

Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education: A Model of Integrity and Autonomy in Academic Research

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Abstract:

The aim of the current study is uncovering the causes behind undergraduates' plagiarism in the department of English at the University of 8 Mai 1945, Guelma (Algeria) through administering a questionnaire to second-year students. Apparently, plagiarism has substantially increased although the anti-plagiarism code, number 933, was enacted by the Ministry of Higher Education in July 28th, 2016. The study concluded that the major causes behind plagiarism are the use of the Internet and digital sources, laziness, low academic self-esteem, and limited knowledge of citation and paraphrasing. As an attempt to end plagiarism, we designed *a model of integrity and autonomy in academic research* to explain the types of plagiarism and the ways of deterring it in Higher Education according to each type as well as the importance of researcher's autonomy.

Key words: Academic research; plagiarism; integrity; autonomy.



Introduction

Not only teachers are researchers, students in Higher Education (HE) ought to be considered as researchers too. Hence, they should work independently to develop their research skills as well as their academic writing. However, students' autonomous research especially through the Internet has violated the ethics of intellectual property. In this respect,

students should be aware of the importance of academic integrity and plagiarism avoidance. Training students to conduct research could be highly effective in developing their research skills. Within this scope, a model is needed to help students understand plagiarism and its impact on academic writing as well as to provide them with efficient ways for avoiding it.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Origins and Definition of Academic Integrity

Integrity is originated from the Latin word “integer” which denotes “the whole of a thing” (*All about hard words*, 1874, p. 159). It is defined as “the trustworthiness of data or resources” (Bishop, 2003, p. 5). Two types of integrity are identified: “data integrity” which is related to information itself, and “origin integrity” that encompasses data sources (Bishop, 2003, p. 5). In this respect, violating academic integrity implies academic dishonesty or research misconduct. According to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), research misconduct includes three aspects: “fabrication”, “falsification” of data results, and “plagiarism” (as cited in Lo, 2010, p. 110).

Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty which dates back to 1926. It is defined as using other’s words and ideas “as if they are your own” (Singh & Lukkarila, 2017, p. 223). However, “common knowledge” is not viewed as plagiarism (Swales & Feak, 1994, p. 125). Also, plagiarism is considered as unethical behavior. Hence, students should be aware of the ethical conduct of research where students’ intention to plagiarize plays a significant role. In this respect, plagiarism is viewed by Swales and Feak as a “deliberate activity” (1994, p. 125). However, Kirsner and Mandell (2009, p. 195) maintained that plagiarism is often unintentional. Within this scope, Krause referred to two types of plagiarism: *purposeful* and *accidental*. The former is intentional plagiarism while the latter is unintentional. Unintentional plagiarism is the result of the limited knowledge of citation and paraphrasing, which is considered by Krause as a mere “explanation” of the

phenomenon rather than “an excuse” (2007, p. 8). Accordingly, students plagiarize either deliberately or unintentionally and their intention manipulates the situation where personal decisions play an interesting role.

Plagiarism exists in many forms; “self-plagiarism” is when an author plagiarizes a part from his/her previous work or introduces a past work as a new one (Zhang, 2016, p. 23). In addition, “ghostwriting” entails copying the whole work or buying it from online websites and “paper mills” (“cyber-plagiarism”) (Strittmatter & Bratton, 2016, p. 7). Besides, “mosaic plagiarism” or “patch-writing” implies using both the writers’ words and others’ words by substituting the plagiarized words with synonyms (Harvey, 2008, p. 23).

1.2. Originality in Research

Originality first appeared in 1584 in “the English Printing Register” to mean “the work could not already exist in print form” (Sutherland-Smith, 2008, p. 43). This indicates that only works which are printed are checked while non-printed sources are not taken into consideration. The notion of originality was developed by the English writer Edward Young in 1759 when he wrote his essay “Conjectures” in which he explained the need for “legal protection” of “original” works. From this perspective, the writer is viewed as “the sole creator or originator” of the text (Sutherland-Smith, 2008, pp. 43-45). So, the text belongs only to the writer; thus, his/her rights need to be protected. Voltaire, the French writer surprisingly maintained that “originality is nothing but judicious imitation” (1786, as cited in Grimké, 1835, p. 40). Later, an article entitled *Specimens of a patent pocket dictionary* in the *New Monthly Magazine and literary journal* explained originality in a similar manner by defining it as “undetected imitation” (1825, p. 46). After that, originality was defined by substituting “imitation” for plagiarism so that originality is considered as “undetected plagiarism” (Paul, 1896, as cited in Brock, 1911, p. 33). Similarly, originality is described by the novelist Gaddis in his novel *the Recognitions* as “the romantic disease”. He explained that plagiarists “could draw nothing, paint nothing, just so the

