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Academic Writing and the Internet: Cyber-Plagiarism amongst University Students

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to present a number of findings on the perception that university students have on academic plagiarism. Data has been collected on the procedures of copy and paste, paraphrase, translation, as well as the need for citation of resources taken from the Internet. This study was carried out at the University of Lleida (UdL), via an online questionnaire administered to 1150 first-year students. The results show similar figures in the understanding of plagiarism with respect to two procedures: copy and paste (69.3%) and paraphrase (68.3%). In the case of translation, the figure is higher with 82.1% of students considering that translating a text is plagiarism. Regarding the need to cite digital sources, 13.6% argue it is not necessary. When analysing the results according to the different faculties and affiliated schools, no pattern of behaviour has been detected in relation to the typology of the degree students were enrolled in, but a trend towards different behaviours can be observed in the two faculties in which students have received specific training within the framework of subjects of their degrees (Faculty of Nursing and Physiotherapy and Faculty of Education, Psychology and Social Work). In these cases, the figures related to acknowledging plagiarism procedures are higher and so is the percentage of students who say that resources taken from the Internet should be cited. This leads us to conclude, in line with other studies that have dealt with the same subject, that training is key to tackling the issue of plagiarism in higher education.

Keywords PLAGIARISM, INTERNET, MEDIA LITERACY, INFORMATION LITERACY

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Technology and literacy

For a few decades now, studies of literacy practices have shown that there is no universal and permanent literacy (Gee, 1991; Street, 1984). On the contrary, as Gee (2005) argues, reading and writing are considered socially determined practices, since only by taking into consideration the context in which they are generated can their meanings be comprehensively

understood. Therefore, this implies that literacy is not a static, universal and immutable construct, but is comprised of a series of skills in constant construction and evolution. These skills are transformed as the context in which they are embedded varies.

Many factors have had a bearing on the reshaping of literacy practices. One of the most relevant is the incorporation of digital technologies in reading and writing processes. Over the last few decades, different studies carried out in the field of linguistics, but also in the field of didactics of languages or educational technology, have documented how literacy practices have evolved ever since technology has become a central element in our lives (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2017; Leu, Lankshear, Knobel, & Coiro, 2014; Zheng & Warschauer, 2017). This has led to the shaping of the concept of digital literacies[1] (Gilster, 1997; Lanham, 1995), a term that encompasses the skills needed to integrate technology into literacy processes.

The academic field is one of the areas in which the change brought about by the introduction of technology has been highly significant, given that the way in which information is sought, managed, evaluated and used in order to create knowledge has varied substantially (Comas, Sureda, & Oliver, 2011) since teachers and researchers - and also students - have rapid and unimpeded access to information.

Access to information is no longer an issue when developing an academic task, but the excess of information and the ease with which it is accessed, stored and edited has become a challenge. In this context an element emerges which in recent years has been highlighted (Heckler & Forde, 2015; Hu & Lei, 2012): cyber-plagiarism. This phenomenon can be defined as the appropriation of information in any format (text, images, video, etc.) from the Internet and its use as one's own without any reference to its author.

1.2 Cyber-plagiarism in higher education

Studies on cyber-plagiarism in higher education are framed in research that examines academic honesty and have addressed both plagiarism from printed sources as well the appropriation of digital materials. For the purpose of this study, we will confine to the second aspect given that numerous studies have documented that the Internet is the main source of information used by university students to carry out their academic tasks (Egaña, 2012; Fuentes, 2006; Sureda, Comas, & Urbina, 2006).

The systematic study of plagiarism began, as Sureda, Comas, and Morey (2009) documents, in the 1990s and early 2000s, with pioneering research by McCabe and Trevino (1993), Ashworth, Bannister, and Thorne (1997), Hexham (1999), Jordan (2001) or Lambert, Hogan, and Barton (2003), in the Anglo-Saxon context. Progressively, the technological element was introduced into research on the issue, given the relevance that technology was gaining in that, on the one hand, word processors were increasingly sophisticated and enabled the agile processing of information and, on the other, the Internet made it possible to locate, store and manage a large amount of information.

