

Florina-Gratiela Şchiopu-Constantin
Montemorelos University
gratiela282000@yahoo.com

Academic Integrity – Plagiarism and the Impact on Students’ Work

Keywords

Academic Integrity, plagiarism, prevention in plagiarism

Abstract

Nowadays, the subject of Academic Integrity is largely studied and discussed about as an issue of great interest, especially because teachers in all fields want their students to know from the beginning what is expected from them in terms of fairness when it is about completing a task the students are given and respecting the requirements of fairness. The reality is that education in this field is needed, and should be grounded on a strong background, knowing that it is much easier to take the information and use it as it belongs to you, rather than do a lot of research and get to some conclusions for which you had to work many hours, days or even months. Thus, easier, and faster needs to be replaced by harder and more serious work, which will result in personal, enriching information and results.

This research has as purposes to explore the reasons for which someone would commit plagiarism, to make students

aware of the consequences that such an act attracts, and to observe what can be done, to prevent it. The study will be done through Qualitative research, using a focus group discussion, 7 students in the first year of PIPP,¹ from Adventus University of Cernica, Romania. The students seemed to have enough knowledge about the problem in discussion, both the act of committing plagiarism and its consequences. Drawing the conclusions after the focus group information was gathered, there could be seen some results.

1. Review of Literature

In spite of the years in which efforts were made concerning academic dishonesty in higher education, and even though there are results based on the concern for the students ideas on school work, and the way they use the internet in order to accomplish their tasks, we should admit that the problem of cheating in the form of plagiarism in connection with academic integrity is still a matter that calls out attention, being an issue which is pressing at all levels and, in this respect, there are also programs constructed to implement preventive interventions (Rabahi, 2019; Giannotta, Özdemir, & Stattin, 2019; Chankova, 2020).

Consulting some dictionaries, the result that one receives by searching is that the word integrity means showing total acceptance and embracing moral and ethical principles, in other words to show a strong, moral character, to have a whole development (*Dictionary.com*, 2020), and the term is seen as the acceptance of a moral and artistic code. To say it clearly, in even deeper words, to be seen no way of moral corruption,

¹ The Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-School Education (Rom., Pedagogia Învățământului Primar și Preșcolar)

which makes a person totally admirable, to be a complete human being guided in all situations by strong, immutable moral values (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*).

Moreover, Eaton (2020) tries to get our attention on Academic Integrity mentioning that we can even speak about some of the values that belong to Academic Integrity like being universal, rising the idea that, by all means, the result is our vision, interpretation and ideas that are of great importance in the research we work at, and such a result is quite essential and worthy. To go forward, it might be said that the teachers' ideals concerning integrity at all levels can be and should be transferred to students, because generally speaking, people have the tendency to show their trust totally in those whose integrity is proved, even in cases when they do not always show a deep agreement with them and in this respect, Aryanitis and Kalliris (2020) mention a rule or rather a moral principle in accordance to which one acts morally, in different situations of life.

Thus, according to Aryanitis and Kalliris (2020), integrity is recognized when, no matter the circumstances, one can stand up fearless for what that person believes and chooses to do the right thing regardless the opinion of those around. As a result of this approach, they worked on *Self-Determination Theory* explaining the issue that leads someone to act out of moral motivation stressing the idea that one reaches to moral integrity because of an internal, moral system of principles, emotions, and motives. This behavior is a result of the person's interaction with the environment, and the greatness of this principle is that the contexts of life will definitely not change the framework of integrity, no matter the situation, which is, we might say, the core of education through integrity.

The *Google generation* is the term rendered for the nowadays students, and findings on the matter suggest that

this generation witnesses a more difficult issue than before in the fact that they face a conflict in learning value, owing to the fact that the knowledge they have is of little structure, and Chankova (2020) specifies that the nowadays students generally think of cheating as an action that has no connection with the moral or ethical implications.

