Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in Estonia

Executive Summary

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ES 1   Background

ES 1.1   The survey of Higher Education (HE) in Estonia was conducted between June 2011 and June 2013 using on-line questionnaires (students, teachers and senior managers) and national level interviews. The purpose was to check the existence and to explore the effectiveness of policies and systems for assuring academic integrity at bachelor and masters level studies in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of this country.

ES 1.2   The research findings for Estonia were based on responses from over 50 survey participants from 10 Higher Education Institutions: 48 students, 8 teachers and representatives of some national institutions.

ES 1.3   Estonia has 27 HEIs, 7 of which are universities. 6 universities are public and 1 is private. Also there are 20 professional higher schools, 9 of which are state owned and 11 are private.

ES 1.4   According to National Statistics in 2012 of the 63,400 students studying in Estonia 78.0% studied in universities and 22.0% in professional higher education schools. In the same year 49.6% of university students were studying at bachelor's level, 25.7% at master's level, 8.0% integrated bachelors and master's level and 6.6% at doctoral level.

ES 1.5   In the same year the population of international students was 3.2% of the total number of students. 8.4% of the international students are residents of Finland, 31.1% from other European countries and 20.5% from other countries over the world.

ES 1.5   Institutional and individual academic autonomy of HEIs in Estonia is preserved by the low levels of national intervention and oversight in decision making. But according legal regulation of functioning of these institutions, HEIs and members of academic community, including students, have to follow the legal regulation on academic integrity and intellectual property protection.

ES 1.6   The results of an examination or preliminary examination are given in the form of marks or may be evaluated as a pass or a fail. All Estonian institutions of higher education use a standardised 6-point scale of grades based on the percentage of acquired knowledge: 5 or A (excellent); 4 or B (very good); 3 or C (good); 2 or D (satisfactory); 1 or E (sufficient) and 0 or F (insufficient). But the grades used in Estonia are not directly transferable to the ECTS rating scale.

ES 1.7   The Higher Education Quality Agency organises external evaluation of quality assurance for study programmes and provides oversight for creation, implementation and regular improvements to the internal quality assurance system in Estonia. However no evidence was found to confirm that this process is being implemented.

ES 1.8   No statistical data has been collected at state level and no official research has been conducted in Estonia about cases of academic misconduct or plagiarism.

ES 2   Findings

ES 2.1   Regulation of copyright processes of studies, research and functioning of higher education and research institutions in Estonia is provided in the following legal acts: Copyright Act, Act of Universities, Act of Professional Higher Education Institutions and Act of Private Schools.

ES 2.2   Rectors of seven Estonian universities, intending to create an infrastructure for checking of student's written works, exchange good practices and rationally use limited financial resources, have signed an "Agreement on Good Practice regarding quality".

ES 2.3   75% of students and teachers that participated in the survey, agreed that their institutions have policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism.

ES 2.4   Students in Estonia are familiar with consequences for plagiarising in their written works: 71% expect only verbal warning and 60% zero mark or request to re write their assignment. For plagiarising in their projects and final works at least 50% of students expect either zero mark for the work, to fail the whole programme or degree or to be expelled from the institution.

ES 2.5   At the time of the survey only a few academic units in some universities had used specialised software tools for searching for text similarities, but where they were available the tools were just used for checking students' final work. Some teachers had used open source software tools or information search by keywords using internet tools.

ES 2.6   54% of student respondents believed that some digital tools for search of similarities had been used by lecturers to made decisions about students' written work. Responses from 5 teachers out of 8 survey participants confirmed this fact. But 77% of students also selected "Other" in response to the question about use of digital tools, which could imply that students were not sufficiently familiar with the procedures for checking written work using digital tools.

ES 2.7   83% of students who participated in the survey pointed out that they "*became aware of plagiarism*" before they started their undergraduate/bachelor degree studies, but to the question "*when they learned to cite and reference*", only 54% of students chose the answer

"*Before I started my undergraduate/bachelor degree studies*" and 40% chose the answer "*During my undergraduate/bachelor degree*".