mess they make is original” (1955, as cited in Gutbrodt, 2003, p. 9). Gaddis’ words indicate impotence and inability to create something new by the writer.

Moreover, Gutbrodt wondered whether originality is “intrinsic” or “accidental” (2003, p. 9). We all need to know what makes authors or artists do the same work again. Is it from their inner personality or by chance? In the case of artistic works, we think that reproduction by declaring the ownership of the painting or the sculpture is the first step towards learning how to do it correctly and it will end in originality in subsequent works. However, writing necessitates originality from the first work because the writer is supposed to know the techniques of writing through reading. Hence, the British novelist Nosnibor published his novel *The Plagiarist* to deal with the problem of plagiarism in his own way. He declared in the epilogue that playwrights also plagiarise giving the example of Shakespeare and Marlow who stole “plots and ideas from earlier writers” (2008, p. 199).

1.3. Plagiarism in Algerian Universities

Few studies investigated plagiarism in the Arab World. A research project concerning “Arabic intrinsic plagiarism detection” was conducted in 2013 as a cooperative work between the “Universitat Politècnica de València” in Spain and “Constantine 2 University” in Algeria. A total of 2833 cases of plagiarism were reported (Bensalem, Rosso & Chikhi, 2013, p. 57). Recently, Makhloufi and Mehdaoui explored teachers’ perceptions of plagiarism in the University of Saida and other Algerian universities. A questionnaire was administered to collect information about the causes that may lead to plagiarism. The study indicated that the major reason behind the phenomenon is students’ “bad command of the language and easiness of plagiarism” (2016, p. 111).

Although the anti-plagiarism code number “933” was enacted in July, 28th, 2016 to fight plagiarism in Algerian Universities (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research), several cases of plagiarism were reported in many departments (Zaghlami, 2016, n.pag). It was observed that some

students at the Department of English in the University of Guelma do not know about the code even if it is available on the Website of the Ministry and on many Algerian Universities' Websites including the University of 8 Mai 1945 in Guelma. Zaghlami explained that the new anti-plagiarism code is a:

[S]erious professional breach that can result in work being annulled, degrees withdrawn and exclusion from posts as well as possible judicial action. To curb further cases of plagiarism, the department of higher education has instructed all universities to set up databases on their websites in which all works and theses produced by students, lecturers and researchers are reported. (Zaghlami, 2016, n.pag)

Apparently, technology has facilitated copying from hundreds of online sources. Hence, integrity is often lost in the Internet age. Another cause of plagiarism is the "lack of suitable training" (Zhang, 2016, p. 5). Training students to conduct research could help them understand the necessary research skills and techniques on one hand, and elaborate their academic writing through practice of writing styles (APA/MLA) on the other hand.

1.4. Students' Autonomy in the Internet Age

Autonomy has become a need for students to get new information. Within this scope, Nunan explained that "if any learning is to take place, the learners must do it for themselves" (1997, p. 202). Active learning and independent learning are also used to refer to autonomy. The former is related to Dewey's constructivist theory of "learning by doing" (1938, as cited in Ntuli, 2015, p. 142). Whereas, the latter entails the move from total dependence on the teacher to total independence through the process of "interdependence" which denotes teacher-learner collaboration and peer collaboration (Benson, 2011, p. 14). In this respect, Moore used independent learning and distance learning interchangeably (1973, p. 661).

The Internet could raise students' autonomy through VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments) and SACs (Self-Access Centres) where students could have access to a wide range of

language learning materials. In addition, students may benefit from technology-based learning (TBL) either in or outside the classroom. More importantly, the teacher's role as a facilitator is highly advocated to raise students' autonomy through tele-collaboration (Warschauer, 1996) and electronic feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 117) either by using emails or through the social media.

