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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND RESEARCH ETHICS IN PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH: ALIGNING NATIONAL PRACTICE WITH INTERNATIONAL NORMS

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Abstract.

As Uzbekistan integrates its higher education and research system into the international academic community, the alignment of national research practice with international norms of academic integrity and research ethics has become a pressing concern. Pedagogical research, which frequently involves children, students and teachers in positions of dependency, is particularly sensitive to ethical shortcomings. This article examines the content of international integrity norms, identifies the areas in which national practice in post-Soviet pedagogical research is most likely to diverge from them, and proposes a framework for alignment. The study employs a qualitative theoretical design that combines a qualitative document analysis of nine international integrity and research-ethics frameworks with an integrative review of the international and regional literature on research integrity, educational research ethics and post-Soviet higher education. Documents and literature were analysed through directed and inductive content analysis. The analysis identifies a stable core of four principles shared across international frameworks (honesty, reliability, respect and accountability) and five requirements specific to educational research. Five tension areas between these norms and national practice are conceptualized: a compliance-oriented understanding of integrity, a gap in ethical review, authorship and publication practices shaped by indicator pressure, the grey zone of generative artificial intelligence, and the limited place of ethics in researcher training. The article proposes a multi-level framework for shifting from a control-oriented to a culture-oriented model of research integrity in pedagogical research, together with theoretical propositions that can guide future empirical studies.

Keywords: academic integrity; research ethics; pedagogical research; teacher-researchers; publication ethics; Uzbekistan; qualitative document analysis

1. Introduction

Research integrity has become a central condition for the credibility of science worldwide. Major international documents, including the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010), the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA, 2023) and the core practices of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, 2017), define shared principles such as honesty, reliability, respect and accountability. Educational research has its own ethical codes, most

notably the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the Code of Ethics of the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011), which address issues that are particularly acute in research with children, students and teachers: voluntary informed consent, power relationships, confidentiality and the duty to avoid harm.

The relevance of these norms has increased sharply for systems undergoing rapid internationalization. Since 2017, Uzbekistan has introduced extensive reforms of higher education and science, including the restoration of the two-tier PhD and Doctor of Science system, ambitious targets for publication in internationally indexed journals and the goal of including national universities in international rankings (Decree No. UP-5847, 2019; Decree No. UP-6097, 2020). These reforms create strong incentives for research productivity. International experience shows, however, that indicator-driven pressure without parallel investment in integrity can encourage questionable research practices (Martinson et al., 2005; Fanelli, 2009). Bibliometric research has found that several Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan, have among the highest shares of Scopus-indexed articles in potentially predatory journals (Macháček & Srholec, 2022).

Pedagogical research deserves particular attention. It is conducted largely by teacher-educators who simultaneously teach and assess the students they study, and it often involves school pupils, who are minors and require special protection. Teacher-educators are also responsible for forming the ethical attitudes of future teachers and researchers, so their own practice has a multiplying effect on the profession.

The literature on academic integrity in post-Soviet higher education has focused mainly on student plagiarism, corruption and the market for dissertations (Heyneman et al., 2008; Osipian, 2012; Denisova-Schmidt, 2020). Much less attention has been paid to research ethics in its broader sense, including ethical review, consent, authorship and publication ethics, and to the specific situation of pedagogical research. There is also no systematic analysis of what alignment with international norms would require in this field. This article addresses these gaps through three research questions:

- **RQ1:** What principles and requirements do international frameworks establish for academic integrity and ethics in pedagogical research?
- **RQ2:** In which areas is national practice in post-Soviet pedagogical research, including Uzbekistan, most likely to diverge from these norms, and why?
- **RQ3:** What framework could guide the alignment of national practice with international norms?

2. Literature Review

2.1 From misconduct to research integrity

Early approaches to research ethics concentrated on serious misconduct, defined as fabrication, falsification and plagiarism (FFP). Steneck (2006) argued that this narrow focus overlooks the far more common questionable research practices that lie between responsible conduct and misconduct, such as inappropriate authorship, selective reporting and redundant publication. Survey evidence confirms that such practices are widespread: in a meta-analysis, Fanelli (2009) found that about 2% of scientists admitted to having fabricated or falsified data at least once, while considerably more admitted to other questionable practices. Contemporary

frameworks therefore define integrity positively, as principles and virtues embedded in research cultures rather than only as the absence of misconduct (ALLEA, 2023; Bretag, 2016). The Hong Kong Principles further emphasize that the way researchers are assessed directly shapes integrity and recommend rewarding responsible practices rather than output volume alone (Moher et al., 2020).

