made by various experts on improving reading ability, readers can attain familiarity and precision once they find themselves able to ace the fruitful utilization of each model. When readers are able to master the effective use of each model, they will be able to achieve familiarity and precision. Excellent reading skills may be demonstrated by their simplicity and correctness throughout the reading process.

To do this, a consistent link between the two models must be maintained (Stanovich, 1980). Channa Yossatorn & Yossiri (2012) demonstrated that with the assistance of teachers, students may develop four skills. According to the conclusions of this study, utilizing techniques can assist foreign students in medical and engineering in enhancing their skills, including reading.

Furthermore, Channa and Nordin (2014) investigated cognitive learning approaches and proposed using them as input to build reading comprehension courses. It was indicated that cognitive and metacognitive techniques can improve students' reading comprehension. Interestingly, Channa and Nordin (2015) discovered that reading activities were the sole way

to increase the apprehension of the text. The zone of proximal development concept was suggested as a viable method to overcome obstacles to text reading in this study. Similarly, Channa et al. (2015) did research on reading and metacognition and found that metacognitive methods such as planning, monitoring, and assessing can help students improve their reading comprehension. The study's findings indicated that teachers can help children enhance their reading abilities by using metacognitive methods.

Considering the Ethics in Developing a RIMS

In fact, virtual learning with a user-friendly environment has some potentially attractive features such as providing distance learning at all stages of education (Rajasingham, 2009), easy and round-the-clock access to content and resources (Khan, 2005), inexpensive education, cost-saving and time-saving procedure (Tladi & Seretse, 2018), full use of the Internet and the Web, use of multiple channels of communication and interaction such as e-mail, forums and chat-rooms in the educational process (Lewin 2014; Pappano, 2013). It has attracted the attention of many individuals and institutions interested in going beyond the current frontiers (Rajasingham, 2009). Since virtual learning has the potential to reach a broad variety of audiences and given the number and diversity of learners in learning environments, it is important to have a policy of balancing expectations and studying how users perceive ethics in online learning environments. Consideration of ethical principles leads to respect and tolerance among students, as well as constructive relations and interaction based on rules (Lengel et al., 2004).

Although instructors adhere to the ethical foundations of their profession, when it comes to the implementation of a virtual learning application, they may face issues other than face-to-face instruction. In this way, new ethical challenges may be created for teachers which may include one or a mix of the following issues: (1) political and social influence, (2) cultural diversity, (3) bias, (4) geographical diversity, and learning, (5) digital divide and (6) social etiquette (Zenbylas & Vrasidas, 2005).

Some unethical examples in virtual and online education are the invasion of privacy, violation of copyright laws, plagiarism, the spread of digital fraud, increasing deception, promoting anti-values, irresponsibility, etc. (2002, Bauman) Various studies have been conducted to examine the challenges of virtual learning in L2 instruction. Keller et al. (2009) compared the concerns of virtual university professors at universities in Argentina and Sweden and showed that Argentinean professors considered communication with students and their active participation to be an important motivating factor.

Also, problems such as lack of creativity and new ideas, lack of knowledge about technology, lack of motivational factors, and weakness of organizational culture, were among the obstacles to the educational experience of professors in virtual universities. Stodel (2006) also identifies five major neglected areas of virtual education (1) lack of in-depth online conversations, (2) absence of instinctive and creative ideas, (3) dearth of understanding of others, (4) shortage of knowledge of the subject or content of instruction, and (5) privation of teacher monitoring and role modeling. Therefore, the necessary grounds for the growth of a sense of belonging and attachment are not provided. Joy (2004) also found that a virtual classroom is an "improvised culture" that requires more time and work. Communication must

be very clear, as it may lead to misunderstandings. According to the surveyed teachers in his research, it is very difficult to make the learning environment lively and to develop new solutions to problems in cyberspace. Identifying student learning styles is another important problem in virtual learning. Therefore, the learning environment is not a place to show off and requires the acquisition of skills such as listening skills, feedback, and thinking about students' opinions. According to Joy (2004), the biggest drawback of virtual learning is the lack of personal experience of the student in communicating with their teachers.