1.5. Autonomous Research

Research is defined as "purposeful, systematic, ethical, and critical investigation which takes place in a socially constructed world, with the aim of deepening human understanding" (Hanks, 2017, p. 35). From this definition, it is observed that research is linked to ethics. Hence, students have to be trained about research ethics. Furthermore, the simplest type of research which could help students enhance their autonomy is the homework. Students' engagement in the homework is the result of teachers' appreciation of their needs, desire and ability to accomplish the activities by making them "student-driven" and "interesting" (Harmer, 2001, p. 339). Similarly, Zimmerman, Banner and Kovach (1996, p. 11) maintained that the homework could train learners to develop their self-regulatory skills. In this respect, the role of the teacher is to give students "daily assignments" which may help them develop their research skills (Zimmerman et al., 1996, p. 19). A survey to 1135 undergraduates in forty-one universities was made by Lapatto concerning undergraduate research. He found that students think that research could raise independent learning and knowledge about the "research process" (2007; as cited in Hudley, Dickter & Franze, 2017, p. 27).

However, students often do not understand what a task is about, they fail in assessing the assignment given by the teacher. The majority of them may not know exactly "what they were supposed to do" (Ambrose, Bridges & DiPietro, 2010, p. 194). As a result, they write all "what they knew about the paper's topic". Hence, students do not answer the question precisely and concisely. Therefore, Ambrose et al. (2010, p. 194) maintained that assessing the task-as the first metacognitive strategy to

perform, is a difficult issue which needs “practice” and “feedback” from the teacher to ensure students’ understanding of the task. Similarly, Creme and Lea (2008, p. 2) confirmed that “the key to becoming a successful writer at university level is understanding what is required and what is involved in the process of completing assignments”.

Furthermore, technology may permit students to conduct research “autonomously” (Silverman & Patterson, 2015, p. 11). Promoting autonomy could be effective through using technological tools. For example, in Self-Access Centres (SACs), students could have access to either digital materials such as: CDs and videos or printed ones like books and journals. This could be implemented as a part of the timetable or just as a matter of choice in free time (Harmer, 2001, p. 340). Besides, students may develop “self-study plans for future use” to enhance their own learning. A plan that includes both aim and task could be very useful for future language development (Harmer, 2001, p. 343).

2. The Study

The study was conducted through the quantitative descriptive method (Koul, 2009, p. 106) by collecting data through administering a questionnaire. The latter was administered during the second semestre of the academic year 2017-2018. Following Krejcie and Morgan’s sampling table, a random sample of one hundred and three (103) participants was enrolled in this study as the whole population consists of one hundred and forty (140) students (1970, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 94). The aim of the questionnaire was to investigate the possible causes behind students’ plagiarism in the Department of English at the University of 8 Mai 1945, Guelma (Algeria).

The questionnaire is structured since it includes closed questions that aim at collecting quantitative data. It is divided into three sections. Section one includes general information about students. Section two sheds light on information related to

undergraduate research quality. The aim of this section is investigating students' perceptions of themselves as researchers as well as the quality of their research. It probes students' opinions about the importance of research in Higher Education. Moreover, it tackles autonomy in learning through collecting students' answers about students' degree of self-reliance and independence from the teacher. Then, it investigates the prevalence of plagiarism among students. Also, it uncovers whether plagiarism is deliberate or unintentional. Additionally, students' knowledge and involvement in self-plagiarism is probed as well as assignments/ papers' sale from paper mills (websites).

The most important part of this section is discovering the possible causes behind the phenomenon of plagiarism and the use of punishment as a deterrence strategy to end violation of intellectual property as well as the different penalties used by teachers. Also, the section aims at exploring students' knowledge about the anti-plagiarism code, number 933 which was enacted by the Ministry of Higher education and Scientific Research in July, 28th, 2016. Students are asked about detection of plagiarism by teachers and reasons behind inability of some teachers to detect it.