2.2 Ethics in educational research

Educational research raises specific ethical issues. Hammersley and Traianou (2012) show that ethical decisions in qualitative and practitioner research are context-dependent and cannot be reduced to procedural rules. When teacher-educators research their own students, power relations make genuinely voluntary participation difficult, and confidentiality may be compromised in small institutional settings. Research with children requires both parental consent and the child's own assent, as well as attention to the child's best interests throughout the research process.

2.3 Integrity in post-Soviet higher education

Research on post-Soviet systems has linked integrity problems to underfunding, low salaries and formalistic regulation. Heyneman et al. (2008) documented the costs of corruption in higher education in the region, and Osipian (2012) analysed the market for purchased dissertations. Denisova-Schmidt (2020) argues that integrity problems in such systems are not merely individual failures but are embedded in institutional norms and informal practices. Text-matching software has become the main policy instrument in many countries, but studies warn that similarity scores are an imperfect measure of plagiarism and can encourage superficial compliance (Foltýnek et al., 2020; Glendinning, 2014).

2.4 New challenges

Generative artificial intelligence has created new uncertainties about authorship, originality and disclosure (Cotton et al., 2024; Eaton, 2023). COPE and major publishers now state that AI tools cannot be listed as authors and that their use must be disclosed. Paper mills and predatory journals represent further threats, particularly in systems with strong publication requirements and limited experience of international publishing (Grudniewicz et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative theoretical design. It does not collect primary data from participants; instead, it analyses documents and published research to build a conceptual account of the relationship between international norms and national practice. Following Jaakkola (2020), the study combines a theory synthesis approach, which integrates findings from different sources into a new conceptual understanding, with a model approach, which proposes a framework and testable propositions. This design is appropriate because the field lacks a systematic conceptual basis on which empirical studies in the national context could be built.

3.2 Document analysis

Qualitative document analysis followed the procedure described by Bowen (2009): skimming, thorough reading and interpretation. Nine international documents were selected purposively because they are widely recognized sources of norms for research integrity in general, for educational research in particular or for the assessment of researchers (Table 1). Each document was coded for (a) core principles, (b) specific requirements and responsibilities, (c) provisions relevant to research with human participants and minors, (d) provisions on authorship and publication, and (e) provisions on institutional responsibilities.

Table 1. International documents included in the analysis

Document	Issuing body	Year	Focus
Singapore Statement on Research Integrity	2nd World Conference on Research Integrity	2010	Global principles and responsibilities
Code of Ethics	American Educational Research Association (AERA)	2011	Ethics in educational research
San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)	Signatories of DORA	2012	Responsible research assessment
Core Practices	Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)	2017	Publication ethics
Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers	UNESCO	2017	Rights and responsibilities of researchers
Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (4th ed.)	British Educational Research Association (BERA)	2018	Ethics in educational research
Hong Kong Principles for Assessing Researchers	6th World Conference on Research Integrity	2020	Integrity in researcher assessment
UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science	UNESCO	2021	Transparency and openness
European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (revised ed.)	ALLEA	2023	Principles and good research practices

3.3 Integrative literature review

An integrative review (Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005) was conducted to identify how integrity norms are implemented, and where they are challenged, in post-Soviet higher education and in educational research. Sources were identified in Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar using combinations of terms such as "research integrity", "academic integrity", "research ethics", "educational research", "post-Soviet", "Central Asia" and "predatory publishing", supplemented by backward citation tracking. Peer-reviewed studies, reviews and policy reports were included if they addressed integrity practices, their institutional drivers or their consequences.

3.4 Analysis and synthesis

Documents were first analysed deductively, using categories from the established integrity literature, and then inductively, to capture requirements not covered by the initial categories. The literature was then mapped onto these categories to identify areas where documented practices in post-Soviet systems diverge from international norms. Divergences were interpreted through an institutional perspective, which treats individual behaviour as shaped by incentives, rules and informal norms (Denisova-Schmidt, 2020). Rigour was supported by a transparent coding scheme, iterative comparison between documents and literature, and explicit links between each conclusion and its sources.

4. Results

4.1 A shared core of international integrity principles

The document analysis showed strong convergence among international frameworks around four core principles (Table 2). Although terminology differs, all general frameworks require **honesty** in all aspects of research, **reliability** in design, methods and reporting, **respect** for participants, colleagues, society and the environment, and **accountability** for research from idea to publication. These principles correspond to the four principles of the European Code (ALLEA, 2023) and broadly to the four principles of the Singapore Statement (2010): honesty, accountability, professional courtesy and fairness, and good stewardship.

