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Attitudes towards cheating behaviour during assessing students' performance: students' and teachers' perspective(s)

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Montenegro is the first country in the Western Balkans that adopted The Law on Academic Integrity, in March of 2019. The Law was created within the Project *Strengthen Academic Integrity and Combat Corruption in Higher Education*, co-funded by the Council of Europe and European Commission (2017–2019). The whole project was aimed at understanding questions of ethics in higher education and raising awareness about academic integrity (AI). There were a lot of different activities within this project in Montenegrin higher education community since 2017, and that means that the questions about AI are put in the center of academic discussions, both among academia members (students, teachers, researchers) and wider society members. While we may assume that there are no more problems in the field of AI in Montenegro than in some other countries, (according to, e.g. public scandals or university's procedures that are dealing with academic misconduct), the fact that the questions of AI became a part of a public debate is by itself very demanding. Namely, the whole society has very clear demand for HEIs – it's necessary to provide high quality diplomas, diplomas that are absolutely clear of any type of academic misconduct (Perović & Vučković, 2019). It is widely recognized that "When students plagiarize or cheat, they compromise their personal integrity and the institution's reputation" (Engler et al., 2008, p. 99).

The greatest amount of the debate in Montenegro is about plagiarism and about software checking of plagiarism, but the questions on AI are much wider and deeper and AI consists of the whole set of academic values, including intrinsic motivation (and self-regulation) or an attitude towards active learning (den Ouden & van Wijk, 2011), realistic picture about own and others' ethical behavior (Engler et al., 2008), personal awareness (Bonn & Pinxten, 2019) and AI depends on institutional and societal demands and norms (Engler et al., 2008; Bonn & Pinxten, 2019). There are many causes of unethical behavior (Jones, 2011; Lothringer, 2008). Some of them are recognized as academic pressure and competition (Bonn & Pinxten, 2019), the others are connected with societal orientations towards individualism or collectivism (Brodowsky et al., 2019). The highest rating in academic misconduct is probably caused by internet and/or modern technology (Aaron & Roche, 2013; Jones, 2011; Lehman & DuFrene, 2011). It is clear that "Academic dishonesty doesn't start in higher education, but most faculty and many students feel something needs to be done to

put on the brakes" (Aaron & Roche, 2013, p. 162).

Today, there is a large amount of research papers dealing with AI field. Bonn and Pinxten (2019) found that in the period 2005-2015 in the largest databases there were 986 articles about this topic, but only 342 reported empirical data. Some of the articles are oriented towards academic misconduct in teaching (assessing students' performance) while the others are considering research misconduct (Bonn & Pinxten, 2019). It is reported that research misconduct comes in many forms (De Vries et al., 2006), and the same thing could be said about cheating in teaching/learning and assessing (Brodowsky et al., 2019; Jones, 2011).

Research design, aims and objectives

Our aim in this study was to determine students' and teachers' attitudes towards AI issues in assessing students' performance. We aimed to describe how our respondents:

- Recognize ethical misconduct (EM) in several situations given through stories,
- Understand the roles of each subject involved,
- Predict consequences of the EM given in the story and how they understand its' possible causes,
- Create individual answers to EM or resolve problem situation.

Methodology

Our research design was performed on three basis:

1. Considering that we are researching ethical reasoning, we decided to use narrative method (storytelling, fictive case studies). That method was created by Lawrence Kohlberg (1984). In the case of our research, each story is very close to respondents' experience.
2. When treating stories and their usage as a research material, we started with an assumption of cognitive literary criticism that we react to the stories and fictional situations as they were real, thanks to mirror neurons (Nikolajeva, 2014).
3. For creating stories we used taxonomies of cheating behaviors developed by Lothringer (2008).

We used mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative). Each question that was given to the respondents was open-ended, but it also was possible to code, categorize and thematize the answers (Vilig, 2016) and to include quantitative data analysis.

Study design had roadmap as follows:

1. There are many different types of academic dishonesty in assessing students' performance, so we decided to choose 8 of them from three taxonomies arranged by Lothringer (2008, pp. 148–152). These taxonomies consider three domains of cheating: exams, writing assignments and other assignments and actions, and they consist of total

66 possibilities of cheating (Lothringer, 2008). We choose 8 of them (random choice) and created 8 stories. These stories are moral reasoning situations.

2. Considering possible "guilty" person in each story, we decided to have three "guilty" scopes of action: a. *guilty* student(s), b. *guilty* teacher(s), c. *guilty* some other person(s) (other students, persons outside academia etc.). With these three *dramatis personae* we could have 8 different combinations (2^3,3 is a number of actors). It is possible to have 8 combinations as we showed in Table 1.

Table 1 – The actors' roles in ethical stories

Scope of action	a. Student	b. Teacher	c. Other
	EB	EB	EB
	EB	EB	NEB
	EB	NEB	EB
	EB	NEB	NEB
	NEB	EB	EB
	NEB	EB	NEB
	NEB	NEB	EB
	NEB	NEB	NEB

EB – ethical behavior; NEB – non-ethical behavior

Each story is created according to one horizontal line and one combination, so we have one situation that is in line with ethical principles by all actors, and also the latest story shows an example where no one of the actors didn't behave ethically. Considering this, our design gets a better connection with reality and also that was important for our respondents to think better about moral given in the particular story.

3. We set up several questions about each story: Is there any EM? Who (if any made EM? Why do you think so? Which are the possible consequences of this misconduct? What are the possible causes of this behavior? What would you recommend to be done about this case?

4. We gave to our respondents (120 students and 60 teachers) stories and questions in the written form. They answered in the same way. Important limitation of this methodology design was time needed for individual responses (it varied from one hour to one hour and 50 minutes), but our respondents reported that they were highly interested and motivated to understand stories and to write down their answers and ideas.

Results and discussion

Our results show a very good understanding of EM given in the stories. Each EM was clearly recognized by more than 85% of the respondents. Several of them – being incorporated in complex situation in which more than one person was cheating in some way – were not

recognized. But, in this case, it is possible to say that somewhat complex research design with 8 stories and almost 50 questions was too demanding for concentration and reasoning.

Both respondents' groups (students and teachers) are likely to be objective in their understanding of EM. We didn't find statistically significant differences between them when considering identification of EM and *guilty* person in a given situation.

Within the third research objective (predicting consequences and understanding possible causes) we found some differences which we could describe as colored by personal role. Namely, when the students are describing consequences of EM that were made by student actors within the story, they were slightly permissive while for teacher actors they tended to be more offensive. The teachers respondents were more offensive towards both situations. When considering the causes, students tend to be more diverse in their ideas, while teachers group was more homogenous.

Our respondents individual answers to EM were also diverse, but we could see several themes in them: ethical behavior needs to be a didactic topic (students should learn about academic writing), previous students' knowledge is of the greatest importance, un-developed learning strategies are an important part of ethical behavior. We found one common idea between our research sample – more than 90% of our respondents blame university's roles and procedures for EM.

Conclusions

With this research we found out some important ideas of our respondents:

1. They all were willing to participate in this research. We understand it as a great starting point to work in the field of AI. They also see the importance of honesty at the academia and they are able to recognize different EM situations given in the stories.
2. Our participants mentioned several important ideas on how to deal with EM while assessing students' performance. They told us that learning about academic writing and about learning strategies sound to be a part of regular teaching/learning.
3. While partially accepting individual responsibility for EM, they are unique in an attitude that there is a large amount of institutional responsibility. Namely, in their opinion, the institution should have clear and precise roles and procedures dealing with different issues in the field of AI.

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