ES 2.8   Students said that workshops, classes and lectures are the main sources of information about plagiarism (60%) and other forms of academic dishonesty (69%). Also, web sites (54%), booklets, student guides and handbooks (42%) were mentioned as other sources of information about plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

ES 2.9   Answering the question "*What leads students to decide to plagiarise*?" most student respondents from Estonia selected the following choices: "*They think they will not get caught*" (73%), "*They can't express another person's ideas in their own words*"(71%) and "*They run out of time*"(67%). Teachers, answering the same question selected the following reasons: "*They can't express another person's ideas in their own words*" and "*The consequences of plagiarism are not understood*" (4 choices from 8 respondents for both reasons) and "*Plagiarism is not seen as wrong*" (3 choices from 8 respondents).

ES 2.10   Answering the question "*What are the reasons for using correct referencing and citation in scholarly academic writing*?" most of students chose the following answers: "*To avoid being accused of plagiarism*" (77%) and "*To give credit to the author of the sourced material*" (67%).

ES 2.11   In response to a question about potential cases of plagiarism, almost all the teachers who participated in the survey were able to identify the two most obvious cases of plagiarism presented in six scenarios, but very few of them saw the necessity for punishing this type of conduct in students' work.

ES 2.12   Most students who participated in the survey were able to identify the most obvious case of plagiarism presented to them, but many appeared to be confused about when and why to acknowledge sources. In common with the teachers few students saw necessity for punishment for this type of conduct in student work. In response to the question "*Are you confident about referencing and citation?*" only 25% of students answered positively, 40% answered negatively and 27% said they were not sure.

ES 2.13   When asked about the use of language translation as a means of plagiarising, a surprisingly high percentage of the teachers (5/8, 62%) and students (57%) either agreed or strongly agreed that this happens, with the balance of 38% of teachers and 42% of the students saying they did not know. This response is in line with answers from most other countries in the EU, suggesting that it may be relatively common for students to plagiarise and avoid detection through this practice.

ES 2.14   Many student participants provided suggestions for how to avoid plagiarism in students' work: to raise awareness about plagiarism, to improve teaching, training and consulting; to provide more information about penalties, to strengthen the control, to improve the study process and tasks of assignments. Some of these proposals are worth taking into consideration by administration of HEIs, for example: "*Improved instructions of reference and citation should be understandable and available for everyone*" or "*Let people come up with their own ideas and stop pushing the fact that every written assignment has to have a bunch of other people's thoughts in it*".

ES 3 Recommendations

ES 3.1 Nationally and internationally

ES 3.1.1 Ideally the creation of repositories for collection and storage of students' written works need to be financially supported by the state as this will require a great deal of time, effort and financial resources that precludes HEIs providing financing of these activities from their own resources.

ES 3.1.2 Improvement of legal regulation is required for encouraging the development and use of digital text matching tools in HEIs. All HEIs around the country should be given access to collected documents for checking newly uploaded student work. This provision will help to deter reuse of written work prepared by students in other HEIs.

ES 3.1.3 To encourage good practice the national government should consider commissioning detailed research into plagiarism and academic integrity policies in Estonian HEIs for bachelor level and above, perhaps making use of the IPPHEAE survey tools.

ES 3.1.4 As part of a fact-finding exercise the national government should consider monitoring the operation of institutional policies for maintaining academic integrity and keeping statistics on the incidences of plagiarism and academic misconduct at all levels of higher education.

ES 3.2 Institutionally

ES 3.2.1 It is recommended that institutions more clearly define the penalties for plagiarism and describe examples of cases when these penalties were applied.

ES 3.2.2 Fair and consistent procedures should be developed for handling allegations, maintaining oversight and punishment of plagiarism. Procedures for hearing student appeals should be prepared, adopted and made accessible to students and teachers.