Based on what is discussed so far, the researcher developed a learning management system (LMS) to help the EFL learners and teachers as well to develop reading comprehension skills. With regard to the fact that this system is specifically developed to manage reading instruction, it was called a reading instruction management system (RIMS). This system which has the capacity to be used both online and offline has not been developed for learners with specific proficiency levels, cultural or linguistic background, or a specific educational context such as a public school or a private language institute. RIMS is considered to be an open platform for any teacher with any pedagogical orientation and does not support or promote a specific teaching method.

RIMS is a ready-made platform that enables teachers to feed their own teaching material and comprehension questions into the system and plan a series of classroom activities and out-of-class assignments which have to be done timely, according to the deadlines set by the teacher. The activities are also can be attributed to categories based on their levels of difficulty or type of skill or sub-skills they touch so that RIMS can prepare smart reports on formative assessments and performance of the learners with regard to their level or type skills they mastered. In addition, RIMS is equipped with a smart learner concentration tracking system that monitors the degree of learners' concentration, hesitation, and presence while they are doing the activities and taking tests during which they would not be able to cheat.

Overall, a review of literature suggests that virtual learning may lead to a transformation of the structure of education and, in contrast, raise some new concerns about the ethical challenges of learning which occur in a new setting, i.e. cyberspace. In this study, an attempt has been made to represent the perceptions of the students and teachers of a virtual learning system that was developed for the sake of managing L2 reading comprehension teaching-learning management without bias. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to identify the ethical challenges of introducing a RIMS phenomenologically.

Method

Design

The present study was conducted using a hermeneutic or interpretive approach to qualitative research (Given, 2008). According to Sokolowski (2000), demonstration is a way in which it is possible to "see" the essence, truth, or meaning of anything. He emphasized reduction and stated that the subject under investigation must be unveiled and reduced to its inherent features. He also added that it is necessary to put aside any judgments, opinions, and presuppositions about the subject, and only see, report, and describe the subject under investigation. In this study, an interpretive point of view with emphasis on Van Mann's (2001) approach was adopted

to discover the perceptions of the students and teachers, about taking up RIMS in L2 learning and its ethical challenges.

Van Manen (2001) proposes three steps to guide the interpretive phenomenological approach to research in the field of education. The first step is to collect data on the "biosphere" of the participants as well as the researcher himself. The second step is to uncover the underlying issues. The third step is to organize suggestions and orientations for practical action based on the findings of the previous steps. Thus, these steps provide a framework for studying the perceptions of the participants about RIMS and interpreting the findings.

Participants

According to the objectives of the research, the participants were selected from the students and teachers of English courses in a language institute to whom the RIMS were going to be introduced. Based on the provided demographic information by the participants, purposeful sampling was done to select 14 teachers and 14 students who were actively involved in virtual learning environments in multiple L2 classes during the 2020-2021 academic year. In addition, the selected teachers had an active contribution to these virtual classes and had the experience of providing and developing electronic material for their students. Moreover, the students were known as active top students in intermediate or upper-intermediate classes based on their scores. Due to the principle of ethics in the research, the names of the participants are not mentioned. They were asked to take part in the interview voluntarily.

