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**ETHICAL ISSUES IN RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS**

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**Abstract**

Today humanity faces a lot of problems due to a huge gap between scientific and technological capabilities of humanity and its ethical maturity. Morality crisis is the base of many economic, social, and political crises. Higher education institutions have a significant influence on the individual's moral behavior formation. However, even in the higher education system, there are incidents of unethical behavior. Main ethical problems faced by students in higher education institutions are: conflicts between academic personnel, complications with student involvement in scientific research, issues of co-authorship, problems of the research finding and funding. The purpose of this article is to identify and investigate the causes of some ethical problems connected with Russian higher education institutions. Authors conclude that the current system of higher education in Russia provokes unethical behavior of students, teachers and researches which is gradually becoming the norm in the academic community and then leads to the decrease of the morality level of Russian society.

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**Keywords:** Ethics; morality; higher education institutions; students; co-authorship, research.

## 1. Introduction

Many researchers note that in modern society with its key values of consumption, crisis of morality and spirituality is aggravated increasingly. The dominance of financial imperatives has steadily displaced moral considerations (Lafferty, 2016). There are studies on how students treat the moral crisis of today (Ninkovic, & Stevanovic, 2013).

Crisis of human morality is the cause of many economic, social, and political crises. The human society cannot exist without moral standards. Without morals, economic and social system cannot be effective. The roots of the global financial crisis lie in the crisis of axiology being of truly moral nature



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(Bunikowski, 2015). Modern person sometimes abandons moral principles and easily goes beyond their limits to achieve financial prosperity, social status and prestige.

The students of today, many of whom down the line will become the heads of big companies, public figures, teachers, and lecturers are the factor that mainly affects whether we will manage to find a solution to the global problems humanity is facing. These are the problems of poverty, overpopulation, environmental pollution, risk of emerging technologies application (Godymchuk et al., 2015) etc.

Today humanity faces a lot of the problems due to a huge gap between scientific and technological capabilities of humanity and the degree of its ethical maturity. In order to improve the level of ethical awareness, society has created such institutions as committees on ethics, professional communities and associations, universities. At universities, students are taught ethical behavior (Antes, et al., 2009; Galanina et al., 2015; Galanina, & Adamova, 2016). Despite this, during the period of study at higher education institutions, students face adoption of unethical behavior, which eventually leads to violation of moral principles.

Human behavior is determined by the balance between free will endowed from birth and social norms encountered throughout lifetime. All of them are involved in the formation of moral principles that will guide a person in making decisions in specific life situations. Higher education institutions due to their status play an important role in the formation of individual moral behavior. They strive to form dozens of professional and personal competences, the composition and number of which are discussed in detail and adjusted at conferences, in scientific articles, and in the academic community on the whole. However, while studying at universities students and graduates face a number of negative phenomena and processes in the higher education system that contributes to their unethical behavior. There is no need to discuss obvious corruption and unethical phenomena such as sale and purchase of higher education documents, contract services for course works and dissertations. But considerable damage is not directly related to the money. For example, plagiarism in student papers, understated quality requirements for the foreign students' knowledge, low quality of education, etc. These ethical issues are discussed informally in campuses, on Internet forums and blogs. But for a number of reasons, these problems are not fully investigated and discussions of these issues rarely go to the pages of scientific journals. The purpose of this article is to identify and investigate the causes of some ethical problems connected with Russian universities.

## **2. Methods**

Principles of behavior (moral or immoral) learned from universities will affect the individual's future behavior. Graduates will apply these principles of behavior in their future professional activity, transforming them into social norms. All this determines high responsibility of higher education institutions for the morality level of the society as a whole. According to Hand, some basic moral standards are robustly justified and schools should promote submission to these standards (Hand, 2014). In this process, there are no trifles. The article is devoted to the problem of personal moral degradation, which is as important as oft-debated problems of student professional competence formation in higher education institutions, the demand and the employment of graduates.

All this determines the priority of forming individuals with high moral principles in higher education institutions. Main ethical problems faced by students in higher education institutions are: academic conflicts, complexity of student involvement in scientific research, issues of co-authorship, problems of the research finding and funding. Let us consider some ethical issues on the example of Russian higher education institutions.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1 Ethical problems of student research**

While studying at Russian universities, students face the need to participate in research work that is manifested mainly in the form of scientific publications and presentations at scientific conferences. Participation in conferences and publication of scientific articles, of course, contribute to the quality improvement of specialist development. This is true if scientific articles and papers are written for the conference basing on the results of a student research, instead of imitating this activity. Reports which do not contain the students' own original research are acceptable if they contain an overview of the literature published in the past few years, according to certain scientific student interest.

