

THE STATE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY EDUCATION AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EUROPE: A CALL FOR ACTION

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Introduction

Primary and secondary schools are supposed to lay a solid educational and ethical foundation for their students. The development of values at a young age in school contributes to the ethical competencies of students and accordingly increases academic achievement (Berkowitz, 2011; Gamage et al., 2021; Price-Mitchell, 2015). Studies have revealed that neglecting academic integrity during the early years results in bad habits being formed and students continue to display these habits during their university education and workplace (Bacha et al., 2012; Broeckelman-Post, 2009; Dukes, 2012; Gamage et al., 2021; Gravett & Kinchin, 2020; Mulisa & Ebessa, 2021). The presence of a robust academic integrity policy (AIP) is just as critical as holistic instruction to ensure academic integrity at every level of education starting in primary school. The theory put forth by Bretag et al. (2014) is that a comprehensive and clear AIP helps create a culture of integrity at all levels of schooling. Yet, the ethical foundation in general and academic integrity, in particular, is largely overlooked or rarely addressed in primary and secondary school curricula and instruction (Hossain, 2020 & 2022; Menéndez & Valle, 2018; Price-Mitchell, 2015; Santos, 2021; Stoesz, 2022). This is not an exception in Europe,

as Santos (2020) reported that no guidelines or courses have been developed for secondary education in Europe pertaining to academic integrity and research integrity.

The research also demonstrates that besides teachers, qualified school librarians¹ play a vital role in supporting ethical use of information or academic integrity literacy (AIL) at schools - be it policy development or instruction (Hossain, 2020; Menéndez & Valle, 2018; Merga, 2022; Tauginienė & Gaižauskaitė, 2018; Tilke & Barrett, 2021). Further, Merga (2022) stated that school library professionals “Promote understanding and compliance around issues of academic integrity and plagiarism, copyright and digital rights management, research ethics and online safety” (p. 7). Although academic integrity education (AIE) in pre-university years has profound implications, little research has been done on the topic, including in Europe. With this background in mind, we initiated this global study to investigate policy and instructional practices associated with academic integrity and copyright literacy in primary and secondary (K-12) schools by collecting data from qualified school librarians.

¹ School librarians are also referred to as library media specialist, teacher librarian, library teacher, and professeurs documentalistes in France (Hossain, 2019).

Methodology

Based on our study objectives, we conducted an online survey to gather data from qualified school librarians globally commencing March 2021. The questionnaire was created following a thorough literature review, the first author's academic integrity workshop experiences with school librarians in Vietnam, Switzerland, and Hong Kong, and the first and third authors' professional experiences as school library professionals. To ensure equal understanding by survey participants, we defined the related terms and outlined the study objectives as well as data usage and privacy. We then shared the draft questionnaire with two qualified teacher-librarians², an academic integrity workshop consultant and a university professor for their feedback. Using the feedback received, the survey questionnaire was finally created with Google Forms, which included closed, semi-open (using a 5-point Likert scale), and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into three sections - 'Academic Integrity Policy & Instruction', 'Copyright Literacy Policy & Instruction' and 'Demographics & Professional Questions'.

Findings

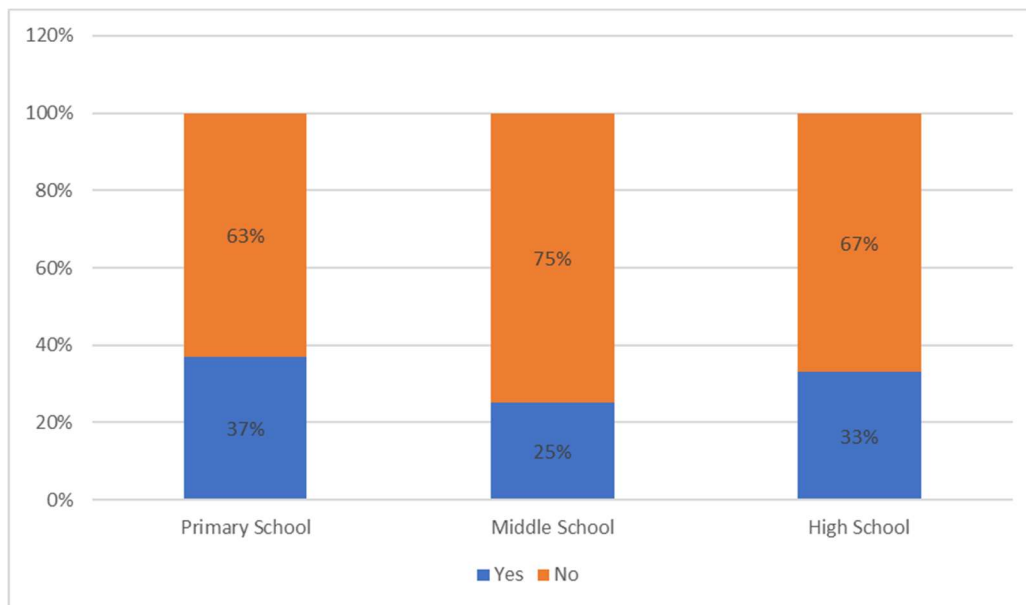
The survey participants reported that academic integrity is a problem at their schools ($M = 2.6/5$) as well as nationally ($M = 2.9/5$). As part of the study, the status of academic integrity instruction/education/literacy was also explored at the survey participants' schools. A majority of the participants reported that academic integrity is taught in their schools to some degree, with 37% beginning at primary school, 25% at middle school and 33% at high school (see Figure 1).