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[1]Two concepts are central to its study: *media literacy* and *information literacy*. For further details, see Romero, Torres, Pérez, and Aguaded (2016), who explain the relationships between the two and the different research perspectives that have addressed them.

As Comas and Sureda (2007) point out, throughout these decades, studies have been conducted in three main areas: a) quantification of plagiarism and profiling student who plagiarize b) identifying the different types of plagiarism, and c) determining the causes that lead to plagiarism.

With regard to the first aspect, despite the fact that the data available to us still comes mainly from the Anglo-Saxon sphere, in recent years research has been carried using data gathered in both Latin America and Spain[2]. Most of it focuses on the analysis of plagiarism in tertiary education, examining one or more degrees. This is the case, for example, of the study carried out by Blanch-Mur, Rey-Abella, and Folch-Soler (2006) at the School of Nursing, Physiotherapy and Nutrition of the Ramon Llull University; the research by Caldevilla-Domínguez (2010) at the Faculty of Information Sciences of the Complutense University of Madrid; the analysis of undergraduate students at the Illes Balears University by Comas et al. (2011); or the studies by Beléndez, Comas, Martín, Muñoz, and Topa (2011) of students of the degree in Labour Relations and Human Resources at the University of Alicante in which it is documented that 90.0% of students say they have carried out one of the forms of cyber-plagiarism. The only study we know of that has attempted to collect samples of students from various universities in a comprehensive manner is that of Sureda and Comas (2008), who conducted a nationwide survey aimed at students registered on the Universia website.

The results of the studies carried out point in the same direction and a large number of students who claim to practice cyber-plagiarism are documented. For example, almost 61.1% of students acknowledged having copied and pasted fragments of the Internet and, without citing them, having included them in an academic assignment presented as original (Sureda & Comas, 2008). As Comas et al. (2011) state, these data are in line with those obtained in studies carried out in other countries (Agnes, 2008; Bilić-Zulle, Frković, Turk, Ažman, & Petrovečki, 2005; Blanch-Mur et al., 2006; Chapman & Lupton, 2004; McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2006; Teixeira & Rocha, 2006; Underwood & Szabo, 2003), in which students also admit such behaviour in similar percentages.

As mentioned above, the studies that have been carried out, in addition to quantitatively documenting the percentage of plagiarism committed, have dealt with the types of plagiarism. Different classifications have been suggested for the typology of what can be considered plagiarism, ranging from the most descriptive and intentional to the most exhaustive. Among the former are those raised by Bugeja (2001) and Park (2003), which distinguish *intentional plagiarism*, in which the ideas and texts of others are presented directly as their own, and *unintentional plagiarism*, in which quotations and paraphrases are made incorrectly or when sources are simply not cited because one does not know how to do it.

As for the third group of research, those dealing with the reasons behind academic dishonesty, studies document that plagiarism is a pluricausal phenomenon, ranging from lack of punishment (some studies report that students believe that teachers do not read texts, for example) to pressure to achieve good academic results (Comas & Sureda, 2007; Eccles, Arnold, Rubin, Lambarey, & Belle, 2006; Ma, Wan, & Lu, 2008; Thompson, 2006). One

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[2]See publications referenced by Sureda et al. (2009) and Barrón-Cedeño (2012)

of the recurrent motifs is, in our view, especially interesting. Devlin and Gray (2007) have documented that poor academic skills are the main factor leading students to academic dishonesty. It is also argued that there is a lack of knowledge of what plagiarism is, what it represents and what consequences it may entail (Pupovac, Bilic-Zulle, & Petrovecki, 2008).

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Objectives

The aim of this paper is to explore a selection of the data gathered as part of the project Digital competences of incoming students at the University of Lleida (CODI Project), an institutional initiative that aims to understand the competence profile in the use of ICTs of incoming undergraduates and to detect their specific training needs.

