

DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH ETHICS IN LAW STUDENTS IN THE PROCESS OF ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION AT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The relevance of the problem of research ethics among law students is actualized by both external and internal factors, which in turn necessitates the search for effective means and methods for developing this quality in academic settings. The external contour is determined, first of all, by obvious changes in public life and its main areas, including education based on the transfer of information and knowledge in the context of globalization, digitalization and integration. In our study, these processes are considered as having both positive and negative impacts on education and its stakeholders (students, teachers, etc.).

The positive aspects include, inter alia, the possibility to create a unified educational environment; harmonize educational standards; distribute and replicate innovative forms, methods and technologies aimed at improving the quality of higher education; support cross-border interdisciplinary initiatives and projects; expand means and channels of academic communication; strengthen cooperation in academic and research fields; increase institutional and staff competitiveness of universities on the world arena, etc.

The negative aspect is associated with digital transformation on a global scale, although it has added visible advantages to education. However, quick and easy access to the World Wide Web (the Internet) and its multiple resources has led to an increase in cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct among law students, which range from minor (copy & paste, paraphrase, summary, synthesis) to serious offenses (infringement of another's copyrights or violations of research ethics). Internal factors are mediated by external determinants and individual qualities, such as student's disposition and readiness to perceive new trends and realities and follow the ethical norms and standards of academic community.

The purpose of this work is to analyze and identify the best strategies and methods to develop academic and research integrity on the basis of Russian universities. We proceeded from the fact that such integrity is achievable only in the unity of the recognition of important social, moral and ethical values and compliance with the norms and standards of academic communication and interaction, regardless of online or offline. To clarify the conceptual apparatus, we singled out and defined terminology related to research, ethics and integrity, namely: academic integrity, academic excellence, research ethics, research integrity, research norms, etc. For comparison, we also conducted a typological analysis of the forms and types of academic dishonesty and misconduct and formulated an action plan to reduce their incidence in the Russian academic community. The key finding of our study is the modeling of university spaces based on the moral code and ethical policy of academia associated with high standards of academic communication and research in accordance with the law.

Keywords: university, law students, research ethics, ethical norms, academic integrity, academic communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

The development of science and technology affects our society in many ways, both positively and negatively, and its beneficial effects certainly outweigh any possible disadvantages. The main goal of science and technology is to generate synergistic solutions to improve and facilitate everyday life, help people answer the basic questions of the universe, advance the economy and living standards, provide various communication channels for easier access to products and services, create new jobs and activities, eliminate geographical boundaries, maximize the duration and quality of life, minimize socio-economic gap between the society and people, etc. (Prasad, 1974). The dynamics of current processes of globalization, digitalization and integration increases the role of science and technology in modern society and forces them not only to change the way people live, study, work or communicate, but also affects the basic worldviews of people, their moral values, motivates them to new knowledge, expands the research and enlarges the public understanding of the world. The close connection between science, technology and society (STS) is especially important in this regard for university education, which in its essence serves as a starting point for the formation and development of life guidelines, proper attitudes, professional identity, academic integrity and research ethics (Faulkner, et al., 2012). This approach prepares students for careers in law, business, government, research, education and provides a foundation for citizenship in a globalizing, diversifying world with rapid technological and scientific change.

The deepening relationship between science, technology and society (STS) creates an interdisciplinary area of research in which scientists from different academic fields, including lawyers, will find new topics to study and target audiences to share new data with in the context of current scientific problems (Bychkova, 2020). Since social and technological issues are key features of the STS teaching approach, it is clear that the university's focus is on engaging students in real life experiences and issues directly related to their lives. This allows students to explore and analyze personal perceptions of natural, social and technological phenomena, actively and honestly respond to them, and competently communicate with the like-minded people in the academic settings. The possibility of a qualified exchange of experience with their peers and professors on issues related to science gives students a brilliant experience of academic communication; similarly, it helps them develop scientific literacy, research ethics, and a positive attitude towards science.

One of the most important aspects of academic communication is the ability to write and speak while making use of the ideas and findings of other people. This is important as students must show that they understand the problem, may present some of the assumptions in their own way, but more often than not they will need to turn to reliable sources to support their thoughts. This is where one of the contradictions of academic communication arises, which stems from the fact that while students are expected to conduct research and refer to experts and scholars, they are also expected to produce original writings and oral presentations. In the age of digital transformation with quick and easy access to the World Wide Web (the Internet) and its multiple resources there is an increase in cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct among law students, which range from minor (copy & paste, paraphrase, summary, synthesis) to serious offenses (infringement of another's copyrights or violations of research ethics) (Ainoutdinova, et al, 2022).

