Project on academic integrity in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Turkey

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Background

The Project on Academic Integrity in the Caucasus, Kazakhstan and Turkey (PAICKT) was commissioned by the Council of Europe as one of the activities of the ETINED platform. The authors represent a team of researchers from Mendel University in Brno, Czechia and Coventry University, United Kingdom. The research was completed between September 2018 and November 2019. The team explored how the higher education sector in each of five countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Turkey, is responding to the acknowledged need for strengthening academic integrity.

PAICKT is the third research project using the same methodology, involving the same team members. The Erasmus funded project Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education across Europe (IPPHEAE), that ran between 2010 and 2013, included a survey of 27 EU member states. The project South East European Project on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity (SEEPPAI), funded by the Council of Europe, surveyed six more countries: Albania, Bosnia- Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia between 2016 and 2017. This third project brings the total number of countries surveyed to 38.

The objective was to cover all remaining countries of the European Cultural Convention by 2020. This will allow Member States to have a complete picture of the situation in Europe. Following the collection of data and its analysis, the profile of each Member State is presented through the “Academic Integrity Maturity Model” (AIMM), in the form of radar charts as follows.
Objectives

The objectives of the study were:
• To identify and analyse policies and practices in regards to plagiarism and academic integrity;
• To identify gaps and challenges but also good examples and success stories that could be shared among the States Parties to the European Cultural Convention;
• To propose guidelines to serve as a reference basis for promoting capacity building in higher education institutions and/or peer-learning.

Methodology

We collected both qualitative and quantitative data about the surveyed countries. We employed the same methods and instruments as in previous projects:
• A set of on-line questionnaires, tailored for students, teachers and managers, translated from English into all relevant local languages by the Council of Europe’s professional translators
• Face-to-face meetings in each country including:
  o Student focus groups using a set of pre-defined prompts
  o Semi-structured interviews with senior managers and institutional leaders
  o Informal discussions with academic staff
  o Seminars and workshops for different audiences on academic integrity

The questionnaires were updated to reflect experiences from the previous SEEPPAI project and also to incorporate changes in focus from the team about threats and potential solutions. However, the core questions remained unchanged, to allow the same analytical tool to be used, the Academic Integrity Maturity Model (AIMM), as for the previous two projects.

Piloting was conducted on the translated on-line questionnaires, with minor adjustments for accuracy before the data collection began in January 2018.

One difference from previous projects was that this time we appointed a locally-based “country manager” to guide the research and advise on the visits to each of the countries under study. These five associate team members proved to be a great asset to the project. Country managers pertained the main channel for contacting potential participants.

The researchers conducted visits to reach of the five countries between March and June 2019. Table 1 summarises the visits and the activities.

The research was subject to standard ethical review and approval by Coventry University and also required approval from Canakkale Osnekiz Mart University in Turkey, before research could be conducted in that country.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAICKT activities</th>
<th>Student focus groups</th>
<th>Manager / national interviews</th>
<th>Teacher /student seminars</th>
<th>Teacher interviews / discussions</th>
<th>Universities visited</th>
<th>State/Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: PAICKT team in-country activities

Findings

The responses had to be reorganised from a language set into country sets according to the country of study or employment of each participant, before analysis. A total of 1266 valid questionnaire responses were available for analysis, as summarised by country in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAICKT activities</th>
<th>Student focus groups</th>
<th>Manager / national interviews</th>
<th>Teacher /student seminars</th>
<th>Teacher interviews / discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>281</td>
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<td>229</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td>341</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>109</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: PAICKT questionnaire responses by country

Strengths and opportunities applying to all five countries
- Involvement in research with international partners from Europe has greatly influenced the attitudes and policies relating to academic integrity at some institutions
- Those involved in the interviews were aware and serious about discouraging cheating
- Institutions with more advanced policies can support institutions with less mature policies
- Text-matching software could be better utilised for educating students about academic writing

Weaknesses and threats applying to all five countries
- Availability of opportunities for “contract cheating”, by other students or commercial essay mill companies.
- Low pay and poor working conditions of academics, more than one job, lack of engagement, are disincentives to taking action against students who cheat
- Grade inflation is being driven by incentives for awarding higher marks to students and not identifying academic misconduct.
• The need for income from tuition fees discourages applying penalties and failing students who are cheating.
• In most institutions individual lecturers deal with cases of cheating - potential for inconsistency and unfairness.
• Where text-matching software is available, similarity percentage appears to be misinterpreted as plagiarism percentage, used to determine actions and outcomes.
• Plagiarism by staff and students is common.
• Exam cheating is common (crib notes, use of technology, communicating with an accomplice and for accessing notes, use of impersonators).
• Examples of contract cheating by students completing assessments for many other students as well as commercial companies.
• Translation plagiarism is a problem common to all five countries; text matching software cannot identify this type of plagiarism.
• Constantly shifting and evolving threats to integrity.
• The publication record of academics is central to career progression prospects of academics, researchers and PhD students; striving for quantity is affecting quality by driving the use of predatory / low quality journals. Scopus / Web of Science indexing is not a reliable indicator of quality.

AIMM Radar Chart for Armenia

Figure 1: Armenia AIMM Radar Chart AIMM score 12.40 / 36
Figure 2: Azerbaijan AIMM Radar Chart AIMM score 15.97 / 36

AIMM Radar Chart for Georgia

Figure 3: Georgia AIMM Radar Chart AIMM score 17.83 / 36

AIMM Radar Chart for Kazakhstan

Figure 4: Kazakhstan AIMM Radar Chart AIMM score 17.40 / 36

AIMM Radar Chart for Turkey
A comparison of all countries and their AIMM scores can be seen from Figure 5.

![Radar Chart](image)

**Figure 6: AIMM results for PAICKT countries**

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt that this research is timely and we hope it will be of value to all stakeholders in these countries, including people engaged in other research on related topics. What came across strongly was the desire by most participants to make their country a better place to live, study and work. They understood that they are on a long journey, but the destination, to improve education, reduce corruption and create communities with strong integrity, is worth the effort needed to get there.

However, it will not be easy. Progress will be hampered by denial, deeply embedded poor practice, low pay for academics and corruption in wider society.

The recommendations in this report for all countries, together with the specific points for each country, provide a good starting point for what needs to be achieved next. Communication and sharing of good practice across countries in the study, combined with provision of training and education, are essential first steps.

**References**


Project on Academic Integrity in Caucasus, Kazakhstan and Turkey. Available at: http://plagiarism.cz/paickt/#projects (Cited as PAICKT)