3. Findings and Discussion

A total of one hundred and three (103) questionnaires were administered to uncover the causes behind plagiarism in the department of English among second-year students. Percentages are ranked in table 1 from the highest to the lowest according to students' choices as follows:

Table 1

Causes behind Students' Plagiarism

Rank	Causes of plagiarism	Frequency	Percentage
1	The Internet and digital sources	96	93.20%

2	Laziness	86	83.49%
3	Low academic self-esteem	73	70.87%
4	Limited knowledge of citation and paraphrasing	71	68.93%
5	Difficulty of the homework	67	65.04%
6	Lack of motivation to study English	66	64.07%
7	No punishment by teachers	63	61.16%
8	Time constraints	61	59.22%
9	The design of assignments encourages plagiarism	54	52.42%
10	Heavy workload	51	49.51%
11	Cultural background	49	47.57%
12	Inexistence of a written ethical code	48	46.60%
13	Peer expectations	29	28.15%
14	Family expectations	28	27.18%

As indicated in table 1, nearly all the students (93.20 %) admitted that the Internet and digital sources are the causes behind plagiarism. This implies that it is difficult to avoid plagiarism in the digital age. Also, the majority of informants (83.49%) confessed that plagiarism is due to laziness. 70.87% of participants considered low academic self-esteem as the cause behind plagiarism. Hence, students have to promote their academic self-esteem in order to be more competent especially in Foreign Language Writing. Additionally, 68.93% of informants viewed limited knowledge of citation and paraphrasing as the cause behind plagiarism. In this respect, both theory and practice are necessary for promoting effective citation and paraphrasing by students. Within this scope,

students need training about using citation styles as well as extensive practice of paraphrasing.

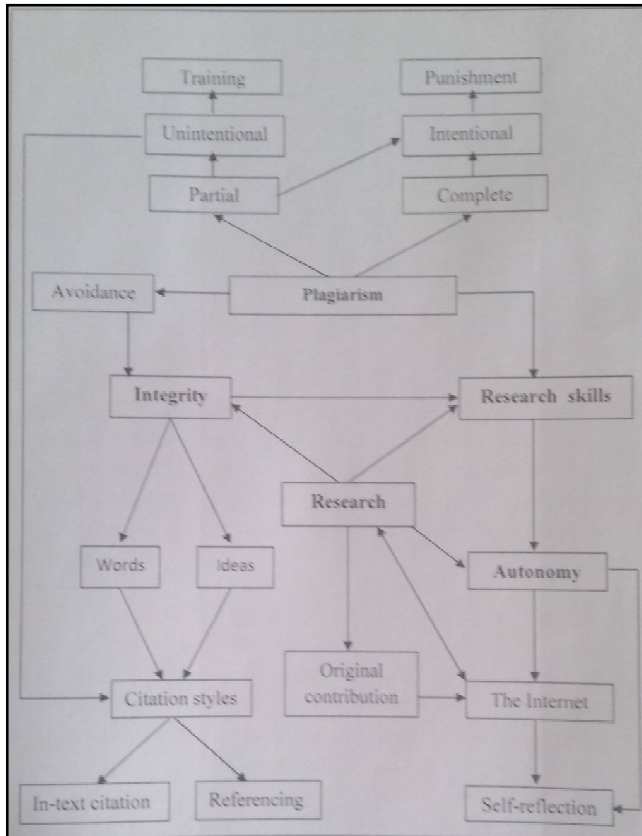
More than half of the students (65.04%) opted for difficulty of the homework as the reason behind plagiarism. This entails that some teachers are indirectly pushing students to commit academic dishonesty by giving students hard tasks to accomplish. However, it is doubtful to assume that easiness of the assignment will not result in plagiarism. Furthermore, lack of motivation to learn English was selected by 64.07% of participants. This denotes that motivation is highly advocated to promote integrity. Besides, 61.16% of students declared that absence of punishment is the reason behind plagiarism. This stresses the effective role of punishment as a deterrence strategy. 59.22% of informants concurred that time constraints are the cause that push students to plagiarize others' works. Therefore, students should be aware about the techniques of developing their time management skills.

