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PLAGIARISM AND ITS PREVENTION IN TEACHING/LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is defined as an act of using someone else's text or idea and pretending it is his/her own. However, plagiarism as a concept that seems simple and straightforward on the surface may not be so in reality. Criteria that define plagiarism are still evolving and controversies and gray areas exist. Students and faculty may not understand plagiarism and scholars may not always agree to what constitutes plagiarism due to the complex nature of research and publication. Sometimes we get confused over plagiarism versus digital copyright, both of which are relevant to distance learning. This paper will discuss the complex issues of plagiarism and its difference from digital copyright in the US law, the types of plagiarism, the reasons students plagiarize, plagiarist profiles, and factors that determine if faculty will report plagiarism. Authors will explain plagiarism detection technology (Turnitin) in simple terms and whether it's successful or not in detecting plagiarism by summarizing published reports in the literature. The paper will be useful for anyone who is teaching both online and face to face as well as scholars who do research and publish.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Academic dishonesty, Academic integrity

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism seems to be a simple and straightforward concept. Anyone from the street will have some idea what it is. However, a closer look may reveal the opposite, namely, its complexity and unsettled issues surrounding plagiarism. Many inconsistent definitions of plagiarism exist. Some gray areas still call for judgement and plagiarism as a concept and practice is still evolving. This paper is based on the common consensus agreed upon by most when defining plagiarism and will discuss some of its controversies. The profile of a likely plagiarist will be defined based on research reported in the literature, reasons why students plagiarize, measures taken by US higher education to combat plagiarism, plagiarism detection technology, and how effective plagiarism detection tools are.

Plagiarism Defined

U.S. Library of Congress defines plagiarism as "The act of stealing and passing off the ideas, words, or other intellectual property produced by another as one's own. For example, using someone else's words in a research paper without citing the source, is an act of plagiarism" (Spieler, 2017). "Plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward" (Turnitin, 2017). Any of the following can be plagiarized

- Intellectual property-papers, reports, art works, designs, computer programs, inventions, etc.
- Works - any form of intellectual property
- Words - text, paragraphs, expression, phrases.
- Ideas – oral or written
- Reflections – what one remembers and dwell on
- Thoughts – what one thinks?

One often gets confused over plagiarism versus copyright. Copyright is a legal offence and the dispute is settled in court. It governs the permission to use a copyrighted work, often in a tangible form, regardless if one cites it or not. Plagiarism is an ethical issue that calls disciplinary action in colleges and universities. It is not about the permission to use a work. In education most plagiarism takes place for works that fall under the protection of fair use. It is possible that one committed copyright infringement and plagiarized when he or she used a work without permission or in violation against copyright restrictions and did give credit to the author at the same time.

Types of Plagiarism

There are six types of commonly acknowledged plagiarism. They include direct plagiarism, self-plagiarism, purchased papers/reports, paraphrasing plagiarism, mosaic plagiarism, unintentional plagiarism, and possibly more.

Direct plagiarism is to steal text or ideas without giving proper credit to the original author. If an author copied text or an idea from his or her previously published works, he or she is considered to be engaged in self-plagiarism. “Self-plagiarism is the act of either presenting a previously submitted work or large chunks of a previously submitted work as completely brand new” (Shabe, 2017).

“Self-plagiarism is the use of one's own previous work in another context without citing that it was used previously” (WriteCheck, 2017). However, an author is sometimes criticized for citing his or her own works for citation inflation. A scholar has to maintain originality in one's work to avoid being caught in self-plagiarism and boosting citation counts.

It is increasingly prevalent that students buy papers from Internet sites. More than 300 such papermills existed in 2011 (Thomas and Zyl 2012, p. 145). Some of them sell ready-made student papers, while others write papers for students for a fee, about \$160 for an eleven page report. Some paper mills give out student papers for free or in exchange for more papers in defiance of academic conduct. The following is a list of popular paper mills.

Table 1. Internet Paper Mills

| Site | URL |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Academic Term Papers | http://www.academictermpapers.com/ |
| Academized | https://academized.com/writing-services/pay-for-college-papers |
| Best Essays | https://www.bestessays.com/ |
| Best Term Paper | http://www.besttermpaper.com/ |
| Essay Town | http://www.essaytown.com/ |
| Fresh Essays | https://www.freshessays.com/essay-writing/pay-to-write-essay.html |
| Pay for Essay | https://payforessay.net/-about |
| Pay to Write A Paper | https://paytowritepaper.com/ |
| Research Paper Writing Service | https://papersowl.com/pay-for-research-paper |
| StudyMode | https://www.studymode.com/ |
| Superior Papers | http://www.superiorpapers.com/ |
| Studyclearks | https://studyclearks.com/ |
| WriteMyPaper4Me | https://writemypaper4me.org/ |

One can paraphrase another author's text or idea to make it brief or concise, but must give credit to the original author. Paraphrasing plagiarism involves either missing in-text citation or keeping some words or phrases of the original work without quotes. Similar to paraphrasing plagiarism, but not exactly the same, "Mosaic plagiarism occurs when a student borrows phrases from a source without using quotation marks, or finds synonyms for the author's language while keeping to the same general language structure and meaning as found in the original" (Bowdoin College n.d.). Mosaic plagiarism involves copying a source with modifications even with citing.