Instrumentation

To collect data, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used. In the interview process, open and semi-organized questions were used so that students and teachers had the freedom to answer the questions and the only task of the researcher was to control the directions of the answers so that the interviewees did not deviate from the main track of the inquiry. The problem under investigation and the purpose of the research were explained to the participants in-person and the main interview session was held in Persian. Concerning the ethical considerations observed in this research, before the interview began, participants had been asked for permission to record the interviews and were assured that the information was confidential. Participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research and participated in the interview with informed consent. In addition, having the right to withdraw from the research at any time was one of the ethical considerations that were observed.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This study was done prior to the development and introduction of a RIMS to a group of learners and teachers of English as a foreign language to identify the possible ethical challenges. The aim was to consider the challenges in developing the setting defaults of the application so that minimal operational defects are encountered when implementing the RIMS. Accordingly, the rationale was to select the volunteering students and teachers who were going to use the RIMS and focus on their perceptions of the ethical challenges which may be raised during the RIMS implementation. After the sampling procedure described in the previous section, an interview protocol was developed after consulting various related studies which had been already conducted on the challenges of implementing virtual learning and learning management systems (LMSs).

The interviews were conducted, as described above. At the end of each interview, the interview data were converted into text and the text was the subject of thematic analysis. Separation and writing of thematic propositions were done for each interview separately. Thus, the first categories were formed and the relevant topics were identified. In order to check the validity and accuracy of the research, the validity, reliability, and verifiability of the data were examined through multiple sessions of reviewing and discussing the codes, their thematic groupings, and classification. In order to observe the accuracy and objectivity of judgment, any prejudice about the phenomenon under study before and after the interview has been avoided; continuous review of data was done by allocating enough time for a true understanding of the data and proper establishment; extracted codes and themes were reviewed multiple times, and interpretation of the results was done after reaching agreement on selected codes and theme classification. The coding process was conducted in parallel by two analysts. In the end, the two analysts sat together and reviewed their analyses and discussed the emerged codes, themes, and subthemes so that the final scheme was developed. It has to be mentioned that the inter-rater coding reliability was .89 in this study which denotes a high level of reliability of the results reported in the next section. To analyze qualitative data, MAXQDA software (Version 2020) was used. All data were coded and categorized in the software.

Results

Analysis of interview data led to the identification of four main themes and twelve sub-themes of ethical challenges in implementing the RIMS. The main axes include moral dilemmas related to the institute, teacher, student, and class. These challenges will be described below in Figure 1.

