Plagiarism Among Students in Higher Education: Comparing East to West

Anonym

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Abstract

ABSTRACT: *Plagiarism forms a general threat to the individual student as well as academic institutions. This paper compares the different perspectives on plagiarism in Eastern- and Western academic tradition. Eastern cultures are generally more collectivist and approach knowledge as common heritage, with unreferenced copying as a form of flattery. The Western academic tradition values referencing the source of the information. Educating international students about plagiarism and the regulations regarding citing and referencing seems to be the most effective form of plagiarism prevention.*

Introduction

Much has been written about plagiarism in higher education demonstrating the pressing issue that it forms. There seems to be a general consensus that plagiarism is hurtful for the academic integrity of both the individual and the universities and research institutes they are affiliated with [1; 2]. The rise of the internet, with open access to many publications, is especially threatening for the current generations as the increasing amount of available information is not paired with appropriate training on how to cite and reference it [3].

Plagiarism has several definitions of which most include a failing to attribute the work to the rightful owner [4]. Three different types of plagiarism have been identified. In some cases academic dishonesty is a representation of bad intent, but more often it results from either differences in cultural and educational background or a lack of knowledge or skill [5; 6]. The former is regarded as moral misconduct and is often discouraged by the presence of a plagiarism detector that analyses papers either externally, by comparing the text directly to other sources, or intrinsically, by judging the writing style and between-paragraph cohesion [7]. However, this paper will focus on the latter two since detecting plagiarism is still problematic due to the number of false positives. Thus preventing plagiarism might be more effective than curing it [8].

This paper will focus on the differences in cultural and educational background of international master students and how it impacts their perception of plagiarism. More specifically it is the aim to compare Asian academic perspectives on plagiarism with the Western tradition. This will be reviewed primarily in the context of what Swedish higher education can do to prevent plagiarism among international students.

Literature Review

Plagiarism in Asian Countries

What is understood as plagiarism has often results from what is learned either in education or cultural tradition. Amsberry [9] notes that many Eastern cultures are collectivist cultures where knowledge and information is perceived as common heritage. Especially students from countries like Japan, Korea, and China, but also from former Soviet countries like Latvia, were historically stripped from the notion of plagiarism as is known in the West [10; 11]. Moreover, Hayes and Introna [12] pointed out that copying someone else's work is perceived as a gesture of respect, thus imitating is seen as a form of adoration and recognition [13].

Although it might appear that collectivist cultures have no notion of the *intellectual property* as exists in the West, this generalization must not be drawn to quickly. With the current globalization, Western textual authorship conventions are being integrated in Chinese writing traditions [14; 15].

Plagiarism in Sweden

A small empirical study (N = 34) at Linnaeus University and Blekinge Institute of Technology looked at preventing plagiarism among international master students [15]. Gunnarsson, Kulesza, and Pettersson argue that this group is particularly vulnerable to revert back to plagiarism because they might be unfamiliar with Western academic writing traditions. Furthermore, writing in English rather than their native language might form a barrier when they try to express themselves [16]. The lack of required skills and knowledge on citing correctly, the unfamiliar academic tradition, plus the language barrier might put the international students behind in comparison to their peers, making them more susceptible to (unintentional) plagiarism [17].

The group in Gunnarsson's, Kulesza's, and Pettersson's [18] study consisted for eighty percent out of Asian students, the remainder of the students predominantly came from Africa and Europe. They were all fresh master students in electrical-, mechanical-, and computer engineering. As a mandatory introductory course the students were presented with seminars about writing scientific texts and doing research. These seminars were hosted by the universities' librarians who introduced the students to the concept of plagiarism both theoretically and with practical examples. Over several weeks the students were asked to write a paper in small groups, forcing them to work with peers from other cultures. The students were asked to come up with a task division and show weekly progress reports. At the end of the course the students were tested on the tutorials. The results indicated that the students generally had a good grasp of the concept of plagiarism. However, the test also showed that referencing and paraphrasing remained difficult to some.

Discussion

Plagiarism, both intentional and unintentional, is a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Yet, investing time in eliminating the main causes might be more effective than fighting it. Students' ignorance regarding the expected academic traditions and a lac in the means to counter it is not a moral but rather an educational issue [19]. Integrating new international students into the universities' culture is essential to combat plagiarism. As Gunnarsson, Kulesza, and Pettersson [18] showed, librarians play a crucial role in educating students about scientific conduct.

Research indicated that seminars and training sessions significantly improved students' knowledge about plagiarism [21]. Other succesful tactics included explicitly showing what was expected from the students [22] and including style manuals for students to fall back on [2].

Conclusion

Although plagiarism remains a problem within the academic world, it is preventable. Differences in educational background and cultural tradition might initially provide an obstacle in the education of students, but these can be overcome. Discussing the Western academic code of conduct in classroom settings and training students accordingly especially provides to be an effective method. Helping students overcome the gap between copying and researching will help them grow into true researchers.

Reference

This section should contain complete information in coherent style for all the references.