

# Internet Plagiarism in PhD Papers

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**Abstract** - The Internet has recently been accused as a potential tool for plagiarism in the research community. This paper investigated plagiarism in thirty PhD students' work. Research instruments were a test on participants' knowledge and attitudes on this issue, essays written by the participants and an interview. The findings showed that the participants were unclear on how to cite outside sources in their writing, nor did they understand the role of the Internet in writing. Moreover, more than half of the participants had positive attitudes on plagiarism. The findings revealed that the participants were not capable at avoiding plagiarism in their work. Also the limitation in English language was found one of the main reasons spreading the 'copy and paste' culture among them. Even though the knowledge on plagiarism was high in most participants, only a few of these participants made significant improvement in their work. The author proposes that the institutions should develop a systematic plan to deal with the issue. In addition, plagiarism could be decreased as a result of fostering ethic in academic rather than relying on detecting software.

**Keywords** - Internet, PhD, Plagiarism, Turnitin, Ethics

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the academic community, papers and theses produced by a PhD Student both during and after graduation are highly expected to be original, best in terms of scientific practices, critically analyzed and ethical. The work must be able to draw insights into the methodologies employed and sustain the

highest ethical standards both in general and in the field. It is necessary to demonstrate how the research is independently formulate hypotheses, design data interpretation. Further, the PhD work should present the results interpreted by the degree holder with best and most unique understanding of the comprehensive significance of his research findings.

Plagiarism has been an urgent issue that disvalues PhD works. The issue refers to a serious scientific misconduct resulting in the maximum penalties.

## II. ACADEMIC PLAGIRISM

According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center which is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world, the growth and advance of the Internet has increased the rate of plagiarism over the past 10 years. Among those were college students who have seen an increase in plagiarism [1], with 89% of them blaming computers and the internet as playing a major role in plagiarism. In fact, the problem is less critical to compare with postgrad work, which needs to be free from plagiarism. While the honesty, ethics and originality are of concern for them, 25 percent of graduates admitted of having this offense within the past year. Moreover, 80% of professors reported they had detected this sort of plagiarism in their students' papers. Under these circumstances, the Internet has recently been mentioned as a potential tool for plagiarism in the education community. This paper investigated plagiarism in thirty PhD students' work. Research instruments were a test on participants'

knowledge and attitudes on this issue, an essay rubric and an interview.

### III. DEFINING PLAGIARISM

Defining the terms ‘plagiarism’ could make different results. In this paper, the study adopted the 10 types of plagiarism categorized by Turnitin as a model. 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.

#### A. Types of Plagiarism

As there are different types and degrees of plagiarism, the author studied and adopted the model produced by turnitin [2], which is a leading software in detecting plagiarism. The following figure (Fig. 1) defines the 10 types of Turnitin’s “Plagiarism Spectrum”.

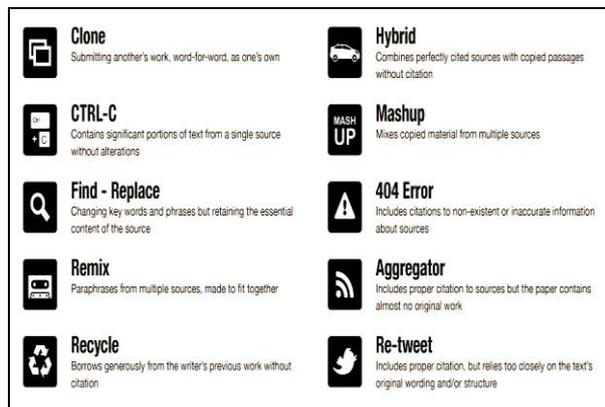


Fig 1. “Plagiarism Spectrum”

According to the illustration (Fig. 1), submitting another’s work as one’s own or the ‘Clone’ was found as the highest frequency in Turnitin survey. It is the most problematic due to the least ethical awareness in writing it presents. In addition, mixing copied texts from several sources, the ‘Hybrid’ was the least frequent. ‘Re-Tweet’ and ‘Remix’ were the least problematic. Perhaps the authors’ main problem was that they had poor paraphrasing skills. On a different aspect, plagiarism could be divided into the intention of using the

outside sources of the writers. Thus plagiarism could be considered in two ways:

1. Unintentional plagiarism-poor paraphrasing, poor summarizing, poor quoting, poor citation, and poor language skills may contain plagiarism, however with no intention.