The negative aspects of the digitalized world can be exacerbated by some internal institutional determinants, such as the race of some universities for publication activity at any cost, excessive demands on novice scientists, overload of curricula with written assignments for students in a short time, lack of strict boundaries regarding the use of technology when writing test papers, etc. (Akour & Alenezi, 2022). In addition, individual qualities and character traits of some students, such as laziness, technology addiction, tendency to isolate and work independently instead of group learning and brainstorming, antisocial orientation to reject accepted rules of conduct, disposition to cheat, falsify, plagiarize, or otherwise violate the ethical norms and standards of the academic community, can also negatively contribute to the decline in the social, communication and research skills of students (Garcia-Penalvo, 2021). While many students will use technology for their studies and research with positive intentions, some may get distracted or lose control. Thus, all these arguments together actualize the need to analyze and identify the possible pitfalls of academic communication and elaborate a set of pedagogical strategies, methods and measures that allow the formation and development of academic integrity and research ethics among law students in the process of studying at university.

The research question was raised about the available pedagogical strategies and methods that can ensure academic integrity and research ethics among law students of Russian universities. We took into account the need to support student publication activity for the competitive requirements of Kazan Federal University and in accordance with the program of strategic academic leadership "Priority 2030" for the next 10 years, which was initiated in Russia in 2021 (Serebriakov, 2021). The hypothesis allows us to count on the formation and development of highly qualified graduates of law faculties (as members of interdisciplinary teams of scientists and researchers), if the set of proposed pedagogical strategies and methods is implemented within the

framework of the university "Academic Communication" course, aimed at disseminating scientific knowledge, advanced communication technologies, best principles of academic integrity and research ethics.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted within a framework of social, pedagogical, integrative, contextual, competence-based and comparative approaches, covering all aspects of academic activities of teachers and students in the modern learning environment of Russian university. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to collect and analyze the relevant data. Analysis, synthesis and comparison were used to study and summarize scientific information on the best strategies and methods for development of academic integrity and research ethics among university students in Russia and abroad. For the experimental part of this work, observations, questionnaires and survey were carried out in order to identify students' attitudes to scientific activity, their perceptions of concepts related to research ethics, scientific literacy and competence, followed by statistical analysis using the open-source statistical program JASP (<https://jasp-stats.org/>).

We proceeded from the fact that academic integrity and research ethics should be studied in synergy, since they are interrelated and imply a unity of strategic goals and objectives within research activities in academic settings. The most effective results are achievable only in the unity of the students' recognition of important social, moral and ethical values and their unconditional compliance with the norms and standards of academic communication and interaction, regardless of online or offline. When it comes to academic or scholarly research, it is habitual to think of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct as being primarily a student problem. However, we must admit that instances of unethical behavior in research and publications remain a problem long after these students graduate and become scientists or researchers. Thus, attention should also be paid to faculty staff and their research ethics as they serve as role models for their students. To this end, we have compared academic disorders and types of plagiarism most common among students and their teachers, and proposed a risk-focused treatment plan based on a case study.

To clarify the conceptual apparatus, we singled out and defined terminology related to research, ethics and integrity, namely: academic integrity, academic excellence, research ethics, research integrity, research norms, etc. For comparison, we also conducted a typological analysis of the forms and types of academic dishonesty and misconduct and formulated an action plan to reduce their incidence in the Russian academic community. The key finding of our study is the modeling of university spaces based on the moral code and ethical policy of academia associated with high standards of academic communication and research in accordance with the law. We conducted our study taking into account the competitive requirements of Kazan Federal University and in accordance with the program of strategic academic leadership "Priority 2030" for the next 10 years, which was initiated in Russia in 2021 (Serebriakov, 2021). The strategic goal of this development program is to transform the major national universities into the world leaders in breakthrough high-tech competencies in various science-intensive industries and provide the labor market as with advanced technologies, so with the highly qualified personnel, and interdisciplinary teams of scientists and researchers (Serebriakov, 2021).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the course of our study we concluded that humanities and social sciences are developing today in the paradigm of the deepening connection of science, technology and society (STS), which creates a separate interdisciplinary area of research and serves as a teaching platform that seeks to promote a cross-disciplinary integration, civic engagement and critical thinking in novice researchers (Heath, 1989; Akcay & Akcay, 2015). Thanks to the development of digital technologies, this process is now much faster and wider than ever before, which gives an additional impetus to scientific activity aimed at building a fair and sustainable future based on six dominant technologies of the day, namely: Internet of Things, robotics, biometrics, persuasive technology, virtual & augmented reality, and digital platforms. At the same time, digitalization puts at risk some important public values, such as privacy, autonomy, security, human dignity, justice, and balance of power (Royackers, et.al., 2018). Clarivate, a recognized provider of analytics services, also acknowledges in one of its annual global research reports that the challenges of the current digital transformation can provide researchers with multiple technology-based tools and resources to accelerate our progress, although, similarly, such tools and resources can be used to undermine academic integrity and research ethics (Szomszor & Quaderi, 2020).