Unintentional plagiarism is wide spread type among students. Such plagiarism includes incorrect citations and paraphrasing, missing quotes around the cited text, even with citing, failure to cite out of ignorance, and misunderstanding about plagiarism.

Controversies and gray areas

There are exceptions to plagiarism. Those include, but not limited to, common knowledge, certain controversies and uncertainty, and conventions outside the academic world. One does not need to give

credit if it is common knowledge. For instance, Sri Lanka is in Asia and Second World War occurred between 1939 to 1945 are two examples of facts and common knowledge. However, common knowledge is relative and not a constant. What is common knowledge this year may not be common knowledge next year. What is common knowledge to one group of people may not be common knowledge to another. Difficulty and confusion may lead to plagiarism.

Another area that can cause confusion is "...when you read different sources, pull out some key points and then rewrite these points as if they were your own ideas." (Shabe, 2017). A composition class often encourages students to read many sources for a report. A student may form new ideas based along the reading, but hard to pinpoint exactly which sources his or her ideas are based on. As a caution, a student can list all the sources at the end of his or her report. However, some style manuals and publishers do not allow non-matching citations at the end. In other words, an end citation must have an in-text citation. In this case it is not clear if the student plagiarized or not.

Inconsistent definitions of plagiarism can cause confusion. For instance, the official definition of plagiarism provided by the Office of Research Integrity states, “As a general working definition, ORI (Office of Research Integrity) considers plagiarism to include both the theft or misappropriation of intellectual property and the substantial unattributed textual copying of another's work” (1994). The definition gives the impression that small amount of copying is allowed. One cannot help wondering, how many words or pages are “substantial”?

Other exceptions add more confusion to plagiarism. Plagiarism does not include disputes of collaborators for credits. It is not self-plagiarism if an author uses the whole section on research methodology of a previously published paper if it is the description of commonly used or previously used research methods in a paper (Office of Research Integrity, U.S. Department of Health and Human services, 1994). It is not paraphrasing plagiarism if certain words or phrases that are so specific that one cannot find other words or phrases to replace them in paragraphs. Those exceptions leave space for judgement and interpretations. In academia we combat plagiarism because it prevents students from learning and defeats the purpose of education. It is against academic values that we teach at higher education - “honesty, trust, and fairness” (Thomas and Zyl 2012, p. 145). It is not fair to those who work hard because students get credit who do not deserve them. In non-academic world plagiarism is not so emphasized. For instance, in corporations, an employee can put together a report without citing sources and will not be accused of plagiarism. In some other professions in-text citations are considered interruption of flow of thoughts and therefore are not encouraged.

Plagiarism on the rise

According to research, plagiarism exists in all disciplines (Nitterhouse, 2003). Many reported that plagiarism is on the rise (Balbuena and Lamela, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2011; Snodgrass, 2014; Thomas and Zyl 2012). “55% of college presidents say plagiarism has increased in college students’ papers over the past 10 years” (Pew Research Center, 2011). About 3/5 of the students plagiarized in the past 12 months in a 2008 study of 1,200 students in UK (Thomas and Zyl 2012, p. 145). About 85.3 % used someone’s idea as one’s own and 85% copying someone else’s text without referencing in a 2012 study of 3611 students in a South African university (Thomas and Zyl, 2012). An estimated 38% of undergraduates and 25% graduate students admitted that they had plagiarized in a three-year study between 2002-2005 involving 79,321 students (Turnitin, 2017a). Eighty percent of the students self-reported plagiarism at least once in a 2015 study involving 60 students (Balbuena and Lamela, 2015). Plagiarism is a wide spread problem in higher education across the globe. The following is a table with plagiarist statistics from the International Center of Academic Integrity (2017) that further collaborate the assertions above.