2. Intentional plagiarism the writers are fully aware that the actions are plagiarism (e.g., buying essays, direct copying from outside sources), however they proceed. Intentional plagiarism may be explained by understanding reasons for it [3].

In addition, The University of Oklahoma [4] defines plagiarism into three common kinds according to the methods being used by the authors.

1. Whole-paper plagiarism the writer copies the whole assignment from outside sources and directly submit it as his own work.

2. Cut-and-paste plagiarism-the writer takes some parts of a paper from outside sources and merge it them into his paper with improper citations.

3. Cut-and-paste plagiarism with references-the writer copies some parts of writing from another source. Even though the references are written up, the section pasted may not be properly paraphrased, summarized, quoted or interpreted by the writer.

#### B. Understanding Reasons for Plagiarism

Due to the fact that plagiarism is both illegal and immoral, educators have investigated reasons that lead to plagiarism in academic writing. The following lists of related findings and studies present the causes for this academic deceit found by several researchers. Reasons may vary from personal to academic.

- Lack of a true understanding of referencing requirements
- Misunderstanding the concept of plagiarism
- Misunderstanding and ignorance about why and how they should avoid plagiarism

- Lack of understanding and ignorance about why and how they should avoid plagiarism [5-8]
- Denial or neutralization of plagiarism-related behavior [5]
- Easy access to information via the Internet [5, 9]
- Weak punishment [5, 10], [7], [11]
- Lack of knowledge on citation and referencing conventions [12]
- Lack of academic skills (such as critical analysis, paraphrasing) [7]

By probing for the true intentions in committing plagiarism, it could help reduce the negative effects on the students' emotional status. In fact, students may need to be trained and to see more examples in order to avoid making ones. In addition, it is helpful, to look into the reasons for plagiarism below, collected from several works.

- Laziness and sneakiness [13, 14]
- Academic workload requirements [15]
- Lack of clarity by university authorities of plagiarism [7, 16]
- Time management [7]
- Misunderstanding [7, 8, 14]
- Social norms
- Lack of true value towards assignments [7, 10, 11, 14]
- Difficulties in overcoming language and content problems [17, 18]
- cultural background of the students [19, 20]

In fact, these reasons only arise when one is caught of plagiarism while in reality there are a large number of students who are not yet caught. Furthermore, Plagiarism is not considered critical in some culture. In Asian institutions, for example, it is complicated to openly say that ones have made plagiarism since plagiarism knowledge may not yet be embedded in the classrooms in general. The issue has created worries and led to a low confidence in writing among doctoral students because their work must be submitted for publication.

## IV. RESEARCH METHODS

### A. Participants

Participants for the current analysis were thirty doctoral students in five faculties in both sciences and humanities and social sciences. The participants were taking Intensive English for Doctoral Students Course (forty-five hours) at the Language Department, Khon Kaen University Thailand in 2015.

### B. Research Instruments

1. Semi-structured interviews the questions focused on students' understandings of plagiarism. The interview took approximately a half-30 minutes on norms and related topics. A series of questions in the interviews asked students on their perceptions, knowledge, current practices and supports they needed on avoiding plagiarism.

2. Essay writing- participants were asked to cite the six sources provided in their writing.

3. Test on avoiding plagiarism (summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting).

A test on common and specific knowledge regarding plagiarism was administered to them. After the training, participants were asked to write an essay using six outside sources. The sources were about 1-2 lines long. Participants were then interviewed about perceptions on plagiarism.

### C. Data Analysis

The data were in three forms: audio script, essay rubric and test results. The audio scripts were coded to set up themes relating to norms and related topics in plagiarism. The essay rubric mainly aimed at detecting types and level of plagiarism. The test was ranged to find the abilities in using the three strategies (summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting) in avoiding plagiarism.

## V. FINDINGS AND DISFUSSION

The findings were drawn from three data sources: essays, and tests on knowledge on plagiarism, and an interview on perceptions on plagiarism.