To encourage students to do the research, many universities impose some disciplines, for example, "academic and research work for students", and even include them into the schedule. This leads to the fact that each student has to carry out scientific research. Although it would be wiser to allocate those from the student environment who are interested most in this type of activity and are good at it. As a result, this inevitably leads to overestimation of a number of students who are allegedly engaged in scientific work, and eventually to simulation of student scientific work. This leads to poor quality of student papers, lack of scientific novelty, high level of borrowing others' ideas.

In our opinion, the main reasons for this situation are the following: 1) problems of student involvement in real scientific work 2) pressure of assessment systems of departments and universities (rankings) in general. To reach the goal of the studying these should be considered in details.

The student involvement in real scientific work in Russian universities is constrained by several factors. In fact, we should acknowledge that the percent of students who are willing and able to be seriously engaged in scientific research is small. What is more, research work requires considerable efforts and time. To participate in the process of solving specific scientific problems students have to obtain certain basic knowledge that they acquire mainly by the end of a course. Student involvement in department research groups is problematic due to constant interruptions related to exams, preparation for tests and course works. At the same time, departments cannot coordinate the timing with student life because of strict reporting deadlines for grant programs. Another problem is that the scholarship does not cover living expenses, and many students, especially undergraduates, have to work. So, this greatly reduces their time possibilities for the participation in research work. Departments cannot support a student financially because in most cases, research funding for an extended period of time, e.g., five years, with annual reporting, the cycle is not available.

Another factor limiting student involvement in scientific work is the pressure of assessment systems of departments and universities (rankings). Adequate assessment in universities and its units, and especially professors and researchers is very complex. Since direct assessment is impossible, authorities are forced

to use the system of proxy indicators which are expected to be functionally related to the performance of university staff. Although the number of indicators used is often a few dozens, results of such assessment are highly controversial. Despite this, in the current Russian situation these indicators of departments and universities evaluation are used by leaders of all levels of the higher education management system while making financial, personnel and administrative decisions. To ensure the necessary execution level, university management applies the “carrot and stick” approach, i.e. a system of remuneration and different methods of pressure on the staff.

Student activity is also evaluated according to certain criteria: the number of scientific publications, the number of victories in scientific activities, participation in scientific projects, etc. It is good that universities do not encourage students to increase the number of scientific publications by means of bonuses, as it has already been applied to academic staff, and do not punish students for lack of scientific publications, as could not give admission to the masters theses defense without scientific publications and presentations at international conferences.

With regard to graduate students, there is a specific requirement: the masters theses are banned from defense if its basic content is not published in journals recommended by the Russian State Commission for Academic Degrees and Titles. It should be noted that it is difficult for graduate students to meet this requirement without conducting research for the dissertation before enrolling the graduate school and publications writing.

First year students spend a huge amount of time on candidacy exam preparation and immersion in the subject of the future dissertation: they accumulate special knowledge, search and study literature on the research subject and then plan the experimental part of a research. During the second year, graduate students create an experimental set-up, conduct an experiment, and start to collect first results. Only during the third year of education, they develop materials and scientific results that can be presented at conferences and published in scientific journals. Therefore, although the main results of the masters theses can be published, in most cases they are comprehended and published after defending dissertation.

At the same time, indicators of undergraduate and graduate student publication activity are included in indicators of a contract for university professors the results of which can be reflected in material rewards, in disciplinary sanctions or even in rejection of the teacher re-election to the position. The close attention to such indicators can affect curriculum negatively (Pankova, et al., 2016).

Thus, according to the administration of higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the figures should constantly grow. A reasonable range of the figures growth is not defined, so they can reach the point of absurd. Just as it happened with the indicator “the economic impact of the R&D implementation” in the USSR. This index had increased to the level of the country national income, and it became clear that this measurement did not match the real economic effect.

Since the organization of real student scientific work, for the reasons mentioned above is quite problematic, and the consequences of ratings are meaningful for departments and universities, it inevitably leads to the scientific activity imitation.