The project was articulated on the basis of specific objectives to document and analyse six aspects: 1) access to technology; 2) knowledge and use of the University's 2.0 network; 3) information management to elaborate academic tasks; 4) digital reading and writing habits; 5) ICT training and 6) attitudes towards technology, especially as a learning tool.

2.2 Instrument

In order to achieve the objectives of the research, a questionnaire was designed for data collection. It was developed using an online platform, *Typeform* and consists of 83 questions distributed in six sections, corresponding to the six blocks outlined above. Seventeen of them were formulated as open-ended and the rest were formulated as close-ended, dichotomous or polytomous with single or multiple choice.

This platform was selected due to its usability advantages in a wide range of mobile devices and for the fact that it allows for the creation of various routes based on the responses of the informants. Thus, it was possible to define sequences of progressive formulation associated with the type of response.

A pilot phase was carried out with a group of sophomores to assess the lack or excess of questions to achieve the stated objectives, their understanding of how questions are formulated and to estimate the time needed to complete the questionnaire. After this phase, the questionnaire was validated by a group of experts and later administered from February to April 2016. This was considered to be the most appropriate date since incoming students were already familiar with the university and its virtual environment.

This article analyses a section of the data collected in the third block, relating to the concept of plagiarism that the participants have, based on their answers to four questions on different scenarios involving the use of digital information sources.

2.3 Participants

The study was designed for all incoming students at the University of Lleida (UdL) using a quantitative methodology. The target universe was comprised of a total of 2,098 students distributed among the 42 degrees taught at the faculties and institutions affiliated to the

university: Faculty of Arts (FLL[3]), Faculty of Law, Economics and Tourism (FDET), Faculty of Education, Psychology and Social Work (FEPTS), Faculty of Medicine (FM), Faculty of Nursing and Physiotherapy (FIF), Polytechnic School (EPS), School of Agrifood and Forestry Science and Engineering (ETSEA), the National Institute of Physical Education of Catalonia (INEFC) and the Ostelea School of Tourism.

The questionnaire was administered to 1150 first-year students, representing 54.8% of the total population, with a margin of error of 1.9%. It was carried out in the nine UdL centres and the valid responses in all of them have been equal to or higher than 55.0%.

As for the social profile of the respondents, as expected, the majority are in a similar age range. Thus, 80% are between 17 and 20 years old and almost half (49.2%) are 18 years old. With regard to the distribution by sex, overall, 63.0% are women. This distribution varies in some faculties where degrees are either feminized or masculinized. The former is the case of FEPTS where 85.5% of respondents are women, and the latter is the case of INEFC where only 19.6% of the respondents are women.

In terms of socio-economic status, 35.6% of students are self-defined as middle class; while 26.5% consider themselves part of the lower-middle class and 23.3% as part of the lower class. Only 3.5% perceived themselves as members of the upper class. The predominant access pathway is the baccalaureate, as 76.0% of students have entered university through this avenue.

3 RESULTS

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 20 (SPSS) programme. Given the purpose of the research, a descriptive analysis was carried out. In some cases, a cluster analysis was carried out by grouping homogeneous elements differentiated among them based on the frequency distribution of the variables.

The participants were presented with the following four statements related to the concept of cyber-plagiarism and the citation of digital sources, on which they had to express their agreement or disagreement:

1. Copying and pasting from a website with no author is not plagiarism.
2. Copying and putting it in my own words is not plagiarism.
3. Copying and translating a text is not plagiarism.
4. It is not necessary to quote if you extract information from the Internet.

In all cases, the general data collected was analysed, as well as those of each faculty or school, with the aim of detecting whether there are distinct patterns according to the nature of the studies they offer.

3.1 Copy-pasting

Firstly, students were asked about the copy-paste phenomenon, specifically in the case of information found on the Internet without any explicit author. This allowed us to assess

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[3]Acronyms in Catalan are used as it is the official nomenclature

whether, as some authors have pointed out (Ferro & Martins, 2016), students tend to think that the information found on the Web is public property.

