DEVELOPMENT OF A COURSE-LEVEL ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY FOR COLLABORATIVE, SMALL-GROUP TASKS PROMOTING ACTIVE LEARNING

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Abstract

In higher education, an academic integrity (AI) policy describes "a university's ethical principles and values, the forms of appropriate academic behaviour, the penalties for academic malpractice, and the procedures for handling policy violations" (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020, p. 1). Such institutional-level top-down regulations provide a framework creating clear lines of principles, rules, and expectations that everyone within the system needs to closely observe as well as standardization in terms of management and implementation, and quality control. On a global scale, such policies are in effect at many universities and are supported by different organizational and technical means such as management boards, events, workshops, handbooks, similarity detection softwares, etc. (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020). However, no matter how detailed an institutional-level AI policy is, studies have shown that university academic staff is regarded as the main source of information and support in AI-related issues (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020; Sutherland-Smith, 2010). Therefore, under the leadership of course instructors and the participation of students, course-level AI policies need to be established to ensure students understand the pedagogical goals that underpin a course syllabus, appreciate as well as claim ownership of the values, norms, and principles of ethical behavior it aims to foster, and benefit from the learning experiences offered in and out of the classroom growing mindful of the academic culture and honesty it tries to strengthen.

Course-level AI policies can be aligned with courses where active learning is promoted through collaborative, small-group tasks. Active learning, in essence, is described as any type of learning that includes "instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing" (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 5). As one of the hallmarks of good practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), it has become a much valued instructional approach in higher education with professionals adapting its principles in their classrooms for more than 35 years (Allsop et al., 2020). Although a range of activities falls into the spectrum of active learning, collaborative learning is a key instructional strategy to achieve student-centeredness "involving a joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. Usually, students are working in groups of two or more, mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product" (Smith & MacGregor, 1992, p.10). There is ample evidence in the literature supporting the positive impact of collaborative group work on student learning and

interpersonal skills (Hammar Chiriac, 2014). However, creating, monitoring, and evaluating collaborative group work also requires a high level of structuring in order to minimize the obstacles that may hinder the successful completion of the tasks. Unequal contributions of the group members, unauthorized collaboration with other groups, violations of academic integrity are some most salient problems encountered. Therefore, learning collaboratively with honesty and integrity needs to be set as a learning objective for such learning experiences and be communicated to the students, which necessitates the support of course-level AI policies.

Based on this understanding, this paper reports on an ongoing study into course-level academic integrity (AI) policy development, implementation, and evaluation in relation to collaborative, small-group tasks (CSTs) used as part of a combination of active learning activities in a second-year course of a pre-service English language teacher education undergraduate program at a state university in Turkey.

Within a participatory action research (PAR) approach, the study brings together the course instructor, two graduate students who were previously involved in similar CSTs with the instructor as undergraduate students as the research team, and the students who are currently enrolled in the course. PAR was chosen since offering an empowering experience to the students from the creation of the policy to its implementation is the primary goal of the study and in the core of PAR, there is a collaborative, self-reflective inquiry that stakeholders engage in to better understand and improve the situations and activities they are involved in (Baum et al., 2006).

The study comprises four phases that spread over a 10-week period in the spring term of 2021-2022 academic year: Phase I explores pre-service teachers' perceptions, experiences, expectations, and needs regarding collaboration, teamwork, evaluation, and AI as they intersect in the coursework; Phase II focuses on engaging all stakeholders to develop a course-specific, sustainable AI policy for CSTs; Phase III aims to help the participants to create a rubric to be used as an instrument to observe and implement the policy and enable the students to evaluate decisions, actions, and performances during the CSTs; and Phase IV aims to understand the participants' opinions about and experiences in relation to the different phases of the PAR process. This paper intends to present the results of the first two phases as the study has not been completed yet.

Quantitative and qualitative methods will be used for data collection including a survey questionnaire comprising close and open-ended questions for Phase I and focus group discussions with the participants for Phase IV. The survey will be administered to volunteered students enrolled in the course via online using Google forms and the data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics where applicable and inductive content analysis will be used to process qualitative data obtained from the survey questionnaire and focus group discussions.

The intended impact of the study is three-fold: a) developing a course-specific policy in relation to CSTs to ensure transparency, accountability, and integrity regarding their organization, management, implementation, and evaluation, b) empowering and encouraging the students to take responsibility for their decisions and actions in such tasks, and c) cultivating a professional understanding about CSTs and showcase how pre-service English language teachers can develop such policies as well as use PAR to promote educational quality in their future teaching contexts.

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