

Chapter 41

Strategies and Technologies for Preventing Plagiarism in Modern Higher Education: War against Today's Plagiarists or Nurturing Tomorrow's Talents

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ABSTRACT

In today's higher education, plagiarism can be ranked as one of the top challenges to academic honesty and integrity. Defining plagiarism itself is another challenging issue as it is transcribed in different manners and practices depending on cultures and institutes. This chapter aims to define plagiarism in context of culture, student perceptions and according to different university policies and procedures adopted around the globe. Plagiarism comes under review not only as an individual's misconduct but more as a symptom of an eroded academic culture. The treatment of this symptom is discussed from point of view of two sometimes competing strategies. One of them is based on the formal side of the problem and uses as tools policy, detection (using specialized software), and punishments (PDP) to abolish plagiarism. Another one focuses on trust, education, and assessments (TEA) as points of intervention with the aim to improve academic integrity and negate plagiarism.

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INTRODUCTION

In higher education of nowadays, academic honesty is one of the key elements to assess the scientific integrity of any research and educational activity. Plagiarism has been recognized as one of the major threats to academic integrity adversely affecting key values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in academia (Hughes & McCabe, 2006). Several studies clearly demonstrated that incidences of plagiarism among students over the last decades significantly increased (Heron, 2001; Park, 2003). In surveys, majority of respondents attributed this rising trend to advancements in technology enabling an easy access to information. A range of activities in the response to this situation has been implemented by universities around the world in attempts to prevent occurrence of plagiarism in academic society. Currently, two modalities in addressing the plagiarism issue co-exist in higher education. The first strategy stresses on the university policy on handling cases of academic dishonesty emphasizing consequences of committing plagiarism and includes methods and technologies for detecting plagiarism cases. The second approach focuses more on ensuring correct understanding of the plagiarism by students, teaching them good academic ethics and responsible practice with emphasis on high quality academic writing skills, designing assessments discouraging plagiarism, creating learning environment with the trust core, and reducing student competition for grades. These two main strategies incorporate four common approaches identified in the project performed by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education under the Australian Universities Teaching Committee as measures to minimize plagiarism:

1. Consistent policies to recognize and counter plagiarism,
2. Educating students on academic writing standards,

3. Designing plagiarism discouraging types of assessments, and
4. Transparent practice of monitoring and detecting plagiarism (James, McInnis & Devlin, 2002).

In this chapter, we analyze some of benefits and deficiencies of these approaches.

Most of the higher education institutes request students to disclose their individual role in the research activity and provide a statement of their report originality declaring that the assignment is prepared by them. Universities often have plagiarism policies that outline the different classification of the plagiarism severity, assessment criteria and the mechanism through which plagiarism cases are handled. Unfortunately, in most of the cases, undergraduate and graduate students hardly get a chance to read such policies word to word and put in action during the course of research dissertations or assignments. Often, students disclose plagiarism declaration without knowing and understanding most of the aspect of the plagiarism policies outlined by their universities. Moreover, students' understanding of plagiarism has been acquired from their previous experiences and linked to cultural perceptions, which may not be adequate in the academic writing practice. It is essential to see how students perceive about the plagiarism phenomenon, what are their knowledge and understanding of plagiarism and academic/scientific honesty. This chapter has an emphasis on how students' attitude affects or motivates them to commit plagiarism in their academic tasks.

Unlike past, plagiarism screening is more often done for student assignments and scientific papers to ensure the novelty and originality of the information compiled by students / authors. A great number of options from free online resources to commercial software are available for assessing originality of the text and finding a potential text matching with other sources of information. Some of these products have been routinely used in academic practice by many universities. How-

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