It can be observed in the following table that 60.8% of respondents say they do not agree with the statement and, therefore, consider that it is plagiarism to take fragments from Web sources. This implies that 39.2% of the students believe that they can take information directly from the Internet in order to elaborate their academic tasks (Table 1).

Table 1 Copying and pasting from a webpage with no author is not plagirism

Item	f	%
(1.1) Agree	434	39,20%
(1.2) Disagree	673	60,80%
TOTAL	1107	100,00%

This figure is slightly higher than the one reported in the analysis of the use of printed fonts. In the questionnaire, students were asked whether or not they agreed with the phrase "Plagiarism is copying directly from a book ". In that case, 69.3% of the students agreed with the statement, only 8.5 percentage points above the answer in the case of online sources. The format, then, seems to have some significance in the students' perception of copying, but does not determine it.

If we take into account the differences by faculties and schools, shown in Table 2, we can observe two groups of centres: those with responses above 60.0% and those with lower percentages. In the first case, we find FEPTS, ETSEA and FIF and in the second, INEFC, FDET, EPS and FLL. It is detected that the type of degrees studied (humanities, sciences or social sciences fields) does not influence the perception students have of plagiarism (Table 2).

Table 2 Copying and pasting from awebpage with no author is not plagirism" broken down by faculties/schools

	Agree		Disagree	
Item	f	%	f	%
(2.1) EPS	21	45,70%	25	54,30%
(2.2) ETSEA	52	33,80%	102	66,20%
(2.3) FDET	102	47,90%	111	52,10%
(2.4) FEPTS	88	30,40%	201	69,60%
(2.5) FIF	38	37,60%	63	62,40%
(2.6) FLL	41	41,00%	59	59,00%
(2.7) FM	69	44,80%	85	55,20%
(2.8) INEFC	24	48,00%	26	52,00%

Other studies in which students were asked whether they copy-pasted from digital have produced data similar to those analysed here. Sureda and Comas (2008), in the survey carried out through the Universia website, found that 63.2% of students carried out this practice. Superior is the statistic documented by Beléndez et al. (2011), where almost 90% of the students at the University of Alicante surveyed claimed to have copied from websites.

Similar figures are collected by Ronda-Pérez et al. (2016), at the University of Alicante. In their study, 99.3% of students recognise the following statement as plagiarism: It is plagiarism when a student copies and pastes information obtained from the Internet into a subject paper, or into a final degree/master dissertation, without referencing the source.

3.2 Paraphrasing

The second scenario suggested was paraphrasing and here it is observed that the treatment given to the information determines the concept of plagiarism. Students were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the phrase: "Copying and putting it in my own words is not plagiarism".

As indicated in Table 3, 69.30% of students agree with the statement. That is to say, paraphrasing information extracted from digital sources is not viewed as plagiarism since they are using their own words, although it entails copying someone else's ideas (Table 3).

Table 3 Paraphrasing without citing the author is not plagiarism

Item	f	%
(3.1) Agree	769	69,30%
(3.2) Disagree	340	30,70%
TOTAL	1109	100,00%

This figure is very similar to that collected by Ronda-Pérez et al. (2016), where 69.3% of those surveyed consider that paraphrasing without citing the author is not plagiarism.

Analysing data by faculties and schools, we observe, once again, two groups of centres: those that are at a level of disagreement greater than 40.0%, which are INEFC, EPS, and those that agree least FEPTS, FDET and ETSEA (Table 4).

