



Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in Slovakia

Full Report

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1. Information sources

Information about Slovakia was collected through:

- The three levels of online surveys;
- Documentation and on-line evidence;
- Structured interviews with students and academics.

Interviews were conducted personally about the national situation in Slovakia. The interviewees were academics with special responsibility for aspects of quality assurance. Where possible in the following report the voices of the interviewees have been used to inform and enrich the narrative. The responses to the national survey have helped to furnish the background to the educational situation in Slovakia.

In the online survey 201 students, 35 teachers and 2 senior managers participated from 7 different institutions. The discussions were raised at several conferences dealing with teaching at HEIs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

2. Higher Education in Slovakia

According to the Annual report on the state of higher education in Slovakia (annual report, 2012), there are currently approx. 200,000 students. Almost 5% of them are from foreign countries, mainly from Greece, Norway and the Czech Republic. Around 60% of students study in bachelor degree, 30% in following master's degree, 5% in "long" masters degree and 5% in Ph.D. degree. There are 20 public and 13 private HEIs in Slovakia. From the population of 19 years olds 57.7% enter Higher Education

The most popular fields of study are social sciences (inc. economics) (58 % of students), followed by technical sciences (20%), health sciences (9%) and natural sciences (5%). Total public income for all (public) Slovak HEIs was approximately 450 million EUR.

More than 2000 students (1%) realized their international mobility in 2012. The most popular destinations are the Czech Republic, Germany and Spain. More than 1100 international students chose Slovakia as their destination increasing the Slovak student population by 0.6%.

Most of the students at public universities study for free; there are some fees for longer studies, for additional studies, or for studies in different languages (e.g. English). These fees vary between HEIs.





Tuition fees for private universities are fully paid by the students. Fees range between 300 and 3000 EUR per student per academic year.

When asked about HE student assessment methods in Slovakia, the most common answer would be written exam. It used to be oral exams, but as the number of students has been rising, teachers were not able to cope with the masses and switched to written exams, mostly in test form with closed items.

3. *Quality Assurance in Slovakia*

Although the National annual report deals with finances in detail, there is no explicit mention about overall HEIs quality or even plagiarism policies. The main body responsible for the quality of higher education in Slovakia is Accreditation Committee granting particular HEIs authority to provide education in particular fields of studies. According to new laws, HEIs are obliged to monitor their quality internally, but there are no overall data about 2012.

The intention of the ministry in the quality assurance area is that *“HEIs has defined and actively use tools for discovering poor quality of provided education, for monitoring students’ progress in the educational process and innovation of methods and content of education according to changing needs of students and employers”* (long-term plan).

The official information portal (iedu.sk) compares HEIs according to various criteria, which makes information about finances, number of students, alumni incomes, alumni unemployment rates, etc publicly available.

4. *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism in Slovakia*

In the ministry annual report, there is no indication that HEIs should monitor plagiarism separately from other forms of academic dishonesty and the Accreditation Committee report (accreditation committee report) does not contain any mention of plagiarism.

Even if there is no mention in contemporary overall official reports, it does not mean that plagiarism is not addressed in Slovakia at all. Since May 2010 a central system for theses and dissertation collection and for plagiarism detection (crzp.sk) has been operating in Slovakia. The creation of the system and operation costs were / are funded by Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport and the further development of the system is co-funded by European money. The National theses repository is run by the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information. A student uploads his/her thesis into the information system of his/her university. Universities then pass the data to the national repository and later they are informed about the result. The result – protocol on matching – is accessible to the supervisor and to the opponent. Student gets to know about his/her result through the opponent’s review. Full texts of theses remain stored in the repository, but some of the





theses may be classified. Public access to these theses is then restricted. This is specified by the author and/or the university in the licence agreement. However, even classified theses are being scanned as possible plagiarism sources.

Before 2006, plagiarism and academic integrity in Slovakia were addressed very rarely (Králiková, 2009). Several academics have been dealing with plagiarism since 2006 after publication of some cases in the media. These people believe that even plagiarism had been present among students in the past; the practice spread vastly along with the Internet and ease of copying from the Internet (Skalka et. al., 2009). In September 2006, Slovak Rectors' Conference approved and published two documents of national importance: *“Measures to Reduce the Ethical Violations of Standards for Preparation and Presentation of the Bachelor's, Master's and Dissertation Theses”* and *“Code of Ethics for Higher Education Institutions Employees”* Even though there is a successful system for plagiarism detection, which has been in operation since 2009, there are no unified national guidelines or policies for addressing plagiarism at the universities. Skalka (Skalka et. al., 2009) proposes, *“Universities and faculties should gradually create the culture of academic integrity and rules for intellectual property protection. (...) All processes have to be developed gradually and sensitively with respect to internal culture to particular university, as well as individual judging and penalties in case proving plagiarism.”*