As an answer to this concern, Giannotta, Özdemir, and Stattin (2019) mention the implementation of preventive interventions which is considered an important factor, also speaking about implementing integrity in parenting programs in Sweden, for example. In this study the parents are shown as being very interested and engaged in this intervention procedure and this action grows the intervention effects, but such an involvement is only discussed in the case of younger students. Moving forward to college or university students, Heiser and McArthur (2020) mention the fact that students face the tendency to violate academic integrity and are strongly tempted to commit fraud and cheating, which, among students, is not a new phenomenon, and it takes place at all levels.

At the same time, Arvanitis and Kalliris (2020) come up with a view of moral integrity that gather three distinct features such as cognitive, emotional, and motivational moral consistency. Akbar and Picard (2020) mention a multitude of research that has been conducted in academic integrity related to culture in western world, and some work has also been conducted in Asian contexts, and because of this work it could be noticed the impact of culture and religion on academic integrity in eastern countries with a Muslim majority. On the other hand, Betawi (2020) brings to our attention the idea that in the absence of values, in general the situation in Jordanian schools keeps on deteriorating ethically speaking, even

mentioning the increase in cheating, bullying and vandalism also.

Eaton (2020) speaks about the examination of the existence of a system approach which is to address contract cheating in all its forms, using 4M framework, through which is demonstrated the importance of the micro-the individual, meso-the department, the macro-the learning organization, and finally the mega-which is something beyond the institution. Henning, Alyami, Melyani, and Al Mansour (2020) established a reliable and valid measure of academic integrity which can be used in higher education institutions, and the three domains proposed are cheating, copying, and complying a questionnaire with 10 items (CCAIQ-3), an instrument which intended to promote academic integrity and whose results were better than those of the previous one (CCAIQ-2), which belonged to the second version.

Keefer, Brown, and Rothschild (2020) saw the problem of plagiarism as a metaphor, mentioning that this type of using such a metaphor influence to a great extent the manner people perceive social, problematical issues, and even more, when such a situation is seen as a disease, people's attitude towards it changes naturally. As a result of their study, they noticed that while naming the plagiarism a disease, even the students' perception on the matter in campus changed, seeing it as it was in reality, a severe problem, and thus, they were more supportive when it came to discuss about or implement a lot of anti-plagiarism policies.

Plagiarism in the Digital Era

In the last decades, in the digital era, it can be said that it is like a great burden when it comes to academic integrity in the digital context, for universities and other institutions of education worldwide, mentions Rabahi (2019). In his study,

which was conducted in some Universities in Algeria, the findings got to the conclusion that, to complete their work, students used technology to commit cheating and plagiarism. To bring a light of hope, he said that integrity can be achieved by institutions and universities when the students start to understand the positive side of ICT.²

Tran, Huynh, and Nguyen (2018) conducted a study on plagiarism in Vietnam, whose results led to the idea that the main source of the situation was that the authors of those materials used the information taken from internet but did not cite the authors that originally had written about the problem in discussion.

Moreover, Tahir and Patak (2019) see plagiarism as being a complex problem which can be done by accident, by mistake or on purpose, the last one being the most dramatic of them all, but the first two ones must be taken into consideration seriously, too. They mention some levels of plagiarism, such as cut-and-paste, when the student getting the information does not mention the source it was taken from, and this meaning more than half of the original text. Hard to believe, but true, in such a situation the reference is not given at all. A second level could be to copy a great amount of the information, which is less than half of the work, and also not giving the source, and the third level, copying some tables, paragraphs, pictures, without even mentioning the source. As a fourth level or method they mention the works in which there are rewritten pages or paragraphs without mentioning the source, and the words or sentences can even be said in order. Finally, plagiarism is when someone only changes the order of words or sentences only. Thus, it is very important to pay attention at such an act, to be able to accomplish scientific research using one's own

² Information and Communications Technology.

way of citing and writing the references in academic style. While trying to help the students understand what is permitted to write in their research, not to commit plagiarism, we should mention that the citation and references are permitted, as being part of this process of writing in scientific works.