Table 4 Paraphrasing without citing the author is not plagiarism" broken down by faculties/schools

Item	Agree		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%
(2.1) EPS	25	53,20%	22	46,80%
(2.2) ETSEA	109	70,80%	45	29,20%
(2.3) FDET	156	72,90%	58	27,10%
(2.4) FEPTS	221	76,70%	67	23,30%
(2.5) FIF	64	62,70%	38	37,30%
(2.6) FLL	66	66,00%	34	34,00%
(2.7) FM	99	63,90%	56	36,10%
(2.8) INEFC	26	53,10%	23	23,00%

3.3 Translating

Thirdly, data was gathered which documented students' perceptions when translating a source of information. As can be seen in the following table, the majority (82.1%) of students consider that translating a text and using it as their own is plagiarism (Table 5).

Table 5 Translation is not plagiarism

Item	f	%
(3.1) Agree	203	17,90%
(3.2) Disagree	928	82,10%
TOTAL	1131	100,00%

When examining the differences between faculties, only one of them, FDET is below the 80.0% threshold. FIF stands out, with 91.2%, followed by ETSEA and FEPTS (Table 6).

Table 6 Translation is not plagiarism" broken down by faculties/schools

Item	Agree		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%
(2.1) EPS	8	17,00%	39	83,00%
(2.2) ETSEA	21	13,60%	133	86,40%
(2.3) FDET	57	26,90%	155	73,10%
(2.4) FEPTS	40	14,00%	246	86,00%
(2.5) FIF	9	8,80%	93	91,20%
(2.6) FLL	13	16,00%	84	84,00%
(2.7) FM	60	19,60%	123	80,40%
(2.8) INEFC	18	36,00%	32	64,00%

These figures are in line with those collected in other studies, such as that of Ronda-Pérez et al. (2016), in which it was detected that translation was recognised as plagiarism in all cases.

3.4 Quoting

With regard to the use of quotations, 86.4% of students say that it is necessary to cite the author if the information is taken from the Internet (Table 7).

Table 7 Quotation is not necessary if the information comes from Internet

Item	f	%
(3.1) Agree	151	13,60%
(3.2) Disagree	959	86,40%
TOTAL	1110	100,00%

This figure is similar to that reported by Comas-Forgas (2009). In their case, 19.5% admit that they never cite online sources, which consistent with our study that 13.6% of students who in our study state that it is not necessary to quote when using information taken from the Net.

Research carried out by Egaña (2012) runs in the same direction and states that a third of students (an average of 1.86 out of 3, state that they cite) admit that they do not cite the authors of the information used, a figure that is higher, according to the opinion of their teachers (an average of 1.05 believes that their students cite). In the discussion groups of the same study, the students admit that, in fact, they do not usually make bibliographical citations when they use other author's information. Thus, in the group of first-year students, the researcher documents that the students specify that they only make bibliographic citations when strictly necessary, that is, when the professor expressly demands it (Egaña, 2012). In this same study, Egaña (2012), mentions that students say they would know how to cite if they need to. However, when suggesting the interpretation of a bibliographical reference, the author states that more than half of the students were not able to interpret a bibliographical reference adequately.

The analysis of the different faculties and schools shows three of them in the upper part, with more than 90.0% (FEPTS, FIF and FLL), and two in the lower part, with less than 75.0% (FDET and INEFC). There is also no pattern by type of studies, but we do believe that a pattern of behaviour by faculties can be observed, as seen below(Table 8).

Table 8 Quotation is not necessary if the information comes from Internet" broken down by faculties/schools

	Agree		Disagree	
Item	f	%	f	%
(2.1) EPS	11	24,30%	36	76,60%
(2.2) ETSEA	22	14,30%	132	85,70%
(2.3) FDET	56	26,00%	159	74,00%
(2.4) FEPTS	14	4,90%	274	95,10%
(2.5) FIF	5	4,90%	97	95,10%
(2.6) FLL	9	9,00%	91	91,00%
(2.7) FM	22	14,30%	132	85,70%
(2.8) INEFC	13	26,00%	37	74,00%
	152		958	