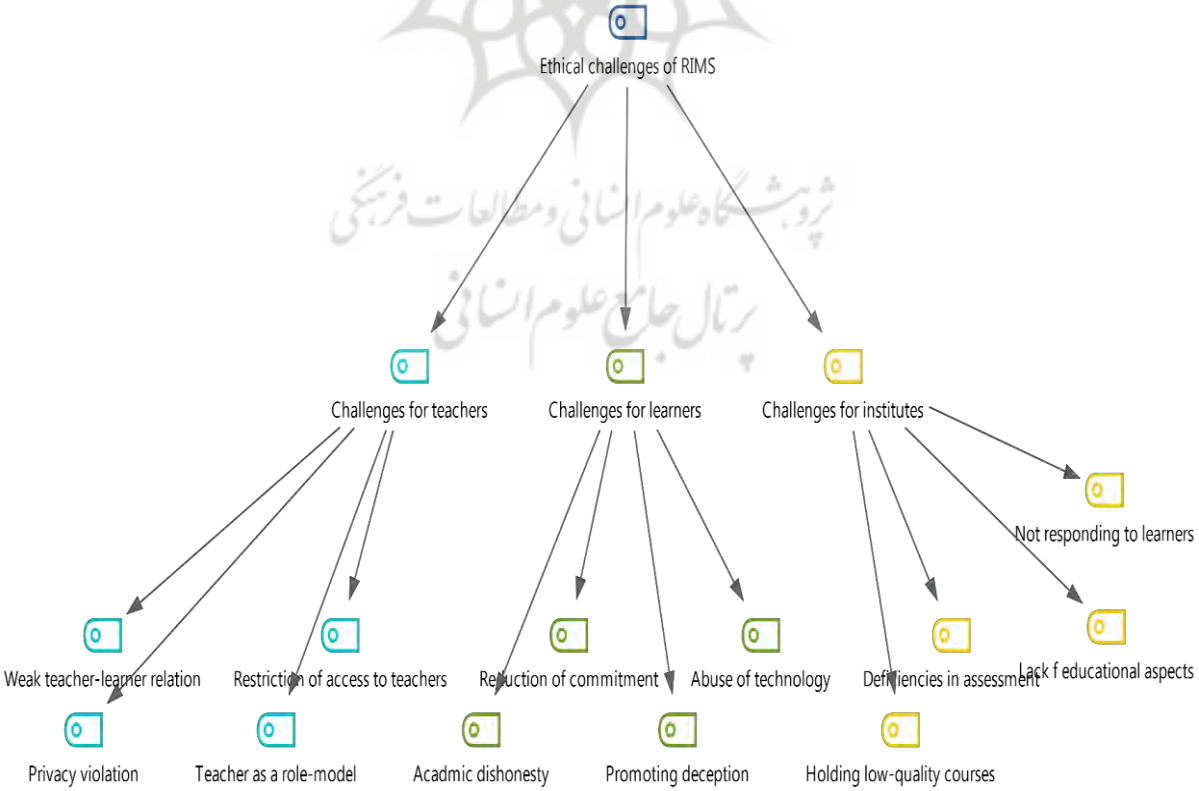

Figure 1. The mind map of student and teachers' perceived challenges in using RIMS

1- Ethical Challenges Related to Teachers

Findings obtained from the analysis of the data from the interviews with the participant show that the most important ethical challenges related to the teachers include the following:

1-1- Privacy Violation

The concept of "privacy" consists of three pillars: anonymity, confidentiality, and loneliness (Banisar, 2000). In the field of virtual learning, the issue that endangers the privacy of the students and the teachers is the increase of the student-teacher relationship and their constant availability and may cause excessive communication and harassment that affects the student's personal rights. Therefore, it is necessary that the level of access and communication between the parties be clearly defined and observed during the course and instruction (Casey & et al., 2008). With regard to confidentiality and anonymity a participant stated:

Participant 3:

> *In RIMS, there are many conversations between students and teachers during the semester on the virtual platform, which sometimes forces students to disclose their performance and knowledge. This is accessible to other students as well or even institute managers. I generally do not like to have my performance disclosed to others.*

Therefore, this issue can affect the quality of interactions between students with each other and with the teacher. This also may affect the students' performance and attitude to RIMS. In terms of excessive communication and virtual harassment a participant stated:

Participant 11:

> *Students usually expect their teachers to be available to them online and to answer their questions and concerns while they are on RIMS. Sometimes, I communicate with my teacher early in the morning and late at night on social networks, and I expect to receive a quick response, but usually, they think we are violating their privacy.*

1-2- Restriction of Access to Teachers

Despite the feasibility of managing reading comprehension from distance, the temporal aspect of instruction seems to be an issue. RIMS is indeed smart enough to manage a learner's concentration on the reading task and provide feedback in terms of the wrong choices s/he make fulfilling the task items; however, further interaction may be needed. This "additional" interaction seems to be a controversial issue; in other words, learners assume that they are in the position to be free to ask their questions on online platforms and get instant responses or, at least, have the responses in the shortest time possible; nevertheless, the teachers find themselves in the position to claim that there is a limit to working hours so that they are not responsible for out-of-class reading comprehension practice of their learners, and if the learners are practicing reading on RIMS, it does not mean that they are in a class. Concerning the quality of providing feedback on RIMS, a teacher stated:

Participant 12:

> *Access to the teacher in RIMS should not be limited to specific hours and the teacher should be available in various ways, and be responsive when necessary,*

but, unfortunately, I think very little may it happen. As far as I know, my teacher is willing to respond quickly and in the shortest time.

With regard to monitoring out-of-class activities done by students, a teacher stated:

Participant 6:

We, the teachers, try to answer the students' questions as much as we can. On the other hand, we would like our students to respect our restrictions and personal lives. Therefore, we may not be able to answer students' questions quickly.

