



Dealing with Plagiarism in the Digital Age

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Abstract

As the Internet allows easy access to almost every written materials, the rate of plagiarism in educational institution has become one of the main concerns shared among teachers at all levels. This paper is based on the studies the researcher done from 2010-2015 focusing on plagiarism at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The research involved 65 Master's Degree students, 31 PhD. students and 44 Undergraduate students in three universities in Northern Thailand. The research instruments included questionnaires, in-depth interviews, pre/posttests and essay writing. The research procedures included the experiment employing class activities, a blogging project and eLearning lessons. The findings reveal that digital technology made it easy to plagiarize. The results indicate that more than half of the participants failed to understand and to address the concept of authorship in using outside sources in their writing. Most of the students (82%) were unaware of plagiarism and did it unintentionally. The essay evaluation pointed out that students could improve their writing by using eLearning lessons and feedback from peers and the instructors. Class activities and discussion sessions on the target issues were effective tools and witting in supporting students to write with plagiarism awareness and to use outside sources more carefully. The analysis of essays written by the participants revealed that students plagiarized as they were not confident in their English, laziness, and lack of knowledge on plagiarism. The author will discuss on strategies in detecting plagiarism in students' work. The highlight will be made on how to assist students in using digital texts as sources for writing wisely.

Introduction

Plagiarism is defined as using of all published and unpublished work of others in one's work without full acknowledgement. However, plagiarism may not be punished as long as students are not caught copying. This academic violation has long been blamed as part of Asian culture. However it is obvious that none of educational institutions in the region gives support to copying. Plagiarism is therefore also totally intolerable in Asian educational institutions. This paper focuses mainly on the plagiarism in undergraduate students' writing on how the designed teaching methods and selected technological tools affected it.

According to a survey conducted on of more than 12,000 high school students by the Josephson Institute of Ethics claimed that 74% of the respondents said they used to cheat at least once in the previous year. About half of these cheaters confessed that they cheated at least two times in the last 12 month [1].

Plagiarism detection software

Among the others, the software Turnitin is well-known web-based plagiarism detection software developed by Turnitin.com, Inc. The software has been used widely by renowned universities worldwide (e.g., Indiana University's Bloomington, Indianapolis, East, Kokomo, Northwest, South Bend, and Southeast campuses). Even though the tool is recognized as a deterrent, it could also be used as an instructional tool to help learners work with sources and to improve paraphrasing and quoting skills. Basically, students can use the following services.

The software checks if the uploaded paper matches pages on the Internet that it has an access to, both live and archived. Turnitin can also access journal databases as well as the increasing number of archived student papers.

Turnitin can identify the paraphrased in form of a percentage indicating the paper's originality. Colours are used as codes to show the matched sections. The following figure (**Figure 1**) demonstrates how the software Turnitin works.

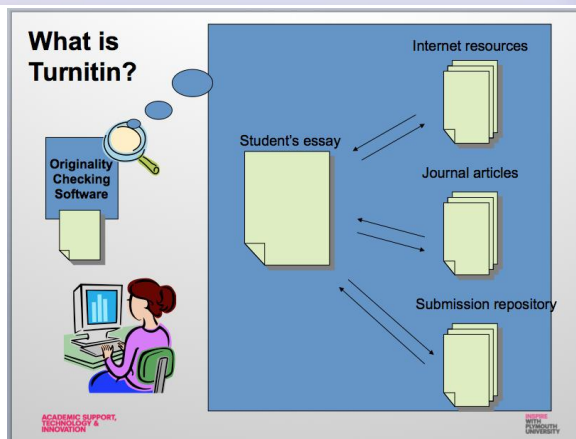


Figure 1 Turnitin (taken from <http://www.fleapalmer.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/WhatIsTurnitin.png>)

Prior to use of Turnitin, the instructor are encouraged to explain how their academic integrity policies work. At the learning process, either the instructor or students submit papers to Turnitin via file upload or cut and paste. Their papers will be compared with Turnitin's proprietary software which includes over 12 billion pages of digital content (including the online materials that is no longer available on the Internet), a huge database of over 110 million students' papers and more than 80,000 professional, academic and commercial journals and publications [4].

Plagiarism among students

There are some several reasons plagiarists have mentioned to when caught with plagiarism. An article published online on CNN website indicated that some of these were students who had positive views on cheating. The drive for cheating concerned with their desire to have high grades from pieces of work. Students in this article claimed that grades were so important that they risked cheating penalties. Their learning outcomes would usually be judged mainly on their GPAs. CNN [5]quoted that

Table 1: Reasons for plagiarism

Reasons for plagiarism	References
• Lack of a true understanding of referencing requirements	[6]
• Misunderstanding the concept of plagiarism	[7]
• Misunderstanding and ignorance about why and how they should avoid plagiarism	[8]
• Lack of understanding and ignorance about why and how they should avoid plagiarism	[9]
• Denial or neutralization of plagiarism-related behavior	[6]
• Easy access to information via the Internet	[6]
• Weak punishment	[10]
	[6]
	[11]
	[8]
	[12]
• Lack of knowledge on citation and referencing conventions	[13]
• Lack of academic skills (such as critical analysis, paraphrasing)	[8]
• Laziness and sneakiness	[14]
	[15]
• Academic workload requirements	[16]
• Lack of clarity by university authorities of plagiarism	[17]
	[8]
• Time management	[8]
• Misunderstanding	[8]
	[9]
	[15]
• Social norms	[8]
• Lack of true value towards assignments	[11]
	[12]
	[15]
• Difficulties in overcoming language and content problems	[18]
	[19]
• cultural background of the students	[20]
	[21]

Besides the above reasons, literature also indicates that the Internet technology is blamed for the increase of plagiarism [22].