### **3.2 Ethical issues of scientific research co-authorship**

To ensure compliance with the indicator of joint publications of academic staff and students in the serious journals, students are often included in co-authors lists without any significant participation in research. Sometimes the opposite situation takes place, when postgraduates and students, not having a sufficient basis, include a research advisor into the co-authors list.

Co-authorship has become common practice in most science and engineering disciplines (Youtie, & Bozeman, 2014). Problems of scientific articles co-authorship have attracted much attention in recent years (Cutas, & Shaw, 2015). However, issues of co-authorship are rarely discussed straight. Of course there are rules of scientific ethics, but as all ethical standards they cannot embrace the life aspects. In fact, they are not only delicate, but also contradictory.

We will not discuss unethical behavior, consisted in imposition of authorship in scientific research with colleagues of a higher official position. This is very rare, but sometimes it happens in research institutions and universities. If coworkers publish their work together for their initiative and mutual agreement, regardless of the real contribution to the article, the question of the validity of such a decision does not arise.

During the Soviet period at some universities, there was a rule to include a research supervisor into co-authors. This approach was not always perceived as fair. Indeed, after setting research objectives a young researcher, a graduate student or a student did everything himself: he prepared the literature review, carried out necessary calculations, prepared and conducted the experiment, processed the results and wrote the article. Then what is the role of the research supervisor? Nevertheless, it is not all as easy as it sounds.

After all, to offer a perspective topic, the research supervisor has to have the idea that she/he actually passes to the student. And the idea is the compound of thoughts and the information review and the labor invested in it perhaps is not less than those of the student. So, sometimes the participation of the research supervisor during the research work can be considered as the authorship of the work. But sometimes students do not appreciate the help of the research supervisor in the implementation of the scientific work and even forget to thank.

From the perspective of psychology, such a situation is understandable. A student, a graduate student or a young researcher, received a specific topic and the task, after a while becomes immersed in it and begins to understand the topic more than people around him/her, including even the research advisor. The idea and the subject of the scientific research become personally meaningful for him/her, and student begins to defend his "property" against all attacks. We should bear with this situation. It is better to overcome the reluctance to discuss a sensitive issue and to remove it, maybe even with the participation of a disinterested arbiter.

The mass media, literature and film industry form the illusion among uninitiated people that scientists are driven only by a desire to learn something new, to make a discovery, and, at the same time, they prefer to be anonymous creators of scientific and technical progress. In fact, high scientific results depend mainly on ambitions of scientists, their desire for recognition, scientific fame and a certain position in society. Consequently, published works attract other experts to the results of studying, which leads to future citations and influence on the recognition of a scientist in research environment (Kabanova, et al., 2016).

However, in science and technology, research papers are rarely performed alone. A team spirit greatly affects the research efficiency and its results. It should be realized that the high assessment of the colleagues' contribution in scientific work does not detract individual's achievements, but increases cooperation very effectively. Some colleagues in this case are included in the authorship of the article, someone's contribution is reflected in the text of the article, and someone gets a gratitude for the assistance and support.

This is particularly important today due to the massive encouragement of individualism and the spirit of competition in the scientific world. Such a competition among scientists for funding, positions and prestige etc. can lead to such negative phenomena in research as a decline in free and open sharing of information and methods, sabotage of others' ability to use scientific work, deformation of relationships (Anderson et al., 2007). Unfortunately, in recent years, even gratitude in the Russian scientific articles almost never occurs. Although sincere gratitude to people who have made a contribution to the study not only perceived with appreciation, but also increase their motivation to further work.

#### 4. Conclusion

According to the described ethical issues in Russian higher education institutions, students and graduates get a distorted picture of the scientific research essence. Furthermore, they develop the following qualities: the ability and the willingness to simulate scientific activity; the ability and the willingness to assign others' ideas and authorship of scientific publications; adoption and justification of unethical behavior at the workplace.

Violation of ethics also does not go unnoticed for professors. They are strongly influenced by a system based on key performance indicators. Universities expect from professors a certain number of scientific papers published per an academic year. In turn, professors sometimes are forced to write articles based on a small amount of material, to violate ethical norms of co-authorship, and frequently to pay fees for publication from their own funds. All these lead to the fact that such high moral values as honor and dignity are sacrificed. And this, in turn, makes undergraduate and graduate students consider such behavior as normal in the academic community.

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