It can be seen that there is an ethical dilemma that necessitates setting terms and conditions of using RIMS so that both parties have to see the terms of using the application online and offline.

1-3-Weak Teacher-Learner Relations

A further challenge seems to be related to the learner's feeling of being supported and scaffolded either affectively or cognitively. As it is evident in the following excerpts both parties are aware of the need; however, the ways they approach the issue are not parallel. It seems that the teachers are considering the new environment a new educational context subjected to an innovative approach whereas the learners consider RIMS in continuation with the traditional instructional procedures. It seems that further "dialogue" is needed for both parties to come to an agreement.

Participant 14:

Some teachers, because they do not a face-to-face contact with us, the learners, think that they do not need to improve the quality of their content and teaching, and therefore most of their teaching is usually soulless, ordinary. I wonder if there is a risk that RIMS can deepen this attitude.

Participant 5:

The ways students attend, teach and evaluate in traditional and virtual classes are different from each other. So it is natural that the nature and process of establishing and maintaining this relationship are different.

1-4- Lack of Role Modeling of Teachers

It is undeniable that the learners of English as a foreign language attending a virtual environment need various supports, including educational advice, counseling on both technical services, and strategic solutions to their problems. In other words, it is their right to have their teachers as their role models not only for developing their strategic competence while doing their tasks but also for developing their overall human character.

Participant 14:

In face-to-face classes, the learner sees the teacher modeling the way we need to answer the question. I doubt that it is possible in RIMS. If this is going to help us, we have the right to be guided by our teacher.

Participant 7:

> *In virtual classes, the teacher either appears on the monitor or sends clips modeling the strategies. I wonder if we have this option on RIMS.*

2- Ethical Challenges Related to Learners

The findings of the analysis of the interview showed that the most important ethical challenges related to the learners include the following:

2-1- Academic Dishonesty

Academic honesty is the fundamental value on which educational institutions are built and is an unequivocal commitment to the five principles of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility even in the most critical conditions. Both teachers and learners presuppose that RIMS, similar to other learning management systems, is open to this threat.

Participant 8:

> *Sometimes some learners suffer from dishonesty, but they may not be aware of that. They may do not care that helping other students with the task without the teacher's permission is an example of dishonesty. Can't it happen on RIMS?*

Participant 9:

> *Learners are dishonest for some major reasons: fear of academic failure, tendency to get better grades, parental pressure, and expectations. In addition, if they are caught, there is no special punishment for them.*

Considering these points of view from both teachers and learners, language learning software developers have to consider the fact that academic dishonesty is an ongoing ethical issue when a learning management system is put into practice and preventive measures have to be taken when developing the software so that both parties can rely on the individual learner's abilities and competence.

2-2- Promoting Deception

Some examples of deception in online education are copying a student's notes and course materials without his permission (Dietz-Uhler, 2011), or help from a personal tutor or notes from previous semester students in classes or a final exam without the instructor's knowledge (Rowe, 2004). Although this category could be classified under academic dishonesty, since this emerging code was not directly relevant to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, or responsibility, an independent theme was allocated to this code. Unlike the previous category, dealing with academic dishonesty in terms of the learners, this category refers to the content in the sense that it has to be innovative and renewed so that the answers provided by the learners in previous terms or even previous sessions fail to help the learners currently using RIMS. Accordingly, it is expected that the system has to provide a new combination of texts and relevant questions or even different types of questions for the same text so that the learners do not come across repeated content.

