

Academic freedom and plagiarism in the Albanian university life

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present and evaluate the development of two main columns for the assurance of the quality in the higher education institutions in Albania: academic freedom and academic activity and notes of some negative phenomena such as plagiarism. In order to improve and consolidate the European Space of Higher Education, quality commitment is central to the development of education, not only in Albania but also in other countries. HEI quality commitment is based on several axes: research programs, scientific policies, management institutions etc.

One of the main pillars of quality standards is academic freedom and scientific activity; therefore, the problems and phenomena observed in these areas of the Albanian university life make up the subject of our presentation. Academic Freedom in the Albanian higher education system is defined in the law, which is expressed in the freedom of teaching, freedom of research, freedom of creating etc. Academic freedom and maintaining a code of ethics are an important part in meeting the standards of quality in higher education.

The Albanian government has made a series of reforms for the development of higher education. These changes have come to the surface more openly especially after the signing of the Bologna Charter in 2003, and with the participation and membership in several European institutions aiming at Albania's integration into the European Union.

Development of Albanian Universities in quantity and quality has been accompanied by some negative phenomena, one of which is the lack of ethics in scientific publishing activity, which can be illustrated through an example. Involvement in credit evaluation system brought the change and the content of study programs, where many new teaching disciplines were added and existing ones were equated to new models brought by other European countries and the U.S. Many of the university professors began to translate and publish texts taken from different languages and countries, thus providing a positive practice and a new mentality to the students and consequently creating a good fund of translated literature. Some universities have undertaken the task of translating and publishing qualitative works coming from prime and enduring western universities.

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Meanwhile, the process is accompanied by the negative phenomenon of plagiarism, ie, the appropriation of someone's work or of a part of it as if it were his. It has happened nearly in all public and private universities, both in Tirana and other Albanian universities.

Until recently, quality control of these publications, and, above all, control over plagiarism almost did not exist. To prevent these negative phenomena the Ministry of Education and Science has taken some important decisions as allocating a special fund from the state budget for universities to translate their best publications, approving the State Quality Standards for the accreditation of third cycle study programs (PhD), editing online the doctoral thesis, adopting the Regulation on "Ethics in Research and Publishing" for higher education institutions etc. These acts should be regarded as an attempt to establish the quality, integrity and trust in the Albanian education.

Key terms: academic freedom, plagiarism, quality assurance, academic activity

Identification of the problem

In a time when the human society is expanding its boundaries due to the modern means of communication, the benefit from the achievements of the human mind throughout the world is even bigger. Benefits by means of information are visible to everyone. Meanwhile, in addition to all the limitless good sides, modern means of communication have led to the phenomenon of plagiarism spread everywhere: all texts translated from different languages and published as if they were original works; deal and excerpts included in an act of personal branding with no mentioning of the source; a paraphrasing of theses and ideas published in different languages without citing the source; very often there is used the term "adaptation" (obviously from a foreign language) and yet it seems as if the work is original; at most, some of them call it morally correct obtaining the ideas and actions of others referred to in the references or bibliography, so almost "washing hands" of plagiarism.

The worst occurs when any kind of information is taken from the internet by the students to accomplish any assignment required to be carried out for different disciplines as in the case of course projects.

About the Term Plagiarism

As we all know the term "plagiarism" (from Greek the one who makes plagiarism), plagiarism (from lat. initially: burglary, kidnapping, and then, by extension of meaning: submission by someone of the work of another person or of a part of it as if it were his own; or a part of someone's stolen works occurring in this way), so today the term plagiarism is often used as a widespread phenomenon in all areas of knowledge, particularly in the field of art and science.

This phenomenon has nothing to do with the legacy that generations shall pass each other in order to move forward, because the new knowledge is based on the previous, otherwise humanity would not have progressed, for people today and at all times have benefited interchangeably from the great experiences in order to advance human thought.

Academic Freedom and Plagiarism

In order to improve and consolidate the European Space of Higher Education, quality assurance is central to the development of education not only in Albania but also

in other countries. HEI quality assurance is based on several pillars: research programs, scientific policy, institution management etc. One of the main pillars of quality standards is academic freedom and scientific activity, defined in the law Nr.9741, date 21.5.2007, and changed Nr.10 307, date 22.7.2010.

Academic Freedom in the Albanian higher education system is defined in the law, which is expressed in the freedom of teaching, freedom of research, freedom of establishment etc. Academic freedom and maintaining a code of ethics are an important part in meeting the standards of quality in higher education.

The Albanian government has undertaken a series of reforms aiming at the development of higher education. These changes were plainer especially after the signing of the Bologna Charter by Albania in 2003, and with the participation and membership in several European institutions aspiring the Albania's integration into the European Union.