The lack of unified guidelines is illustrated by answers from 2 senior management staff at the same university. Each of them was from different a faculty and their answers were totally opposite. They both agreed that policies for plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty were separately defined. One of them added *“Just the penalties are not known in case of top politicians”*. However, answers to following questions seem like an exercise of negation: Do you think it should be [separately defined]? Yes. No. Do you have a set of standard penalties for cases of student plagiarism? No. Yes. Are there standard penalties for other forms of academic dishonesty? Are these penalties separate from those for plagiarism? No. Yes. Do the plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties differ according to a student's level or background? Yes. No. Are there other factors taken into account, e.g. first offences, international students, mitigation circumstances? Yes. No. And so on. When one looks at the methodical instructions for theses at this university, s/he may find two mentions of plagiarism: *“Thesis must not have the character of plagiarism and violate someone else's copyright.”* and: *“The head of supervising department is to inform the dean of any case of plagiarism”*. According to study regulations, dean then passes the case to the disciplinary committee, which decides. And evidently, the result may be different from faculty to faculty. So the question is, can we consider these two mentions of plagiarism consider as “defined policy”?

As there is no national policy and most of the universities participating on the survey don't have their institutional policies either, it is often up to the teacher to decide what will happen when plagiarism is uncovered. Where the case is more severe (depends on the teacher's opinion), the student is sent



to the disciplinary committee. The most common penalty is zero mark and repetition or failure of the module or subject. In case of plagiarised dissertation, student is likely to be expelled from the institution. Students' and teachers' answers mostly agree, the only notable difference is in verbal warning for the plagiarism in assignment – teachers thought this is a much more common penalty than the students believed.

		Students		Teachers	
		Assignment	Dissertation	Assignment	Dissertation
a.	No action would be taken	9 (4%)	1 (0%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
b.	Verbal warning	53 (26%)	14 (7%)	16 (46%)	6 (17%)
c.	Formal warning letter	52 (26%)	29 (14%)	8 (23%)	6 (17%)
d.	Request to rewrite it properly	58 (29%)	32 (16%)	13 (37%)	11 (35%)
e.	Zero mark for the work	137 (68%)	88 (44%)	23 (66%)	17 (49%)
f.	Repeat the module or subject	128 (64%)	76 (38%)	20 (57%)	16 (46%)
g.	Fail the module or subject	92 (46%)	76 (38%)	13 (37%)	10 (29%)
h.	Repeat the whole year of study	26 (13%)	40 (20%)	6 (17%)	7 (20%)
i.	Fail the whole programme or degree	48 (24%)	58 (29%)	5 (14%)	9 (26%)
j.	Expose the student to school community	34 (17%)	37 (18%)	4 (11%)	3 (9%)
k.	Suspended from the institution	56 (28%)	84 (42%)	10 (29%)	13 (37%)
l.	Expelled from the institution	49 (24%)	69 (34%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
m.	Suspend payment of student grant	27 (13%)	35 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
n.	Other	13 (6%)	12 (6%)	3 (9%)	3 (9%)

The students often added comments, that a specific penalty depends on the scale of plagiarized text and on whether it is student's first case of plagiarism or not.

5. Why do Slovak students plagiarise?

Both teachers and students agree that the most important reasons are easiness of cutting and pasting from the Internet, students' conviction that they would not be caught, running out of time and the fact, that students do not want to learn anything, just pass the assignment. Students then often ticked that they are not able to cope with their workload (underscored by teachers), whereas teachers added that students cannot express their ideas in their own words (underscored by students). So we can conclude that the main reason leading students to plagiarize is laziness, which is confirmed by one of the most expressive narrative comments: *"Students will not care unless the penalties are serious. There is no way you would encourage most of them not to plagiarize."*

Honestly – we are lazy, we want to have fun and not write some essays we do not care about (...)
 (student survey).

Surprisingly, the lack of knowledge about citing and referencing is not so often marked as a reason to plagiarism (in comparison to other countries). However, students often mentioned a need for better training in citation rules as a mean of useful plagiarism prevention.

	Reason	Students		Teachers	
1	They think the lecturer will not care:	67	33 %	17	49 %
2	They think they will not get caught:	127	63 %	27	77 %
3	They run out of time:	142	71 %	23	66 %
4	They don't want to learn anything, just pass the assignment:	126	63 %	20	57 %
5	They don't see the difference between group work and collusion:	19	9 %	10	29 %
6	They can't express another person's ideas in their own words:	84	42 %	22	63 %
7	They don't understand how to cite and reference:	83	41 %	19	54 %
8	They are not aware of penalties:	38	19 %	7	20 %
9	They are unable to cope with the workload:	107	53 %	14	40 %
10	They think their written work is not good enough:	31	15 %	2	6 %
11	They feel the task is completely beyond their ability:	60	30 %	5	14 %
12	It is easy to cut and paste from the Internet:	132	66 %	27	77 %
13	They feel external pressure to succeed:	32	16 %	0	0 %
14	Plagiarism is not seen as wrong:	69	34 %	17	49 %
15	They have always written like that:	65	32 %	18	51 %
16	Unclear criteria and expectations for assignments:	34	17 %	6	17 %
17	Their reading comprehension skills are weak:	46	23 %	7	20 %
18	Assignments tasks are too difficult or not understood:	50	25 %	6	17 %
19	There is no teachers control on plagiarism:	16	8 %	4	11 %
20	There is no faculty control on plagiarism:	16	8 %	2	6 %

2	The consequences of plagiarism are not understood:	56	28 %	10	29 %
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Another reason, mentioned by some students, is diversity of assignments. Teachers usually give the same assignment to all of the students, or the assignment is the same as it was in previous years. Very often the assignment does not support enough variety, so students know that their texts will be similar to each other anyway. In this situation it is practically impossible to avoid plagiarism and students naturally tend to copy their work.