When examining the different faculties, it can be observed that there are two groups: a) those that present high plagiarism recognition figures (FIF and FEPTS), and b) those that present lower figures of plagiarism recognition (FDET and INEFC). When approached, those responsible for training in the centres of the first group informed us that specific training actions have been carried out in this respect. It is noteworthy that such training is offered within a subject or several subjects of the degree, linked to specific tasks, and not as complementary training to the degree. We argue that this may be one of the keys, since knowledge is not developed in an abstract setting as sometimes happens in the courses offered by the

university's library and documentation services. For instance, FIF incorporates aspects of the use of academic information in various first-year subjects and FEPTS does so in the second year. Sureda et al. (2009) point out that one of the intra-system factors that cause plagiarism is the scarce documenting skills on the part of university students, in terms of locating, managing and citing resources. In this regard, Cebrián-Robles, Raposo-Rivas, de-la Serna, and Sarmiento-Campos (2018) indicate that the internal motives used by students to justify plagiarism are ignorance, incomprehension and lack of practice in writing extensive works. Ochoa and Cueva (2016) also document that students maintain that plagiarism decreases as guidance is provided by teachers and there is specific training.

4 CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent that plagiarism is a growing concern in higher education (Egaña, 2012; Wilkinson, 2009). The results of this study, which coincide with those obtained in similar contexts, stress the importance of taking into due consideration the scenario in which academic production has had to develop since the introduction of technology, given that, as stated by Torres-Diaz, Duart, and Hinojosa-Becerra (2018), the Internet has opened up new solutions to tackle academic tasks.

Regarding the concept of plagiarism, it can be observed that 39.2% of students do not identify copy and paste as plagiarism. As for paraphrasing, 68.3% believe that it is not plagiarism. Conversely, 82.1% consider the practice of translating as plagiarism. Therefore, it is evident that the concept of plagiarism is limited to the appropriation of the text and that the treatment given to it determines the concept of plagiarism, that is, if it is copied or translated, plagiarism does exist, but if it is paraphrased, it is not. Hence, there is no awareness that plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, regardless of whether or not an exact text is used for its articulation.

With respect to the need to cite the resources taken from the Web, the majority (86.4%) of students consider that the sources should be cited. We note, however, very significant differences between centres, since in two of them (FEPTS and FIF) practically all students (95.1%) recognize the need for citing. These centres are also the ones that record the highest figures in terms of recognizing plagiarism practices.

As previously indicated, the causes of plagiarism are numerous and must be addressed on multiple fronts as well as at all educational levels, not only in higher education. One of the main reasons behind academic dishonesty is the students' lack of skills in locating, managing and citing digital resources. Therefore, providing specific training should minimize the tendency to plagiarize (Cebrián-Robles et al., 2018). This training must cater for the multi-literacy that, as Torres and Juárez (2014) state: "includes a convergence of closely linked literacies, that is, digital and technological literacy, reading literacy, information literacy and social media literacy, all without forgetting ethical responsibility and social commitment (p.6)".

As Cebrián-Robles et al. (2018) state, in order to tackle the problem from different facets, increasingly more proposals adopt a holistic vision, which is not focused on sanctions. Tak-

ing into consideration a formative perspective on academic integrity Eaton, Guglielmin, and Otoo (2017) suggest three courses of action: a) carry out conversations on plagiarism, b) teach students the skills to quote and reference, and c) create opportunities for feedback as part of the learning process. Thus, there is no doubt for the need to introduce training and monitoring measures, where both reflexive dialogue between teachers and students and self-reflection exercises predominate (Dalal, 2015). In our view, these measures should be circumscribed to a specific subject or subjects in the curricula of the degrees being studied and be rooted in one or more academic tasks, as in this way there will be situated learning, since the students will acquire the knowledge through developing tasks in the classroom.

Universities cannot deny their responsibility in developing the academic digital literacy of their students and enabling them to fully acquire, experiment and use digital technologies with academic integrity (Bretag, 2016). Therefore, it is essential that training programmes be designed so that students can take advantage of the possibilities offered by digital tools to access and manage different sources.

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