Methods

This section presents two main parts of the methodology including participants of the study and the research design. In this study, the 10 types of plagiarism categorized by Turnitin. However, the researcher didn't allow participants nor did herself to use Turnitin in this class. It was clear when making such the decision that the software may need true understanding and knowledge from the

users to learn what Turnitin could do and could not do. Moreover, it could, on the other hand, encourage students to learn to avoid being caught by the tool rather than to learn not to plagiarize.

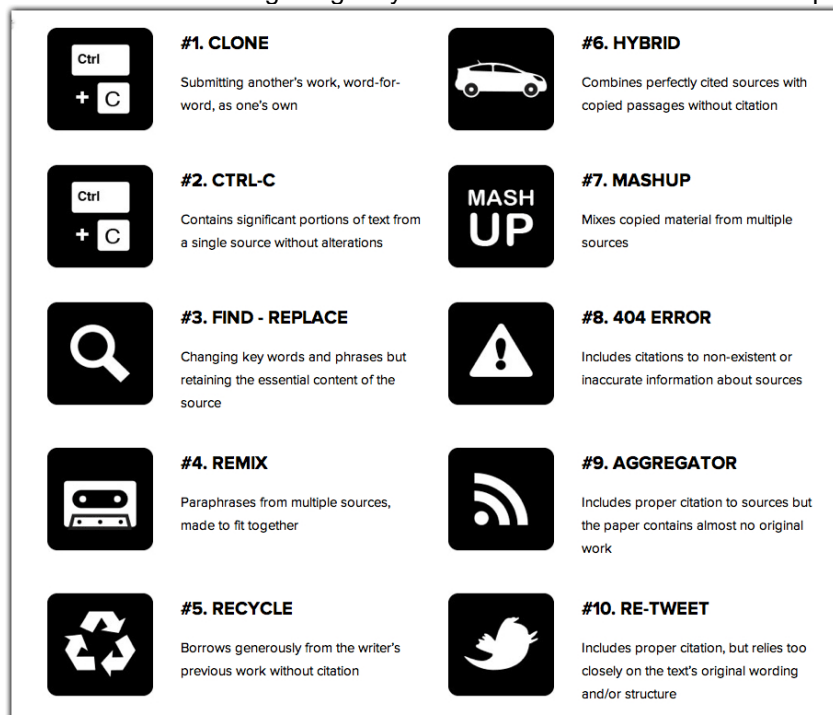


Figure 2 Turnitin's "Plagiarism Spectrum" nbmjhh(taken from http://turnitin.com/assets/en_us/media/plagiarism_spectrum.php)

However, students' written assignments were not detected for plagiarism by the software due to the agreement the instructor made with the participants. Instead, the written assignments were checked for plagiarism manually by peers, a research assistant and the instructor (researcher) as part of class activities. The following illustration (Figure 2) presents the 10 types of Turnitin's "Plagiarism Spectrum".

Participants

The target group of this study was 44 Business English Major Students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, who enrolled in English for Health care Business in the second semester of the academic year 2014. The participants were purposive selected as writing skills were covered within their course outline. The participants were assigned to write essays to investigate their errors in elements of writing. Then, blogging, social media, Google Drive were employed as tools in studying on reasons and causes of plagiarism and effectiveness of the teaching methods in avoiding plagiarism in academic writing. Four steps for designing the research including the pre-analysis of the students' errors in essay writings and exercises, the construction of e-learning, the post- analysis of the writing development by essay writings and exercises, and the investigation of the effectiveness of blogging, social media, Google Drive in reducing plagiarism in students' work were taken.

Results

Findings are featured as the followings:

- More than 80% of students agreed that it was wrong to cheat, while more than half of these admitted that they used the internet to copy text to hand in as their own copied.
- None of the students bought online essays.
- Most students (71.5%) admitted that they wouldn't plagiarize if the instructor provided them with a clear understanding of plagiarism, practices to avoid it and feedback focusing on plagiarism.
- The most common type of plagiarism done (83.3%) was copy and paste from the internet without citation. This figure gradually decrease to 56% in the second assignment and to 21% in the last piece of the assignment.
- Students said they revised and edited their writing more with blogging than on paper.

- From focus-group interviews, it was reported that few instructors discussed plagiarism with students in class.
- There were no student development programs focusing on plagiarism in undergraduate writing.
- Blogging, social media and e-Learning lessons employed in the project were found handy tools in delivery lessons, extra materials and links for external sources to overcome plagiarism and as resources for writing.

Discussion

The students in this study contradicted themselves between what they should do and what they really did. It could be noticed that university policy and instructor's care and effort to foster academic honesty in writing is a significant part leading to success in avoiding plagiarism. It could be assumed that if teachers discuss about cheating in writing in class, students will try to avoid committing this academic crime. Turnitin Originality Reports can be very useful in most of the cases in assisting the instructor to identify plagiarism in students' writing. It is usually indicated, as a guide, that the percentage of similarity should be no more than 10%. However, Turnitin may be able to detect the similarity and not a plagiarism index. In other words, it may not be a plagiarism even though it says the similarity is shown as 30%. This could be just 'similarity'. Thus other methods such as human teacher checking or interviewing the students could also be used. All in all, judgement should be made on a clear understanding on plagiarism.

Thus it is strongly recommended that the instructors and all faculty members could demonstrate how not to plagiarize and raise the value of honesty in academic writing in classes. A training on how to avoid plagiarism should be integrated as part of all possible courses.

Use of a plagiarism software was found useful in identifying the unoriginal written work. However, the non-original work may not always be a plagiarized writing. It is in fact the instructor who always knew well if her students were copying the materials from the outside sources without proper citations. The most significant aim when assigning an essay is how students would be facilitated to write better using their original ideas and their own words

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