6. Comparison of Slovakia with the EU average

There were some notable differences between the Slovak surveys and the EU average. Almost all Slovak students (99%!) become aware of plagiarism before or during their bachelor studies. The EU average shows that 20% of students become aware of plagiarism during their masters/PhD degree or are still not sure about it. Although the percentage of students receiving training in scholarly academic writing was similar (62% in SK compared to 60% in EU), Slovak students were much less likely to ask for more training (36% in SK compared to 63% in EU). Significant numbers of Slovak students (96%) were convinced that their institution had policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism. The EU average for this criterion is 66%. Students were convinced that policies were available to students (80% in SK, 53% in EU), that penalties were administered according to a standard formula (62% in SK, 38% in EU). They were also convinced about the existence of policies dealing with academic dishonesty (87% in SK, 56% in EU). Evidence that indicated Slovak universities do address this problem was the fact that 70% of students correctly identified a case of serious plagiarism from a scenario that only 37% of EU-wide student respondents were able to identify. The percentage of Slovak students thinking that one of their teachers may have plagiarized in his/her class notes was almost the same as that for the EU as a whole (33% in SK, 30% in EU). Only 14% of Slovak students said they may have plagiarized, whereas the average for all EU student responses was 29%.

The most frequent methods for Slovak students to get to know about plagiarism are student guides and handbooks followed by workshops.

When given a specific case (40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied into the student's work), Slovak students were more likely to judge it as plagiarism (or serious plagiarism), compared to the EU average. For example, the sub-question stating that some words in copied 40% of text were changed, but with no quotations, references or in text citations, gave us following results:





The answers to other sub-questions of this question can be combined together and weighted producing one number from interval [0:100] for each country. Slovakia together with UK achieves the highest value, which means that Slovak students are the most aware of plagiarism among all EU countries. Details are described in (Ondrejicka, 2013).

7. *Examples of good practice*

The most outstanding example of good practice is definitely the existence of national repository of theses. As it is run centrally and universities are obliged to upload their theses, students from all institutions have theoretically the same conditions. The other aspect is that the software tool provides just a protocol for matching with other sources. The decision about whether a given case is plagiarism or not lies with teachers and/or the examination committee and these may not always follow the same procedures.

8. *Recommendations for Slovakia*

Compared to other countries, Slovakia should be praised for its achievements. And it already was: The European Commission has awarded the Centre of Scientific Information of Slovakia the European Prize for Innovation in Public Administration. However, having an outstanding technical solution, national repository and obligation to upload all theses, is just half way to the solution. Slovakia has to make sure that the results are used properly and that the technical tool really helps to prevent plagiarism in Slovakia.

Slovak teachers participating in the survey were convinced that the three most important aspects that may improve the situation in Slovakia were: Better communication with students, law enforcement, and penalties.

Communication with students involves consultation on their theses and also education, as one of the respondents suggested: *"It is needed to give our time to students, to consult their theses and lead them to respect values created"* (teacher survey). When a teacher knows a student is working on his/her topic and presenting gradual progress, s/he can be confident that student is not plagiarising.

Teachers have useful tool available. They have to cope with the results and follow procedures ordered by their university. Some of the respondents admitted that their colleagues are hiding cases of plagiarism to make their lives easier. This has to end, but neither a technical solution nor any guidelines or policies can force the change. It is about overall culture of countering plagiarism in the society.

Both teachers and students agree that one of the most efficient means of plagiarism prevention is severe penalties. Students have to be aware of these penalties; they have to know they will be





punished if they plagiarize. Cases of plagiarism should be published (probably anonymously) to make sure students know the consequences of possible plagiarism.

However, not only stick, but also carrot works. Namely students suggested more education on plagiarism: workshops, courses, more time of their supervisor. Universities should take plagiarism prevention seriously and teach students how to write their assignments and theses without plagiarising.

9. Conclusion

The responses from Slovak students demonstrated the highest level of understanding about plagiarism within the whole Europe. Their unwillingness (in comparison with other countries) to receive more training on plagiarism is therefore understandable. The research team of the IPPHEAE project would also like to praise Slovakia for existence of national repository of theses and built-in plagiarism detection tools.

Based on suggestions of respondents, comparison with other countries, exploitation of good practices and research results, some recommendations were raised. We will now summarize them clearly:

- Keep training for students and teachers at those institutions where it works well. Introduce training at institution, which are not providing it yet. They have to know exactly what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, how to cite and reference correctly and why it is important.
- Unify policies and procedures dealing with plagiarism; Plagiarism should be explicitly mentioned in study regulations.
- Unify penalties for plagiarism across all HEIs in Slovakia. Cases of plagiarism should be published (anonymously) and institutional and national statistics should be maintained.

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