ES 3.2.3 HEIs in Estonia are advised to organise discussions with participation of academic staff and motivated students about:

- reasons why students are plagiarising;
- difficulties that students meet preparing written work;
- ways of improving the teaching and training processed on avoiding plagiarism;
- expanding existing and including new topics covered when guiding students about plagiarism issues and choosing the most suitable teaching methods;
- improvement of students' time planning during study process.

ES 3.2.4 HEIs in Estonia should apply more effort to improve teaching and training for students on correct academic writing, citing and referencing and understanding the essence of formal requirements by:

- analysing how students understand what it is "plagiarism";
- explaining to students not only the rules of citing and referencing, but also legal aspects of preservation of intellectual property and copyright;
- as much as possible making use of typical and specific examples in the training process;
- checking students' abilities to recognise cases of correct citing and plagiarism.

ES 3.2.5 It is advised that institutions become engaged in academic staff development, because most of the teachers who responded would welcome and benefit from training and discussions about plagiarism and effective ways to recognise it.

ES 3.2.6 Institutions should make more visible their information about services available for students and teachers on avoiding plagiarism. Students should be able to consult those responsible for provision of services on plagiarism prevention, especially when teachers or supervisors are not available.

ES 3.2.7 Institutions are advised to develop a system of monitoring teachers' work on clear use of procedures for fair handling of allegations and maintaining oversight when applying penalties. The academic community should be familiarised regularly about results of such monitoring and invited for discussion on this issue.

ES 3.3   Individual academics

ES 3.3.1 Teachers are advised to provide advice and guidance to students inside the institution, on aspects of academic writing, internet addresses and other sources of information on requirements for citing end referencing, policies and guidance about sanctions and consequences for academic misconduct and details of internal departments and individuals responsible for provisions of these services..

ES 3.3.2 Teachers should pay more attention to explaining requirements for written work, expectations for results and criteria for evaluating the quality of this work, because 50% of student respondents stated that one of the main reasons for plagiarism in student work was that the assignment task was too difficult or not understandable.

ES 3.3.3 Teachers should be more principled in applying penalties according to the regulations and to precisely follow procedures for punishments because according the survey 73% of students think *they will not get caught* and 25% believe *there is no teacher control on plagiarism*.

ES4 Conclusions

The low number of responses to the IPPHEAE survey makes it impossible to understand the full situation across Estonia, but this analysis provides some insight. There is currently no effective national oversight for institutional policies on academic integrity in Estonian HEIs. The lack of statistical data on plagiarism and misconduct cases in student work institutionally and nationally makes it impossible to know whether plagiarism and other forms of cheating are being appropriately and consistently addressed, but the reluctance of some institutions to engage with the survey

coupled with the IPPHEAE results suggest a very immature approach is being adopted in many institutions.

The moves by some institutions to develop a digital repository of academic sources are to be commended, but more national coordination and support is needed to ensure the resulting resources are comprehensive and accessible to all institutions, nationally and, in time, internationally through the provisions of suitable digital tools. The tools will gradually develop the capacity help to plug the gap in access to resources in the Estonian language. However in the longer term the search tools need to have access to a much wider range of resources via the Internet and also material available in different languages.

Different answers provided by students and teachers to the question about sanctions that could be applied when plagiarism is found in student work show there are no common rules on penalising plagiarism and procedures for applying these sanctions known by all members of the academic community. This unfair situation for students and teachers needs to be urgently addressed by institutions.

There were indications that much more access to information and training is needed for both teachers and students on good academic practice and the consequences of academic misconduct.

It is important for the key players in Estonian higher education to seriously question whether they are allowing academic standards to be eroded by the prevalence of different forms of unchecked student plagiarism, facilitated through the global digital economy. Particularly, the analysis of the research generated no confidence that Estonian academics appreciated the ease with which students can acquire or purchase essays and solutions via the World-Wide Web or evade detection through us of sources in different languages.

The IPPHEAE researchers are very grateful to individuals and institutions from Estonia that participated in the survey. Researchers, educationalists and academics interested in contributing directly to further research are advised to contact members of the project team.