Table 2. Core principles across international frameworks

Principle	Singapore Statement (2010)	ALLEA (2023)	AERA (2011)	COPE (2017)
Honesty	Honesty in all aspects of research	Honesty	Integrity	Transparency in publication processes
Reliability	Use appropriate methods; report results fully	Reliability	Professional competence	Data and reproducibility
Respect	Professional courtesy and fairness	Respect	Respect for people's rights, dignity and	Fair peer review; complaints and appeals

Principle	Singapore Statement (2010)	ALLEA (2023)	AERA (2011)	COPE (2017)
			diversity	
Accountability	Accountability; good stewardship	Accountability	Professional, scientific and scholarly responsibility; social responsibility	Handling of allegations; corrections and retractions

The analysis also showed a shift in recent documents from individual responsibility towards **institutional responsibility**. The European Code (ALLEA, 2023) places explicit duties on institutions to provide training, supervision and fair procedures, while the Hong Kong Principles (Moher et al., 2020) and DORA (2012) argue that assessment systems based on publication counts and journal metrics can undermine integrity.

4.2 Requirements specific to educational research

Analysis of the BERA (2018) and AERA (2011) codes identified five requirements that are particularly relevant to pedagogical research:

- **Voluntary informed consent** from each participant, with special procedures for children, who should give assent in addition to parental consent.
- **Management of dual roles and power relations**, especially when teachers or teacher-educators research their own students, so that participation does not affect assessment or relationships.
- **Protection from harm and respect for confidentiality**, including the right to withdraw and the careful handling of data about minors.
- **Responsibilities to the research community**, such as honest reporting of pedagogical experiments, including unfavourable results, and avoidance of misrepresentation.
- **Responsibilities for publication and dissemination**, including fair authorship and the communication of findings to practitioners.

4.3 Tension areas between international norms and national practice

Mapping the literature against these principles and requirements identified five areas in which national practice in post-Soviet pedagogical research, including Uzbekistan, is likely to diverge from international norms (Table 3).

Tension 1: Integrity understood as compliance. In many post-Soviet systems, text-matching software has become the main and sometimes only institutional instrument of integrity (Glendinning, 2014; Denisova-Schmidt, 2020). When an originality percentage becomes the decisive criterion, integrity is reduced to a technical threshold. Similarity scores can be manipulated through paraphrasing tools, character substitution or translation (Foltýnek et al., 2020), while fabrication, falsification and selective reporting, which are more damaging to knowledge, remain outside institutional attention. This contrasts with international frameworks that treat integrity as a culture rather than a check.

Tension 2: A gap in ethical review for educational research. International codes treat consent and protection of participants as fundamental, and many journals require evidence of ethical approval for research with human participants. In systems inherited from the Soviet model, ethics committees have historically been associated with biomedical research, while educational research has typically required only administrative permission from institutions. This creates a structural gap: research involving pupils and students may proceed without individual consent or independent review, and researchers may be unable to meet the requirements of international journals.

Tension 3: Authorship and publication shaped by indicator pressure. National reforms link degrees, promotion and institutional standing to the number of publications in indexed journals. International evidence shows that such incentives, when combined with limited publishing experience, increase vulnerability to predatory journals and paid publication services (Grudniewicz et al., 2019; Macháček & Srholec, 2022). Hierarchical academic cultures may also normalize honorary authorship, in which senior colleagues are listed without a substantive contribution, contrary to COPE (2017) guidance that authorship must reflect actual contribution and accountability.

Tension 4: Generative AI as a grey zone. Where English-language publication is a recent expectation, AI tools offer an attractive solution to language barriers. In the absence of institutional guidance, the boundary between legitimate assistance, such as language editing, and misconduct, such as undisclosed generation of content, remains unclear (Cotton et al., 2024; Eaton, 2023).

Tension 5: The limited place of ethics in researcher training. International frameworks require institutions to provide training in research integrity (ALLEA, 2023). Where doctoral education has emphasized subject content and formal dissertation requirements, ethics is likely to be addressed briefly and normatively, which limits researchers' ability to deal with real dilemmas (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012).

Table 3. Tension areas between international norms and national practice

Area	International norm	Typical national pattern (from literature)	Underlying driver
Plagiarism and originality	Originality of ideas, methods and text; proper attribution (ALLEA, 2023)	Reliance on similarity percentage	Control-oriented regulation
Data integrity	Honest collection, analysis and full reporting (Singapore Statement, 2010)	Limited verification of experimental data	Focus on detectable misconduct
Ethical review and consent	Independent review; individual consent; assent of minors (BERA, 2018)	Administrative permission instead of review	Biomedical model of ethics

Area	International norm	Typical national pattern (from literature)	Underlying driver
Authorship	Authorship based on substantial contribution (COPE, 2017)	Risk of honorary authorship	Hierarchical academic culture
Publication ethics	Reputable journals; no duplicate publication (COPE, 2017)	Vulnerability to predatory journals	Indicator-based assessment
AI use	Transparency and disclosure; AI not an author	Lack of guidance	Rapid technological change
Training	Institutional duty to train in integrity (ALLEA, 2023)	Brief, normative instruction	Content-focused doctoral education

4.4 A multi-level framework for alignment

Synthesizing these findings, the study proposes a framework that shifts integrity from a **control-oriented** to a **culture-oriented** model across three levels (Table 4). The framework assumes that integrity depends on the interaction of individual values and competences, institutional structures and national incentives.