The development of Albanian Universities in quantity and quality has been accompanied by some negative phenomena, one of which is the lack of ethics in scientific publishing activity, which can be materialized only with an example. Implementing the credit assessment system required some changes even in the content of study programs, where many new teaching disciplines were added and existing ones were equated to new models brought by other European countries and the U.S.. Many of the university professors began to translate and publish texts taken from different languages and countries², thus providing a positive practice and a new mentality to the students and consequently creating a good fund of translated literature. Some universities have undertaken the task of translating and publishing qualitative works coming from prime and enduring western universities. Meanwhile, the process is accompanied by the negative phenomenon of plagiarism, ie, the appropriation of someone's work or of a part of it as if it were his. It has happened nearly in all public and private universities, both in Tirana and other Albanian universities.

The examples which can be brought are countless in number, but in academic life plagiarism, contrasted to academic freedom, can be viewed in two ways: in textbooks, especially in applied and theoretical sciences, as well as in dissertation and diploma theses. This has become an issue particularly during the last three to four years³, where all students of the first or second cycle studies should conclude their graduation by presenting a diploma thesis, which as stated in Instruction no. 15 "On the organization of studies at public institutions of higher education", of 4.4. 2008, the Minister of Education and Science: "To obtain a first level diploma (Bachelor nom), it is expected to prepare a diploma thesis, with no special requirements for originality". Such a request made to the students with low academic results to find paths to deliver "diploma thesis". From the observations we have made, some universities did not get "en bloc" this Instruction no. 15, but set as compulsory the GPA of the last three years in order to have the right to defend a graduate thesis and complete their studies, while others sit for the graduation exam.

For the implementation of this instruction, many universities have licensed the criteria each paper should meet in order to be successfully approved.

It might have been noticed that in recently there is a tendency of higher education institutions to organize as many of those so-called "international conferences", as well

2. Worth mentioning is UET, UFO, CDE etc.

3. According to a daily newspaper dated 8 February 2010, "Half of the students of the University of Tirana have copied their submitted course tasks. The figure is extracted based on a survey the University Student Council has undertaken, under which 49% of the students commit plagiarism. Meanwhile, 82% of those who commit plagiarism use Wikipedia to get their information".

as a keen participation of professors and young researchers, through one, two or three papers, most of which coauthored either as a first, second or third presenter. There can also be seen papers presented by 6-7 authors simultaneously, as if one would experience any breakthrough.

This hankering after as many presentations as possible in the so-called international conferences, even abroad, done out of “necessity” to meet the established terms and conditions⁴, encourages wide spread plagiarism. Moreover, in many cases these papers, with few changes, are published in scientific bodies at home and abroad.

Conclusions

Until recently, quality control of these publications, and, above all, control over plagiarism almost did not exist. To prevent these negative phenomena the Ministry of Education and Science has taken some important decisions as allocating a special fund from the state budget for universities to translate their best publications, approving the State Quality Standards for the accreditation of third cycle study programs (PhD) etc.

We think that the most important step is the adoption of the Regulation “*On the ethics of research and publishing activities*”⁵ as an important document, with specific requirements and contemporary standards, the implementation and the achievement of which will reduce plagiarism performances in academic and university life, and raise above the concept and practice of academic freedom, therefore, considering them as serious efforts to help the quality, integrity and trust in the Albanian education.

First, there are coordinated two key tracks: freedom and honesty in research.

Secondly, in this regulation for institutions of higher education and scientific research it is emphatically raised the claim to publish “*in the official site, in an non-manipulated format the dissertation for the scientific degree “doctor” and the diploma thesis “Master of Science”*” - a precaution against plagiarism performances.

Thirdly, in the section 4.8 of this regulation it is written black on white that “*the applicant is obliged to quote in full and correctly the authors and their works, which are consulted as the primary source or secondary sources.*”

Fourth, given the fact that plagiarism emerges in different forms of concern around the world and that many universities all around are trying to find methods for detecting cases of plagiarism, creating different software programs, this regulation imposes specific duties to institutions that conduct research to provide software that automatically check for plagiarism research works and publications (papers, reports, scientific articles, dissertations, monographs, textbooks, manuals, theses presented for obtaining a degree “master of science” and so on.

Yet, in the face of these negative phenomena, it remains imperative for the Albanian university governing bodies, academic senates, professor councils to undertake drastic measurements, so that the academic freedom, in any case, will not be misused or infringed.

4. In the decision no. 467 of the Council of Ministers, dated 18.7. 2007 “*On establishing criteria and procedures for scientific and pedagogical qualification of the academic staff*” high standard are required, stating “*at least two original scientific articles in scientific journals*” for the docent title; or “*five original scientific articles in scientific journals, from which two of them as first author*” for the “*prof. as.*” title etc..

5. Tiranë, 23.3. 2012

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