Contribution of librarians in the prevention of plagiarism: the case of Lithuania

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Introduction

The role of the today's library is not only to maintain information resources and provide services and guidance to users, but also to contribute to the education of members of academic community on issues of academic integrity. From the first sight, the research question could seem too simple, but not simplistic. In the study we explore how librarians could contribute to the promotion of academic integrity in their higher education institutions. It is very likely that such an issue is minor in Western countries; however, this is very relevant in Lithuanian higher education institutions. In this paper, we attempt to figure out points of view of librarians about their roles, particularly how they see their efforts to contribute to the promotion of academic integrity. In addition to this, we also investigate what preventive measures against academic malpractices, such as plagiarism, are taken by Lithuanian higher education institutions.

Methodology

Data were collected using a survey which was completed after the workshop designed for librarians. This workshop was held in English, not mother tongue for librarians, by two lecturers from University of Konstanz, Germany. This is to note that lecturers fulfil their responsibilities in the university library. Therefore, they were invited to share good practice in promoting academic integrity and to encourage Lithuanian librarians to revise their role in academia.

The survey consisted of nine questions – six open and three closed. The first two questions were related to the identification of the respondent's characteristics (such as workplace and area of responsibility). The main part of the survey was designed to find out how the library as a unit of the higher education institution engages in activities related to plagiarism prevention. Respondents were also invited to rate six statements using an interval scale (from 5 "strongly agree" to 1 "strongly disagree" as well as 0 "don't know/can't answer").

Portrait of a Librarian

The survey involved 28 respondents overall, i.e. 22 (78.5 per cent) librarians from universities, 3 (11 per cent) from universities of applied sciences, 1 (3.5 per cent) from a research institute and 2 (7 per cent) from other organisations (e.g. Lithuanian Research

Library Association).

As the core responsibility respondents most frequently identified information literacy and training (34 per cent) and database maintenance (23 per cent). Among the most common areas of responsibilities were customer service and counselling (11 per cent), formation and maintenance of information resource pools (11 per cent), library management (9 per cent) and other areas (12 per cent). Only one respondent testified that s/he is checking intertextual matches using a text-matching software.

Role of Librarians in the Promotion of Academic Integrity

The two-thirds of respondents (21; 67 per cent) indicated that members of the academic community approach librarians with questions on plagiarism. Librarians asserted that they are most frequently asked about compliance with copyright (64 per cent) (e.g. *How to check plagiarism? How to prevent plagiarism?*). The rest of the respondents indicated that academic community is interested in citation styles and/or rephrasing (19 per cent) (e.g. *How to quote correctly? What are the information management programmes?*), and publication ethics gaps (17 per cent) (e.g. *What percentage of plagiarism is allowed? What percentage of self-referencing can be used in the text?*).

Respondents were also asked whether they are facing in-text dishonesty. Half of librarians (14; 50 per cent) answered positively, 12 (43 per cent) responded negatively and 2 (7 per cent) did not answer this question. Respondents most often indicated that the most cases of in-text dishonesty are related to incorrect citation and/or paraphrasing (N=11). Other, more rarely, cases involve: 1) violations of publication ethics, e.g. copying portions of previous publications without providing references to them (N=2); 2) copyright infringement, e.g. copying information from the Internet without citing sources (N=1); and 3) using pictures with the reference to a secondary source or without reference to any source (N=1).

Half of the respondents (50 per cent) indicated that they, or their colleagues carry out activities related to plagiarism prevention for members of their academic community. The most common training provided by librarians is about citing sources, copyright and preventing plagiarism, academic literacy, information literacy and other. Mainly students (e.g. 1st year, 3rd year) are targeted during the training. The frequency of training varies by target group, from once or twice per month in one institution to daily within 2 months in another institution. Teaching staff is less targeted for such a training, e.g. twice or three times per year. Some libraries provide individual counselling and discussion when needed.

In response to a question about other measures to prevent academic dishonesty taken by libraries, respondents most often noted training (61 per cent). Less frequently mentioned prevention measures included individual counselling (17 per cent), use of text-matching software (11 per cent), participation in meetings of academic integrity committee and

public disclosure of ethical infringements (5.5 per cent), observation of an exam as a way to assist teaching staff (5.5 per cent).

18 respondents (64 per cent) affirmed that libraries use a text-matching software while the rest answered negatively. However, some expressed the will to use a text-matching software from the upcoming academic year. Seven respondents indicated that their libraries had access to two or more text-matching software at the same time. Half of respondents affirmed that they use a national text-matching software and another half of them use a foreign text-matching software. This practice evidences that the need of public higher education institutions to use a text-matching software has not changed substantially since the last study conducted in Lithuania (Office, 2019 April). This is to say that 36 per cent of respondents of the current survey and 35 per cent of respondents of a previous study have indicated that they do not have enough resources to purchase a text-matching software, so to use it on regular basis. Nevertheless, in comparison with results from the Office's survey (2018) related to the promotion of academic integrity in national scientific journals, the need to use a text-matching software still remains. Moreover, 47 per cent of Lithuanian higher education institutions indicated that their scientific journals do not use a text-matching software during the peer review of manuscripts.

The library, as a separate unit of the institution, only partially contributes to the implementation of the policy to prevent academic dishonesty (50 per cent of all respondents). One of the means is consulting members of the academic community on issues of academic dishonesty. Over two-thirds of the respondents (78.5 per cent) implement this measure to some extent. Given this fact, the library seems to be one of the most open and accessible units in the institution from which the academic community can obtain all the necessary information on academic (dis)honesty when needed, and this pathway should, therefore, be particularly strengthened (e.g. to deepen not only knowledge, but also creating a positive atmosphere and a culture of collaboration).

Furthermore, 61 per cent of respondents indicated that libraries provide training on writing skills in their higher education institution. Hence, library takes a primary responsibility to train about academic integrity. Therefore, higher education institution should focus on the quality and diversity of such a training, and should provide opportunities to learn to all academia.

Then, by stating that libraries check written works with a text-matching software it is assumed that libraries contribute not only to plagiarism prevention, but also monitor plagiarism practices. In order to reduce the number of ethical infringements through improvement of academic literacy skills in the institution, the library should play a more proactive role in the implementation of institutional plagiarism prevention policy. In addition to this, respondents expressed the need to better involve the library as a unit in the implementation of the institutional academic integrity policy, e.g. 80 per cent of respondents fully or mostly support this idea. In this regard, a mismatch between a reality and an intent

may occur. On the one hand, the library could become a full-fledged actor in the prevention of plagiarism. On the other hand, the competence of human resources should be maintained in the further development of librarians' activities related to plagiarism prevention, and the library should be provided with sufficient technical means, such as a text-matching software.

Observations

Following the workshop and the discussions, several respondents expressed contradictory points of views regarding the role of the library in contributing to plagiarism prevention. On the one hand, according to some respondents, the library should remain a traditional service providing unit, such as the full responsibility should lie with the higher education institution itself. Accordingly, higher education institution should approve the procedure related to the evaluation of plagiarism and then decide which units should implement, but the library should not be among these units. On the other hand, some respondents supported the idea of a today's library and believed that a higher education institution that approved a plagiarism prevention programme must support national academic integrity initiative and pursue homogeneous goals, taking into account good practices of other countries.

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