Moreover, 52.42% of informants stated that the design of the assignment(s) could encourage plagiarism. In this respect, teachers have to ask for explanations, discussion, comparison, and analysis instead of definitions, true/false, and multiple-choice questions. Less than half of the students (49.51%) asserted that heavy workload encourages plagiarism. Students may be exposed to stress because of the huge number of modules and assignments in each module. 47.57% of informants opted for cultural background as the cause behind plagiarism. It is argued by scholars that non-native/international students tend to be plagiarists unlike native ones. Moreover, less than half of the participants (46.60%) argued that inexistence of an ethical/honour code. Only 28.15% and 27.18% of students opted respectively for peer expectations and family expectations, which implies that external factors have little significance in relation to plagiarism.

To solve the problem of academic dishonesty by fighting its main causes which are pointed out throughout our study, we designed the following model that may be an effective tool that could help teachers in higher education understand the nature of

students' plagiarism as well as its types. It provides academic institutions with the main ways of plagiarism avoidance as follows

Figure 1.1. A Model of Integrity and Autonomy in Academic Research



As illustrated in the model, two types of plagiarism are indicated: intentional and unintentional. Unlike intentional plagiarism where plagiarism is complete, unintentional plagiarism is due mainly to ignorance of citation styles. Therefore, plagiarism is partial. For example, the student writes a quotation without quotes or makes in-text citation but does not write the source in the bibliography. Hence, this case necessitates training the student to avoid plagiarism mainly through practice of citation styles including both in-text citation

and referencing. Often, a student could plagiarize intentionally but his/her work could be partially plagiarized. However, complete plagiarism could never be unintentional. It shows that the student is pre-determined to violate intellectual property. Accordingly, punishment is unavoidable as a deterrence policy so that teachers could preserve integrity. Eventually, punishment requires the use of honour/ethical codes that have to be introduced to students from the beginning of the academic year accompanied by a plagiarism pledge in which the student assumes full responsibility by promising not to violate academic honesty and intellectual property.

Plagiarism implies that the student does not know research skills. Furthermore, as the model indicates, conducting research requires autonomy. Apparently, a student who is not independent cannot develop his/her research skills through self-guidance and Internet use. Therefore, research implies an original contribution to academic writing. Lack of autonomy could affect negatively students' choice of the topic and research design. Consequently, autonomous research calls for originality which presupposes a new topic, plagiarism avoidance and integrity concerning the ownership of both words and ideas. In this respect, the Internet is an influential tool which could help teachers check originality. Moreover, it is effective in making self-reflection which is the core element of autonomy.

Consequently, the four main causes of plagiarism could be fought as follows:

1-The Internet: teachers have to raise students' awareness that the Internet is a two-edged tool. It could raise students' autonomous learning on one side; however, it could provide a wide range of digital materials that could be easily copied on the other side. Hence, teachers should encourage students to use the Internet in a way that promotes academic honesty.

2-Laziness: students should be conscious that laziness threatens their academic career since it increases plagiarism. In this respect, students have to develop their devotion, perseverance, and self-reliance.

3-*Low academic self-esteem*: perceiving one's self as an able learner could raise self-confidence and responsibility. The latter is the key towards building high academic self-esteem.

4-*Limited knowledge of citation and paraphrasing*: students should be trained to use citation and paraphrasing techniques. By training we mean extensive practice of citation styles and rewording techniques and strategies.

Conclusion

As indicated by the results from the survey, the use of the Internet and digital sources, laziness, low academic self-esteem, and limited knowledge of citation and paraphrasing are the major causes behind students' plagiarism in the department of English. Hence, students could preserve academic integrity mainly when they work independently to promote their research skills and practice the necessary citation techniques. Within this scope, tele-collaboration is highly recommended to benefit from teachers and experts in the field of scientific inquiry. Apparently, teachers who are autonomous could enhance students' motivation and independence more than non-autonomous teachers.

Reaching the highest degree of autonomy is the result of self-guided learning when students feel responsible for the integrity of their academic writing by making self-assessment. However, the role of the teacher as an assessor of students' research is also appreciated through the employment of automatic/electronic detection to check for plagiarism in students' works. However, this study has to be replicated in other departments of Algerian Universities to know more about the causes behind students' plagiarism.

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