Table 2. Plagiarism statistics in recent years

| The statistics below are just a snapshot of overall trends uncovered over the past 12 years. | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| | Graduate Students | Undergraduates* |
| Number responding | ~17,000 | ~71,300 |
| % who admit cheating on tests | 17% | 39% |
| % who admit cheating on written assignments | 40% | 62% |
| % total who admit written or test cheating | 43% | 68% |

*Excluding first year students, code schools, and two year schools

The profile for plagiarists surfaced from a search of the literature. Who are those that are more likely to plagiarize than others? According to a study, students at junior level of studies, young and unmarried

college students, and undergraduate more than graduate students, are more likely to plagiarize (Thomas and Zyl, 2012). This is echoed by another study that found that first year students have the tendency to disregard ownership of knowledge” (Cilliers 2017, p. 3). Plagiarizing students generally have “A lower grade point average” (Thomas and Zyl 2012, p. 144) and high level of procrastination and low level of motivation (Siaputra 2013, p. 9). Student with traits of “bravery, honesty and empathy” do not plagiarize (Thomas and Zyl 2012, p. 144). According to some studies, male students have problem with citing Internet sources and males more than females are likely to plagiarize, but the evidence is not totally conclusive (Sprajc, et al., 2016; Thomas and Zyl, 2012). The influence of family values during grow up years played a big part in plagiarism (Sprajc, et al., 2016). Contrary to our impression, international students do not show a difference in their attitude towards plagiarism than American students and there is no difference between full-time versus part-time students engaging in plagiarism (He, et al., 2016).

Students plagiarize for many reasons. Research shows that easy access to information on the Internet and communication technology makes it easy to copy and paste text (Sprajc, et al., 2017; Snodgrass, 2014). Other reasons include lack of ability to do research, lack of knowledge to create citations, difficulty with writing, confusion over what constitutes plagiarism (Snodgrass, 2014), large size of classes, pressure for success and good grades, the need to meet the deadline, and poor time management and laziness (Nitterhouse, 2003). Some students view plagiarism as “normal school act” under lenient school policy (Balbuena and Lamela, 2015).

According to de Vise (2011), the top 8 Most Popular Websites that Students use to Plagiarize.

1. “Wikipedia Encyclopedia
2. Yahoo! Answers Social & content sharing site
3. Answers.com Social & content sharing site
4. Slide share Social and content sharing site.
5. OPPapers.com Cheat site & paper mill
6. Scribed Social & content sharing site
7. Course Hero Homework & academic site
8. MedLibrary.org Homework & academic site”

Measures taken by the US higher education and faculty to prevent plagiarism.

All institutions in the US have a student handbook or academic policy manual which often includes student honor conduct code, policies on academic integrity and honesty, penalties and procedures for violations. The institutions put together a disciplinary committee to review and hear plagiarism cases. They display plagiarism policy or guidelines on the website and implement plagiarism detection tools/software such as Turnitin in the course management system. Faculty are encouraged to include plagiarism awareness into the curriculum.

One innovative approach is by Kent State University who sends students to the plagiarism school to be educated on academic integrity, and most institutions adopt a more educational than punitive approach. Some provide plagiarism training or workshops for faculty, and encourage faculty to talk about plagiarism during the class. Others teach a correct style manual for citations. It is interesting that one Indian author recommends to build an international database blacklisting all those who committed plagiarism (Awasthi, 2019).

Faculty deal with plagiarism in their own way. For instance, they avoid plagiarism by giving students unique and

specific projects that requires the most recent sources within the last three years. It may help to prevent plagiarism by telling students about the websites for buying the essays and plagiarism detection tools (Nitterhouse, 2003). Some faculty turn on a plagiarism detection tool in the course management system such as Turnitin. A study shows that if students know their work will be checked in a plagiarism detection software, they will not plagiarize (Heckler, Rice and Bryan, 2013). However, another study found that Turnitin will not reduce plagiarism if it is unintentional plagiarism and students plagiarize out of ignorance (Youmans, 2011).

At Rider University, a faculty asked students to do research on a famous plagiarist in a composition class. For instance, using Alex Haley as model for researching and collecting articles to identify him as a plagiarist or non-plagiarist. By the end of the class, students will develop criteria to determine plagiarism. The end results are very encouraging as the professor commented happily that students come to "...understand the pitfalls of plagiarism after they have researched a severe plagiarist like. Haley, Doris Kearns G., Monica Crowley, Christopher Spence, Joe Biden... I hope that our students have moral values and research documentation lessons about plagiarism and validity of reference sources that will make them responsible and honest adults who avoid cheating/stealing what is not theirs."