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Annex EE-1: Responses to Question 5

Table 16: Student and teacher responses to questionnaire Question 5												
Statement	1. Strongly Disagree		2. Disagree		3. Not sure		4. Agree		5. Strongly Agree		6. Not applicable	
	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T
Students receive training in techniques for scholarly academic writing (s5a; t5a)	0	0	8/ 17%	0	7/ 15%	1	26/ 54%	3	7/ 15%	4	0	0
This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism (s5c; t5b)	0	0	5/ 10%	0	7/ 15%	1	16/ 33%	6	20/ 42%	1	0	0
I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism prevention (t5c)	-	0	-	0	-	2	-	4	-	2	-	0
I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism detection (t5d)	-	0	-	1	-	2	-	4	-	1	-	0
Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students (s5d; t5e)	0	0	4/ 8%	0	10/ 21%	1	23/ 48%	6	11/ 23%	1	0	0
Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to staff (t5f)	-	0	-	0	-	1	-	6	-	1	-	0
Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula (s5e; t5g)	1/ 2%	0	5/ 10%	0	17/ 35%	5	17/ 35%	2	8/ 17%	1	0	0
I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty (s5f; t5h)	1/ 2%	0	6/ 13%	2	15/ 31%	0	16/ 33%	4	10/ 21%	2	0	0
Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism (s5g; t5i)	1/ 2%	0	7/ 15%	0	26/ 54%	4	9/ 19%	2	3/ 6%	2	2/ 4%	0
The penalties for academic dishonesty are separate from those for plagiarism (t5j)	-	0	-	2	-	3	-	1	-	2	-	0
There are national regulations or guidance concerning plagiarism prevention within HEIs in this country (t5k)	-	0	-	1	-	6	-	0	-	1	-	0
Our national quality and standards agencies monitor plagiarism and academic dishonesty in HEIs (t5l)	-	0	-	1	-	6	-	0	-	1	-	0
The institution has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty (s5h; t5m)	1/ 2%	0	3/ 6%	0	7/ 15%	2	27/ 56%	4	10/ 21%	2	0	0
I believe one or more of my teachers/colleagues may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes (s5i; t5n)	2/ 4%	0	14/ 29%	1	21/ 44%	6	7/ 15%	1	3/ 6%	0	1/ 2%	0
I have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution (s5j)	6/ 13%	-	16/ 33%	-	8/ 17%	-	14/ 29%	-	3/ 6%	-	1/ 2%	-
I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately) (s5k; t5o)	7/ 15%	0	13/ 27%	4	13/ 27%	2	15/ 31%	2	0	0	0	0
I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty (s5b; t5p)	1/ 2%	1	7/ 15%	2	7/ 15%	2	23/ 48%	3	10/ 21%	0	0	0
I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism (s5l; t5q)	4/ 8%	0	7/ 15%	3	25/ 52%	1	9/ 19%	3	3/ 6%	1	0	0
I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student (s5m; t5r)	3/ 6%	0	7/ 15%	2	17/ 35%	0	17/ 35%	5	4/ 8%	1	0	0
I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the required procedures (s5n; t5s)	3/ 6%	0	3/ 6%	3	13/ 27%	0	22/ 46%	4	6/ 13%	1	1/ 2%	0
It is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism (s5o; t5t)	0	0	2/ 4%	0	16/ 33%	2	18/ 38%	3	12/ 25%	3	0	0
I think that translation across languages is used by some students to avoid detection of plagiarism (s5p; t5u)	0	0	1/ 2%	0	20/ 42%	3	21/ 44%	4	6/ 13%	1	0	0
The previous institution I studied was less strict about plagiarism than this institution (s5q)	2/ 4%	-	7/ 15%	-	11/ 23%	-	12/ 25%	-	6/ 13%	-	10/ 21%	-
I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism (s5r)	1/ 2%	-	4/ 8%	-	14/ 29%	-	18/ 38%	-	11/ 23%	-	0	-