Douglass and Watt (2019) mention that there is a specific view considering plagiarism and the way it must be dealt with it in every university, and that some errors, negligence, and lack of technical knowledge should not be considered as plagiarism, but as the result of a work written in an inappropriate way. As a result of their work, they mentioned the necessity that the students, especially when speaking about electronic submission, should have the chance to see the detailed online plagiarism report before the moment of submission, so that they can have the chance to correct the places in which there seems to be plagiarism. Thus, they say that the students should immediately receive their work back, as soon as possible, after the moment the work has been sent, and the copy of the plagiarism report also.

2. Methodology

This study research was motivated by the desire to get the subject into attention in the academic area, not because it was not known, but because being brought again into students' attention, and the focus being stronger, it could lead to the understanding that it deserves being taken into discussion. Besides, one of the most important and meaningful purposes was to make the students aware of the implications of such an act. The qualitative research methodology was conducted on a group of seven students, all students in the first year of PIPP. The students were made aware from the beginning of the study that their names will not be mentioned, and that their opinion

mattered to the extent to which they meant what they said about the subject in discussion, and the qualitative methodology was based on asking questions about their knowledge about plagiarism and the results that such an act could lead to. The way the data was collected was by focus group discussion, teacher-students (FGD- T/S), seven student girls and a teacher.

Collecting Data

Data collection is about asking, watching, and reviewing the information and Qualitative data consists of direct questions from people about their opinion, experience, feelings, and the information they have about a specific subject, and all these are obtained through interviews. In education we find interviewing as the most common form of collecting data, and this method is found in most applied fields also. The work of writing the results of the study is much facilitated by paying attention to some issues before the writing task, such as determining the audience, selecting a focus and report outlining, keeping in mind the idea that first of all the issue needs to be understood by the researcher, and then to be understood by others.

Being a work in which the names of the participants (Table 1) are not given, they received information about the subject they were to discuss, and they signed an informed consent, which showed they did this willingly. The data was gathered for one hour and later the result was thematically analyzed, coded and put under themes.

The Limitations of the Study

There is a small number of participants, from the same class and the same university.

3. Results

The results of the study will lead to a better understanding among the students in this university, as well as in others.

The study was conducted on 7 students at PIPP, Adventus University of Cernica, Romania, and was meant to find out which was the level of knowledge of the 1st year students about academic plagiarism. The interview was semi structured, with the possibility of forming other questions, too, which really happened. The students were told the purpose of the study and were also assured of total confidentiality.

Question 1. What do you know, what have you found about plagiarism? When was the first time you got in contact with this term?

Student X1, who was at the second faculty spoke about the fact that in the first faculty there were many students whose research works had been rejected because of plagiarism. This student said that before this moment it seemed to her that the teachers were exaggerating, but later on, she changed her attitude:

Some of my colleagues gave their works to be checked and the result was negative, and therefore, they received the grade 1, and had their work rejected. In some cases, they were given the chance to write it back, but sometimes it was too late and there was nothing to be done. It was a turning point for them, and for their colleagues a lesson to be learnt.

Student X2, another student mentioned that they learnt about this subject in university, but that when students do their work, they still use to do copy-paste, or taking the information without mentioning the source.

Question 2. Which are the difficulties you faced concerning the subject and how did you handle them?

Mentioning about the past, they spoke about situations when they were required to do research and they needed to write the source and in the end the work was tested, which, while waiting, caused them some fear.

Student X6: I remember when I finished the work, I gave it to my teacher and then I had to wait for an answer, to know if I had done it well, in accordance to the rules mentioned in the University, and of course, to see if it was accepted. I was a little bit nervous while waiting.

Question 3. Why do you think that people commit plagiarism?

The issue of plagiarism is known by students, but even if they know the consequences of such an act, because they consider that it might be easier to get the information and use it as it belongs to them, without paying so much work, they resort to plagiarism. Other reasons that were mentioned connected to this issue led to the lack of time, the large amount of work consumed with writing the footnotes, as well as the lack of a specialized, appropriate language.

Student X7: I think that students find it easier to copy the information, instead of working hard, and because they think it is not going to be so bad, or that the teachers will not be so categorical.

Student X3: There might be some situations when we, students, have just a short time to accomplish our task, being not so easy to write all the footnotes. The lack of time can also be because of a bad administration of time.