We have found that research integrity and ethics are critical for all stakeholders involved in creation, execution, and evaluation of academic works. In the absence of sound ethical and research standards, it is impossible to use other authors' previous ideas, replicate their results, or apply their scientific findings effectively in practice. For the purposes of our study we have identified guiding principles of research ethics and attempted to explain the reasons why it is important for research participants to adhere to ethical norms and standards in their practice. The identified ethical principles include: social or scientific value of the chosen topic; scientific validity

of any data collected or presented; fair subject selection; favorable risk-benefit ratio in experiments; voluntary participation of respondents with no coercion; independent review; informed consent; respect for potential or enrolled participants; full disclosure of fundings; citation of primary sources, etc. (Vanclay, et. al., 2013).

There are several reasons why adherence to ethical norms and standards is important in research. First, they contribute to the achievement of research goals, such as new knowledge, truth, and error prevention. Second, ethical standards promote the values of academic integrity, such as trust, honesty, fairness, mutual respect, and responsibility (or accountability) when it comes to close collaboration and coordination among many different researchers across disciplines and institutions. Third, many ethical standards help to hold researchers accountable to society in terms of their compliance with the law and respect for human rights, social responsibility, animal welfare, public health and safety, conflicts of interest, intellectual property rights, etc. Fourth, ethical standards in research may help build public support as people are more likely to fund the scientific projects if they trust the quality and integrity of the research. And, finally, ethical norms and standards in research help to produce and develop other important social competences and moral values, such as, obedience to the law, integrity, openness, transparency, carefulness, etc. (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015).

Many different disciplines, institutions, and professions have standards of conduct that suit their particular aims and goals; similarly, ethical norms and standards serve the aims and goals of research and apply to people who conduct scientific research or other scholarly or creative activities (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015). These norms and standards also help members of the academic community collaborate and coordinate with their peers and communicate with the public to create interest and credibility in their work. Most often, universities have specialized codes of conduct for both students and teachers, but some of them expand the content to include specific practices listing forms of unethical behavior and procedures for dealing with violators. The best example of such a detailed code in its description and punitive measures, which operates in conjunction with other university policies, is the University of Oxford's Code of practice and procedure on academic integrity in research (<https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/academic-integrity-in-research>). Immediately after entering the university, students get acquainted not only with the institutional rules of conduct, but also with the basics of academic integrity and research ethics and with possible disciplinary actions for their violation.

The basic concepts of research ethics and academic integrity need to be carefully understood by novice researchers, thus, to clarify the conceptual apparatus of this study, we have singled out the key terms related to research, ethics and integrity and defined them in interrelation. Research – can in short be defined as the process of investigation leading to new insights and knowledge that are effectively shared and disseminated. It includes works of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and public and comprises invention and generation of new or substantially improved ideas and the use of the already existing knowledge in experimental efforts to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes. Academic integrity – is the term used to refer to some of the most important values of academic community; it is a commitment to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Thus, academic integrity is seen as a demonstration of honest and ethical behavior in the academic environment by students, faculty, researchers, and all other members of academic community. Academic integrity is most relevant at university level as it relates to providing credit to other authors when using their ideas and discoveries; in simplest terms, it requires acknowledging the contributions of other people and the emphasis should be on working with other people's ideas, rather than reproducing their words (Milton, 2015).

Research ethics is another important term closely related to academic integrity; it involves application of fundamental ethical principles to a variety of topics within academic and scientific research. It serves as the basis for the moral code and ethical policy of academia and is associated with the high standards of science. Research integrity shows compliance with ethical, scientific, legal and institutional rules and standards in the conduct of research and directly correlates with the responsible conduct of researcher (RCR). Academic excellence fundamentally combines all the previously given concepts and specifically excludes any forms of misconduct in research, including cheating or plagiarism; falsification, fabrication or misrepresentation of data; failure to follow good practice for the proper preservation, management and sharing of primary data; failure to declare conflicts of interest; improper conduct in peer review of research proposals, results or manuscripts submitted for publication, etc. (Kaufman, 2008; Milton, 2015; Penaluna & Ross, 2022; Resnik, et.al., 2015).