Participant 1:

> *I believe that students who are concerned about getting a higher grade and are under pressure to get a high grade, or those who are very busy, may find a way to deceive their teachers or even the "smart" system you are introducing.*

Participant 13:

> *Because virtual courses and tests are held when the teacher or a proctor is absent, some learners can get the answers to the task from other learners who have already passed these courses. They skip the RIMS.*

2-3- Reduction of Commitment

Intellectual property rights are the use of ideas or writings of others under their name, by removing the names of the original authors (Ko & Rusan, 2010). In other words, plagiarism means copying the literary works of others, which involves copying word for word from any source and turning it into one's own work (Dietz-Uller 2011). Accordingly, it is expected that if a previously prepared or published material is used in RIMS, the sources are mentioned. However, there is a risk to observing this ethical issue in that the address the learners need to find the answers are also provided. It is believed that the Internet is the dark source of learning material as well. Both teachers and students assume that if the learners using RIMS know where the passages and reading tasks came from, they can easily trace it on the web and access the answer keys, test books, and sample test items as well.

Participant 2:

> *Students may submit their answers perfectly and their assignments flawless in online classes because they are responsible for their answers rather than finding the answer. There is always a way for finding the answers to the questions in the books.*

Participant 10:

> *It is a piece of cake. You can find the answers to the tasks by searching the Internet. They are available for free […] if not, you pay some little money and download it.*

Considering the fact that the possible access of the learners can provide inequality in terms of the learners' observed readiness in RIMS and, consequently, this may lead to unfair evaluation of the learners' reading comprehension ability of the learners, the learning management system developers have to keep an eye on the principle of authenticity and mentioning the sources from which the material was extracted while they are assuring the teachers and assessors that the answer keys or other supplementary material are not available to the learners.

2-4- Abuse of Technology

Using technology to deceive or share information for skills is different from the supervision of professors on student actions. During the Corona pandemic, there have been recurrent reports about the poor connection affecting the LMSs in Iran in higher education institutes and especially, in schools. However, it is believed that the existence of such problems may help the uncommitted learners to make believable excuses about why they have not been active on

RIMS as they are expected. Since many teachers are worried to have the same experience they had with other LMSs with RIMS, too. There is a need to assure the teachers regarding the flexibility of RIMS and its smart monitoring systems in that the learners cannot skip the sessions they have to attend in the virtual learning environment.

Participant 3:

> *Students learn how to provide plausible excuses for not doing homework on time and taking time again to do or evaluate homework. Therefore, they may intentionally disconnect or disrupt their Internet connection or their system to delay the assessment and redo the task.*

3- Ethical Challenges Related to the Institutions

The findings of the analysis of the results of the interview with the participant show that the most important ethical challenges related to the institute include the following:

3-1- Lack of Educational Aspect

Lack of face-to-face communication has caused students to not be able to be morally influenced by their teachers and other individuals in the institution. Some teachers believe that the cultural values transferred in face-to-face classes are part of what the students have to learn when they attend an educational institution no matter what the subject of material is.

Participant 4:

> *The weakness of such systems is that there is no moral training in them. They may fail to experience the "culture" of the community in which they are growing up. Some values are dependent on cultural transfer which happens in actual human gatherings, not in virtual gatherings.*

Considering the critical aspect of education, their claim is well-supported and this aspect of language teaching has been emphasized by both the critics of teaching material developers and the critics of language teaching methods. However, the virtual environment can provide a different context for raising cultural and critical aspects, but it seems that it is not impossible to do so. In addition, it is hoped that the new environment can teach new aspects of values that are relevant to cyberspace such as netiquette.

3-2- Not Responding to Learners

Similar to other educational applications and LMSs, RIMS is developed by other parties than the institution in which it is implemented. However, both teachers and learners as the main users of this platform expect full client support and responsibility. It can be assumed that the institution which implements the platform is in the frontline and has to predict this need of the learners and teachers. The need may be more intense in the case of RIMS in that they are new to this environment and certainly need some demos which help them with the preliminaries of the environment and a rich help menu item that help the users find handy responses in a short time. In addition, a client support center is needed for both teachers and learners which can help them with possible problems.