Student X4: *Another reason could be the lack of an appropriate, specialized language, the presence of some difficulties in expressing oneself, while getting the information and transmitting it back in our own words.*

Student X5: *I also think that for some students it is difficult to render some ideas in their own words in the most appropriate language. Even though, I am sure that only through hard work, through repetition, we can get to the performance of doing a work which is written in accordance with the requirements of that task.*

Question 4. Which are your recommendations concerning the subject?

Student X1 told that in the first university where she had studied, students were asked to put a lot of footnotes in the end of the page, and then the page looked crowded, but she mentioned having been told that they needed to do that:

We were told that because we did not have so much knowledge on the subject we needed information from other sources, but we needed to mention the source.

Another student spoke about the necessity of mentioning the source, focussing on the importance of appreciating someone else's ownership on the subject or the information in general. The importance of being fair to yourself and to the author from whom one might consider taking the information without mentioning the place it was taken from, seemed to be very much appreciated by the student.

Student X2: *The teachers told us that when work research is written it is necessary to specify the place we take our sources, because anybody else worked a lot for it, and it is not fair to assume the information as if it belonged to us.*

Question 5. Which do you consider as being the best practices to avoid plagiarism?

To this question also, one student mentioned some practices that she had learned at a course she had participated at, such as paraphrasing, the use of inverted commas, the method of rendering the same information in one's own words, in short, working intelligently. She also meant that one learns only by working hard and paying serious attention to such an endeavour.

Student X7: I learned that paraphrasing is a good way of avoiding plagiarism, close to rendering the same information in one's own words, and the use of inverted commas. I also think that if one does this for a long time, he will learn how to handle this.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study research was to get the subject of Plagiarism into attention of the students in the academic area, not because it was not known, but because being repeated and the focus being stronger, it could lead to the understanding that a second and better implementation is needed, which would also involve improvement.

All relevant data was gathered and studied, after being organized in such a manner that was easy to be followed. Then, the researcher wrote down all the answers of the students in the focus group considering the topic covered in the questions of the study. The following step was to put the topics in order.

The findings showed that the students had a lot of knowledge on the matter, they received information from teachers, one student even had colleagues, in the previous faculty, whose works had been rejected, marked with the grade

1, in some cases they were given the possibility to do it again, but in others, not.

Further on, it can be noticed that the students' view on plagiarism resemble the results of the study conducted by Tahir and Patak (2019) and whose elements are: cut-and-paste, copy a great amount of the information and not giving the source, copying some tables, paragraphs, pictures, without even mentioning the source, and when someone only changes the order of words or sentences.

The students in the focus group admitted the fact that the teachers mentioned this in their courses, militating against plagiarism, helping them understand that working more for now is a way to give them a better understanding on the issue in discussion, and the freedom one needs when having finished an important research study. Some of them showed disapproval toward those who commit plagiarism and were sure that they would not do such an act in order to do a better or faster work.

Further research is waited for in this field, so that the students should be aware of the importance of this issue whose results affect their present situation and, in some situations, their future career.

5. Recommendations

Teachers and students necessarily need to be aware of the seriousness of the problem in discussion, which is plagiarism and cheating. At the same time, it is the teachers' role to create such an environment in which cheating can be just an exception, and integrity can be seen as the core of all values connected to learning. Thus, the students should be oriented to doing the things as well as possible, but not necessarily inclined to receiving high grades with all costs,

which will by no means cut down cheating through the motivation presented to the students.

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Tables, Figures and Appendices

Table 1. Participants' profile

Participants	University Section	Year of study	First/ second faculty	Measure of encountering the subject
X1	PIPP student	1 st year	Second faculty	Heard of it in the 1 st faculty
X2	PIP student	1 st year	1 year in another faculty	At courses
X3	PIP student	1 st year	First faculty	At courses
X4	PIP student	1 st year	First faculty	At courses
X5	PIP student	1 st year	First faculty	At courses
X6	PIP student	1 st year	First faculty	At courses
X7	PIP student	1 st year	First faculty	At courses