The need to train future lawyers in research ethics is one of the topical and controversial discussions in the Russian academic community. Every lawyer knows that people can act legally without necessarily acting morally; similarly, they may act within the bounds of the law, but not necessarily honestly. This problem is not a lack of knowledge, but gaps in deep moral and cultural roots that inspire many people with the idea that what is not forbidden is allowed. Such ignorance can subsequently lead students into cheating, falsification or plagiarism if they do not realize the full detrimental consequences of such misbehavior, especially if they

are never caught or punished (Kaufman, 2008). Colleges and universities that implement codes of conduct based on the leading principles of academic integrity attempt to reduce academic dishonesty on campus by holding the student responsible for their actions if they do not follow the norms of integrity and research ethics. For better results, in our view, university curricula should be supplemented by the educational course "Academic communication" with a separate section devoted to formation and development of research ethics.

To become effective lawyers, students require not only extensive technical legal expertise (as a "hard" skill), but also an excellent level in "soft" skills such as oral and written communication, advocacy, interviewing, drafting, negotiating, problem solving, managing work and time, resilience (stress tolerance) and ethics of research. The scope of "hard" and "soft" skills is fundamental to developing a career in legal practice and is transferable to other professional environments and work situations. The "Academic Communication" course gives students opportunities to develop competence in these skills and build confidence in the competent use of academic and professional language for research, writing, speaking and presentation during their studies. With the assistance of experienced professors, students will have the opportunity to act out role play interviews, conduct negotiations, write written reports and documents, analyze different writing and citation styles, etc. The course is generally focused on research-based practice, understanding of research methodology, methods and designs and the development of communication, information and digital literacy skills (Wishkoski, et.al., 2022).

To help students learn, we have created online resources such as reading materials, interactive tests and quizzes, case studies, and video demonstrations. They are freely available to all enrolled students and are located on the educational e-learning platform of the university. Through interactive lectures and self-paced assignments, students learn to effectively communicate, honestly explore important social issues, share and disseminate their findings and appeal to a variety of purposes and audiences. This part of their academic experience is based on assumption that to become better writers, students need to become better readers. Therefore, most tasks and assignments in this context are aimed at developing critical reading and writing skills and ability to understand precisely the other author's original style and purpose, which are transferable to academic writing competences. In addition, students learn how to avoid plagiarism and any other forms of academic misconduct, which may lead to failure on the plagiarized assignment and result in failure of the course. As such, students should set aside time for brainstorming, pre-writing, planning, drafting, referencing, and revision. If students leave their assignments to the last minute, they tend to get overwhelmed with the writing assignment and panic, trying to find an alternative, which is usually plagiarism (Milton, 2015).

We found that students' experience of effective academic communication is affected by their willingness to take the course (56%), their attitudes towards science and technology (34%) and research (62%), their perception of the relevance of the course content to their field of study in university (76%) and the opportunity to further apply the acquired knowledge and skills in the professional activities of a lawyer (87%) or a scientist (35%). Since some students show weak communication skills (63%), lack of interest or motivation in research work (54%), negative attitudes and misconceptions about scientific knowledge and research ethics (48%) at the beginning of the course, it is important to integrate gamification, habitual Internet resources for socializing so as to change these negative attitudes and perceptions to a more positive learning experience with mandatory feedback.

The results of our empirical research confirmed that the majority of university teachers realize the need for integration of special courses in academic communication into higher education as a driver for its successful reforming (82%); admit that best technologies and methods of communication have totally changed the way teachers work in the classroom (77%); agree that due communication facilitates student learning modes and styles (75%); favor communication in education and research since it contributes to collaboration and cooperation between colleagues (68%). Some teachers believe that a true professionalism of their students is only achievable in multidisciplinary environment based on a science-technology-society (STS) model that promotes students' involvement in community issues, makes learning active, experiential and problem-based (64%); increases students' awareness of the range of opportunities of the research for their future profession (59%); enhances students' readiness for future career (57%) and serves as an important factor in preparing students for active social and public life (53%). Only a small number of the respondents do not see the need to integrate communication course into higher education (8%), since it takes time away from other important learning activities (10%). At the same time, they admit that academic communication can make research more attractive to their students (12%) and increase students' motivation for research work (15%).