Participant 1:

> *If you need to call, to clear up the ambiguity or solve the problem, the institute is hardly willing to answer. Most learners are unable to go to the institute in person and the institute is not responsible for them and their issues."*

Participant 13:

> *I had problems many times during the online classes held during the last academic year. The institute was not willing to provide support. Is it true about RIMS?*

3-3- Holding Low-quality Courses

Using RIMS, teachers and institute supervisors believe that they have the minimum of computer and internet skills to administer their classes; however, they see themselves responsible for holding high-quality courses as far as they are not going to provide technical support. That is, they assume that the learners are referring to them when facing any problem, even technical ones when using RIMS and it is not their responsibility to resolve these problems. Instead, they believe that it will waste their time and energy which are intended to be spent on teaching English and reading comprehension skills per se.

Participant 2:

> *Training in the use of tools and facilities for teachers is either not implemented or is not held seriously and with quality. We want to use new technology in our classrooms and lessons, and this will reduce the quality of our teaching. Look at what the virtual classes did with us last year during the Corona epidemic.*

Participant 4:

> *[Institution] must first prepare the learners technically and upon admission. It is not a teacher's duty to do so and teach English.*

3-3- Deficiencies in the Evaluation System

Many technical shortcomings and gaps in the e-learning evaluation system increase the score bubble and decrease learning standards, and the result is a decrease in student motivation and efforts (Schutz et al., 2013). It is expected that RIMS is not the only source of judgment for the teachers and the institution to assess the learners' achievement after a course. It seems that, from an ethical point of view, the teachers and learners expect that the decisions are made on multiple sources including RIMS.

Participant 5:

> *Here, the conditions of the test or score evaluation are not clear. While the score is important for measuring our success.*

Participant 12:

> *We need to know how to merge its evaluation program with ours. We need to know and I think students should know, too, that if RIMS is going to affect the way we judge them. If so, how and to what extent?*

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, based on the research findings, it can be concluded that virtual learning technology, despite its usefulness and unique opportunities and facilities in the field of language education, can create many ethical challenges in language education settings. Today's society needs flexibility, dynamism, and creativity, and these needs must be met by the education system through creating appropriate opportunities for innovation, interaction, thinking, problem-solving, and challenging the complex issues and problems of today's world. Unique features of virtual learning including the opportunity to use multimedia, virtual interaction, and flexibility have provided unprecedented opportunities for L2 education as well. In other words, today virtual learning seems to be able to remove some of the limitations of face-to-face training due to its advantages such as no need for physical presence, oversupply, and transcendence. Therefore, virtual learning as a worthy innovation and acceptable solution to solve the problems of the academic community has been considered and welcomed by social groups applying for academic education in Iran.

However, due to the neutrality of technology, it should be said that the position of virtual learning with regard to the ethical issues concerning users, especially, the learners and teachers, is not always positive and constructive, and may emerge as a threat to the quality of education. Lack of communication and face-to-face interaction among students and between teachers and students may be one of the most significant ones. The high density of students in each virtual class, teachers' ignoring students' activities, false identity, and lack of student commitment to do their responsibilities and participate in exams cause fragile communication and interactions and the emergence of value gaps and reduction of the ethical development of students.

Accordingly, some experts and teachers emphasize the immaturity of this type of education, while online education in the world of information technology is growing rapidly. In general, it should be said that if virtual learning fails to educate knowledgeable, capable, and responsible students in line with the academic and educational goals in the future, the acceptance of this technological aid in educational institutions has to be questioned seriously.

Feenberg (2002) believes that technology is not a neutral tool that different individuals and groups can use for different purposes, nor is it a destiny that only God can save us from, but something that is built for facing problems and can be transformed. Feenberg (2002) also believes that just as the law can be changed, technology can be changed and alternative technologies may be brought, so given the role and importance of relevant social groups and their flexible interpretations in the development of e-learning and changeable technology. And the reform of virtual learning technology, we can hope that we can make correct and logical decisions through rethinking, modifying, and redesigning e-learning environments and their communication technologies in order to pay attention to cultivating moral character, shortcomings and eliminating its educational shortcomings and moving more towards the realization of a rich identity for users.

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