A variety of means and platforms were used to distribute survey questionnaires to the target population, including the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) and IFLA Schools Section listservs, national, provincial, cantonal and city school library/librarian associations. We extensively used social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to reach out to our target audience. Personal emails/tweets/posts were also sent/posted within the authors' networks. To date (March 2022) the survey has garnered 565 responses from 82 countries, including 126 respondents from Europe. Of those responses, 11 were discarded for insufficient information ($n=554$). The majority of participating school librarians have a master's degree in Library and Information Science or a related field, followed by a bachelor's degree (26.83%), a diploma (6.50%), or a Ph.D. (5.96%). The European respondents ($n=126$) were drawn from 30 countries, with Switzerland having the highest number (29). Other notable respondents were from Germany (15), England (12), Scotland (10), and Iceland (7). For this paper, we analysed sections 1 and 3 of the data collected from 30 European countries.

While only 47% of the school librarians indicated they had dedicated lessons to teach AIL, others have hardly been able to teach it or teach when their colleagues invite them to do so. Participant school librarians agreed that workshops, co-teaching with teachers, and using the schools' internal AIL-related resources (e.g., LibGuide, Handbook) were the most effective ways to teach academic integrity in their contexts.

² "A qualified teacher librarian is defined as a person who holds recognized teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship" (Australian School Library Association, n.d.).

Figure 1. Do you teach academic integrity at your school?

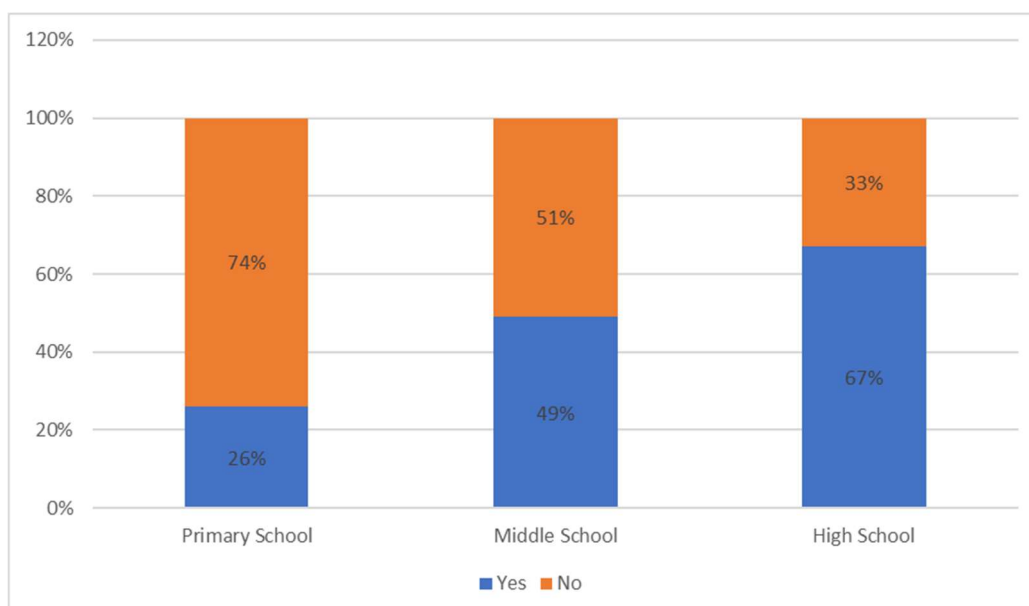


Our survey specifically asked whether their schools had AIPs. According to the survey respondents, 74% of Primary, 51% of Middle, and 33% of High Schools do not have AIPs in place as depicted in Figure 2. The majority of schools that possess an AIP also include a student academic integrity agreement form, 29% contain a teacher agreement form, and 13% contain a parent agreement form.

(73%) believe that the headmasters/principals, teachers and program coordinators/grade level leads in their schools value AIL education and promotion. Regarding academic integrity support, school librarians reported that their schools receive the most support and guidance from external examination boards and curriculum providers (e.g., International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, etc.).

Further data analysis revealed that approximately three-quarters of participants

Figure 2. Does your school have an academic integrity policy?



By asking an open-ended question in the survey, we also gathered school librarians' perspectives on the challenges they face when implementing academic integrity at their schools. The participants highlighted several issues, including lack of collaboration from the teaching colleagues, insufficient time to teach

academic integrity, not embedding AIL into the curriculum, lack of support from administration or external sources (curriculum provider/district or provincial education authority, local university), and a lack of training or related professional development.

Implications and Conclusions

Drawing on the responses of the participants, it can be argued that AIE in European primary and secondary schools is still in the minds of people or on documents. The problems with the effective implementation of academic integrity still prevail. In many school settings - regardless of whether they have an AIP or not - AIL instruction is lacking or sporadic. This study suggests that schools promote AIE within their own institutions through policy development and instructional integration and promotion. This is aligned with the Council of Europe's (2021) Platform on Ethics, Transparency, and Integrity in Education (ETINED) recommendations that the member states follow best practices and principles-based approaches in promoting academic integrity and raising awareness of ethical issues, transparency, and integrity in education.

Collaboration between school librarians and teachers can be used to develop a program based on stakeholders' experiences and informed by research; this can either be integrated into an interdisciplinary curriculum or taught independently as a critical academic skill. It is essential that current and incoming teachers and school librarians are trained in academic integrity and related concepts including instructional skills, both pre-service and after their entry into the profession. In light of the literature, findings of this study and based on the authors' policy and instructional experience, it can be concluded that to develop ethical citizenship in the pre-university years, schools need to adopt an interdisciplinary AIL instructional/educational model backed up by a robust AIP spanning across primary and secondary years.

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