The academic staff should provide examples of good practice in academic integrity and research ethics by acknowledging appropriately the works, designs, ideas and words of others in their teaching and research. Teachers and tutors should fairly use citations, references and acknowledgements thus giving their students examples of decent behavior. It is expected that teachers in the new educational environment, enhanced by globalization and digitalization, meet the needs and expectations of their students and accordingly act in new

and updated roles such as researcher; facilitator and guide; integrator of media; designer of complex learning scenarios; collaborator with other colleagues; mediator; orchestrator of technology, learners, and curriculum; evaluator and learner (Tregubova, et. al., 2022). Students, in their turn, are expected to follow fair practices of integrity and ethics in support of academic undertakings and skills development. Therefore, all members of academic community must adhere to high standards of research ethics and academic integrity policies of their institutions. It is also important that students accept and abide by the laws and standards of living in their community, which will ensure that their behavior is consistent with the legal and moral norms of society.

4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The individual integrity of each student is vital to the academic environment, since learning involves the constant search and acquisition of new knowledge and ideas that are intangible. While studying at university, students write original papers, complete academic assignments, and make oral presentations that require research in libraries, laboratories, and the Internet. Academic assignments exist to help students learn, and grades exist to show how well that goal has been achieved. Therefore, any work or assessment must be the result of the student's own motivation and effort. Evaluation of the level of knowledge acquisition by each student is an integral part of the educational process; it requires tangible means such as reports, homework, exams, etc. Any action that interferes with the assessment process by distorting the relationship between the assessed work (assessment result) and the student's actual level of knowledge is academic dishonesty. Some cases of academic misconduct are described in the university's codes of conduct; some (for example, plagiarism, falsification, forgery, etc.) are qualified in national and international intellectual property (IP) laws.

Students should remember that there are many ways to avoid plagiarism and falsification while still using other people's ideas, with reporting and direct quoting being the two primary anti-plagiarism tools. Reporting simply includes the set of instruments allowing presenting the other writer's ideas in your own words. Reporting uses such tools as paraphrase, summary, response writing and synthesis to acknowledge another author's ideas. Students can either paraphrase, if they want to keep the length the same or summarize, if they want to make the text shorter. Or respond, if they need to present their response to the main ideas of other authors, or synthesize, if they need to use information from several sources. Thus, students can feel free to extract, summarize or synthesize the important points, or respond to the main ideas of the other authors but in all cases, they need to acknowledge other people's works by making it clear from whom and where they get the ideas they are discussing and what their personal point of view is (Evers & Townsley, 2017). Occasionally, students may want to repeat or copy the words, a brief passage, phrase or excerpt from another author's book, article, lecture, etc., as by way of authority or illustration. Such exact reciting as a means of illustrating or supporting some statement, usually with the acknowledgment of the source, is known as a direct quotation. As we see, quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, responding and synthesizing are all different ways of incorporating another writer's work into one's own writing without attempting to plagiarize or cheat. These strategies along with other pedagogical initiatives may help students build true research skills and develop scientific competence in the course of academic communication (Kaufman, 2008; Milton, 2015).

Today tracking academic dishonesty is becoming more difficult due to the digital advances to which technologically savvy students have become accustomed. Technology has resulted in many improvements in the classroom allowing more efficient lesson planning, classroom management and resulting in acquisition of high-order knowledge through better access to content via the Internet, etc. However, technology has created a medium for students to cheat and complete assignments in a dishonest and unethical manner. Common forms of academic misconduct include: falsification, fabrication or misrepresentation of data; failure to follow good practice for the proper preservation, management and sharing of primary data; failure to follow accepted legal procedures, and professional or ethical standards; failure to declare conflicts of interest; unacknowledged appropriation of the work of others, including all forms of plagiarism; abuse of confidentiality in regard to unpublished materials; misappropriation of results, or resources, etc. (Milton, 2015; Evers & Townsley, 2017).

Integrity in academia is far more important than moral and ethical issues on university campus. Cheating students create immoral, unethical atmosphere and destroy the value system that permeates every aspect of life. Students who cheat at university or in extracurricular activities are always looking for the shortest path to "success". Students who are dishonest in their academic work are more likely to act dishonestly in their professional field after graduation. This is why it is recommended for universities to create and enforce moral codes of conduct to educate students about the institution's rules and responsibilities for violating academic integrity and research ethics. A university environment that promotes honesty, trust, respect, fairness and integrity encourages the development of these qualities among students both in and out of the classroom. The "Academic Communication" course at Kazan Federal University is another step in creating a long-term solution that will stimulate law students to be honest and fair in proposing, conducting or reporting research.

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