Evidence shows there is a reluctance to report plagiarism and the case often rests with faculty (Bennington and Harmeet, 2013; Thomas, 2017). The reasons given by faculty for not reporting plagiarism included "psychological discomfort, opportunity costs, administrative bureaucracy and a prevailing culture of managerialism" (Thomas 2017, p. 113). Faculty are also concerned with relationship with students and impact on

teaching evaluation in addition to the time and trouble to report plagiarism. A study shows that the support of the administration and well-established procedures are determining factors if faculty will report on plagiarism (Bennington and Harmeet, 2013). "Ignorance of faculty members about practices that constitutes plagiarism and relevant policies" add to the confusion of students (Thomas and Zyl 2012, p.144). Institutions should provide training on plagiarism and reporting procedures to their faculty.

Plagiarism detection tools and technology

Many free and open source plagiarism detection tools exist on the Internet. A 2002 study analyzed the performance of 7 plagiarism tools and found that Turnitin, a commercial solution, is the best (Eisa, Salim and Alzahrani, 2015). A 2017 review concludes that Turnitin and iThenticate are the best. iThenticate is the better of the two and more expensive, "but can be used with many European languages as well as Arabic, Turkish and some eastern languages" (Nahas 2017, p.1). Currently Turnitin is also capable of foreign language matching and detection. It is crucial that a plagiarism detection tool should maintain a sufficiently big and comprehensive reference database and often only commercial companies have the financial means to expand and maintain a sizable collection. The free and open source tools may not be able to sustain a comprehensive collection and therefore are limited in scale. So far Turnitin has a large reference database of 67 billion web pages, 929 million student papers, and 130 million journal articles as of May 2019 (Turnintin, 2019). The size of its collections is continuously growing. Turnitin seems to be the mostly widely used plagiarism detection program in schools, colleges and universities.

Plagiarism detection technologies generally include two types of checking: external and intrinsic. The external checking, also called fingerprinting, compares a student paper, often in the form of a MS Word document, against a reference database. Intrinsic checking does not compare a paper to external resources. Rather it will examine and compare the writing style inside a paper and look for any unusual changes in the way a student writes. Both external and intrinsic methods call for human inspection and judgement. External checking uses the same technology as the

database searching including keywords and string matching for comparison in plagiarism detection. It will “take a paper (e.g. Word doc.) and turn it into many unique data strings based on a complex pre-programmed algorithm called Minutiae. The reference database for plagiarism detection is also indexed in minutiae. A plagiarism detection tool compares minutiae from the paper and the reference database for similarity” (Wikipedia, 2019). This approach is fast and accurate. Figure 1 demonstrates how the fingerprinting works.

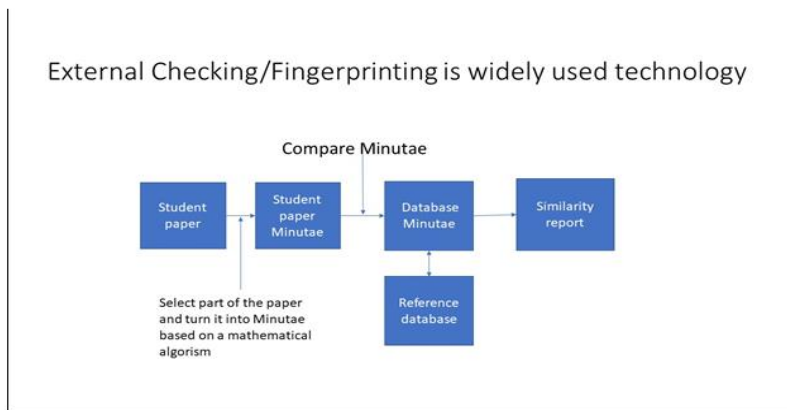


Figure 1. External Checking/Fingerprinting

Figure 2 demonstrates the process of comparing a student paper with the reference database in a plagiarism detection tool. The final result is a similarity report that both students and faculty will receive.