Table 4. Multi-level framework for aligning national practice with international norms

Level	Control-oriented model	Culture-oriented model	Key international reference
National	Publication counts as main indicator; similarity thresholds	Responsible assessment of quality and contribution; ethical review required for research with human participants	DORA (2012); Hong Kong Principles (2020)
Institutional	Anti-plagiarism checks as main instrument	Research ethics committees with educational expertise; authorship and AI policies; journal selection guidance; fair misconduct procedures	ALLEA (2023); COPE (2017)
Individual	Knowledge of	Ethical reasoning,	BERA (2018);

Level	Control-oriented model	Culture-oriented model	Key international reference
	prohibitions	reflexivity about dual roles, competence in consent procedures and transparent reporting	AERA (2011)

Four theoretical propositions follow from the framework:

- **P1:** The more research assessment relies on publication counts rather than on quality and responsible practice, the greater the prevalence of questionable research practices among teacher-researchers.
- **P2:** Institutional ethical review for educational research is positively associated with both the ethical quality of pedagogical studies and their acceptance in international journals.
- **P3:** Case-based, dialogical ethics training is more effective than normative instruction in developing teacher-researchers' ethical reasoning.
- **P4:** Clear institutional guidance on authorship and AI use reduces uncertainty and increases transparent disclosure.

5. Discussion

This study shows that alignment with international norms is not primarily a matter of adopting codes. International frameworks converge on a small set of principles, and these principles are compatible with the values proclaimed in national education policy. The main divergence lies in how integrity is institutionalized: national practice in post-Soviet systems tends to rely on control instruments, whereas international frameworks emphasize culture, training, institutional responsibility and responsible assessment.

The findings confirm Steneck's (2006) argument that a narrow focus on detectable misconduct leaves the broader field of questionable research practices unaddressed. Reliance on similarity scores is understandable, since such scores are measurable and easy to administer, but it risks shifting attention from the honesty of research to the technical appearance of originality (Foltýnek et al., 2020). For pedagogical research, where the most important ethical risks concern participants and data rather than text, this shift is especially problematic.

The gap in ethical review is the most consequential divergence for pedagogical research. Research with children and with one's own students raises precisely the issues that international educational research codes address most carefully. Introducing proportionate ethical review would serve both ethical and strategic goals: it would protect participants and would remove a significant barrier to publication in reputable international journals, which national reforms seek to promote.

The analysis also supports the view that integrity is shaped by institutional incentives (Moher et al., 2020; Denisova-Schmidt, 2020). When defence and promotion depend on the number of indexed publications, questionable practices may become rational responses to the system rather than individual moral failures. This suggests that policies aimed at increasing research output should be accompanied by changes in assessment that reward quality, openness

and contributions such as mentoring and peer review, consistent with DORA and the Hong Kong Principles.

Finally, because teacher-educators shape the values of future teachers, integrity in pedagogical research has a dual significance: it determines the credibility of educational knowledge and it models ethical professional conduct for the next generation of teachers. A culture-oriented model of integrity is therefore not only a requirement of internationalization but also part of the educational mission of pedagogical universities.

The study has limitations. As a theoretical analysis, it identifies likely tension areas on the basis of documents and the regional literature rather than direct empirical evidence from Uzbek institutions, and the extent of each tension may vary between institutions. The selection of international documents, although broad, gives prominence to European and Anglo-American frameworks. Future research should test the proposed propositions empirically through surveys of research practices, qualitative studies of teacher-researchers' ethical decision-making and evaluations of ethics training and review procedures.

6. Conclusion

This article has examined academic integrity and research ethics in pedagogical research from the perspective of aligning national practice with international norms. International frameworks share a stable core of principles (honesty, reliability, respect and accountability) and, for educational research, specific requirements concerning consent, dual roles, protection of participants and responsible publication. The analysis identified five areas in which national practice in post-Soviet pedagogical research is likely to diverge from these norms: a compliance-oriented understanding of integrity, a gap in ethical review, indicator-driven authorship and publication practices, the grey zone of generative AI, and limited ethics training. The proposed multi-level framework suggests that alignment requires a coordinated shift from control to culture at the national, institutional and individual levels. Such a shift is essential not only for the international credibility of Uzbek educational research but also for the ethical formation of future teachers.

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