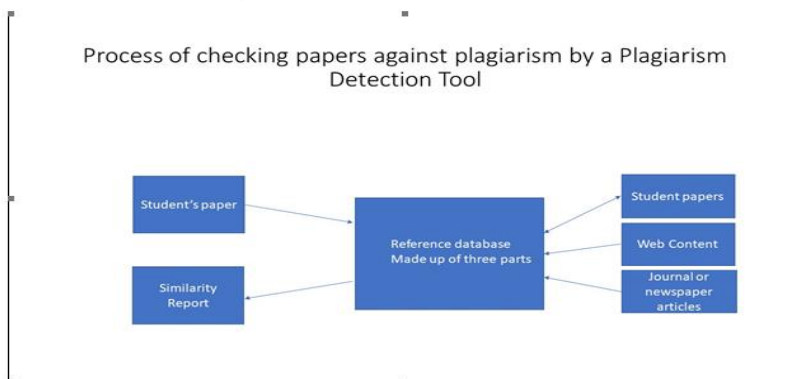


Figure 2. Checking Process of a Plagiarism Detection Tool

How do students perceive plagiarism detection tools such as Turnitin? Several studies on Turnitin indicate that “students did not find it user-friendly neither did they emphasize on its usefulness in academics” (Awasthi 2019, p.2). Evidence further indicates that “when students were aware that their work would be run through a detection system, they were less inclined to plagiarize” (Heckler, Rice, Bryan 2013, p. 1). For unintentional plagiarism, a detection tool will not serve as a deterrent. It will not reduce plagiarism if students plagiarize out of ignorance or other reasons (Meo and Talha, 2019). There is certainly some anxiety caused by a plagiarism detection tool. Research shows that “students experience increased anxiety of being falsely accused of plagiarism and have concerns about their work being stored in the Turnitin® database” (Zaza and McKenzie 2018, p. 1).

Idea detection is a problem for plagiarism detection tools and so are common phrases. The similarity report (Figure 3) may not always be accurate and so human review and inspection should be conducted before accusing a student. Many faculty members use plagiarism detection tools for teaching and learning. One author talks about his experience using a plagiarism detection solution as a learning tool for effective paraphrasing (Awasthi, 2019). Others reported the deployment of a plagiarism detection software to analyze and improve writing. Turnitin can expose other problems by students such as “patchwriting, technical parroting, copying, and falsification of sources” (Bertram et al. 2019, p. 1).

Figure 3 is a sample of Turnitin similarity report. Each student whose name is blackened out for privacy, received a percentage indicating similarity to materials in the reference database.

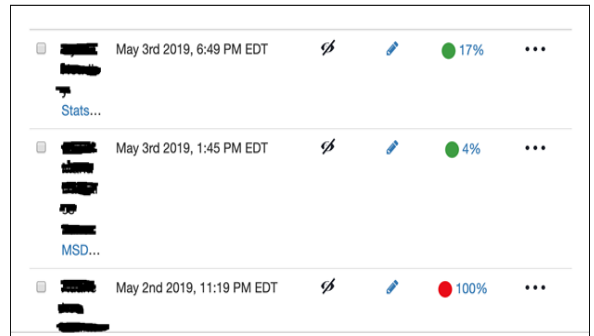
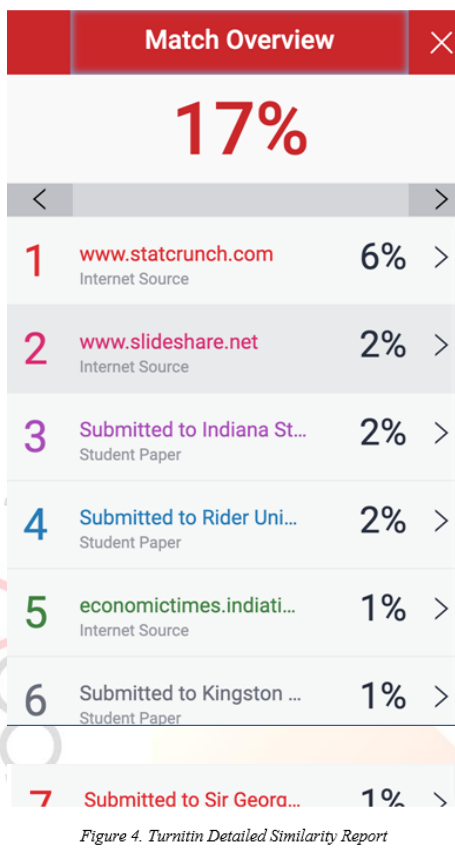


Figure 3. Turnitin Similarity Report

Figure 4 shows the detailed explanation of a student’s similarity report, a breakdown of percentages that resemble the writing of a particular source which could be a web site, a journal article, or another student’s paper. It is up to the faculty what the benchmark is before a plagiarism case is determined.



CONCLUSION

Plagiarism is an increasingly serious problem globally. The Internet makes plagiarist activities easy and convenient. Higher education faces a tough decision to combat plagiarism. There is plenty of research done that shed light on the profile of plagiarists and reasons why students engage themselves in plagiarist activities. Evidence is available on the pros and cons of plagiarism detection tools. This paper is informative in that it summarizes the previous research and provides a well-rounded view about plagiarism.

The key is to educate students on ethical issues and academic integrity. The preventative measures are secondary. The desire to learn and succeed has to be from the learners themselves. The colleges and

universities should provide plagiarist training to both faculty and students so they know clearly what it is and how to avoid it. This will be a continuing battle and challenge that educators must face and win.

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