**A. An Analysis of Essays**

The finding revealed that quoting was the most frequent use technique when students were not certain or confident in paraphrasing

the outside sources in their essay. In the following sample, the participant used quoting technique repeatedly (See Fig. 2 - Fig. 4).

Studying in Ph.D. level is important for university teachers because it gives the stability for their career and their.' The number of foreigners on student visas in U.S. colleges and universities grew dramatically from 110,000 in 2001 to 524,000 in 2012 (Source 1.) and "International experience exposes Ph.D. students to new pedagogical strategies and educational infrastructures" (Source 2). At present, to be a university teacher, the person has to have an educational

**Fig 2. Quoting Technique Sample 1**

"Asian students are killing class discussion" (Source 3). So the motivation is one of the factors which urges the students to have patience, to work hard to solve all obstacles and problem, and reach the goals successfully. The motivation is derived from the good study environment, the willingness to study, the efficiency of technology for searching information and the belief which encourages students to finish their study.

**Fig 3. Quoting Technique Sample 2**

The First "Asian students are killing class discussion. they never contribute." one student told me of how all the students not from China agreed not to speak one day to see what would happen. There was no class discussion and the teacher asked them not do it again. (Source 3) The second I agree with the reasons

**Fig 4. Quoting Technique Sample 3**

In fact, only a few participants were able to use paraphrased information in his/her writing properly (Fig. 3).

students study abroad due to many reasons such as to expose them to new pedagogical strategies (source 2) or to build networks of global relationship (source 4), there are better reasons make you a decision to do PhD in home country.

Fig 5. Paraphrasing Technique

Moreover, some participants referred to citations that did not exist or were inaccurate (See Fig. 4).

which the advantage in Thai is more than for Thai people because when lived outside looked stretches form local people. like (source ?)

Fig 6. Inaccurate Citation Sample

Several of these samples were found written with summarizing technique (See Fig. 5 - Fig. 6.).

Is a Ph.D. From Harvard and different than one from Fresno tech? No - you are both called doctor, what matters is who you did your work under, not the name on your degree (source 6). Items that will define it concept or

Fig 7. Summarizing Technique Sample 1

Season, students need to have time to study, to analyze and discussion opinions with the feel and knowledgeable persons. Time is prominence for students to be able to understand the content and their studies. (Source 2)

Fig 8. Summarizing Technique Sample 2

### B. Knowledge and Perception on Plagiarism

According to the interview focusing on the participants' knowledge and perceptions towards plagiarism, the most frequent used technique in citing was quoting. Most of the participants were able to identify and use quoting in their writing. In addition, summarizing technique was at the second place in using and identifying plagiarism. However, participants had some difficulties in using paraphrasing technique. They used and were able to identify this technique in writing less than other techniques with only above a half (53%) of participants are able to detect plagiarism in writing (See Fig. 9).

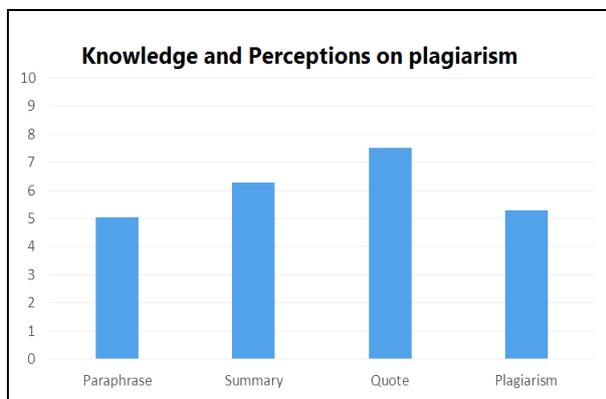


Fig 9. Knowledge and Perceptions on Plagiarism

The interviews revealed that most of the participants (85%) were so worried about their English language limitation that they feared their paper would be weak and unattractive or less academic. They also feared of not having a writing assignment to submit when the submission dates approached. This group of participants finally chose to copy and paste from outside sources.

Other (15%) were students who had problems in time management and some personal problems. They confessed that their first attempt was to complete the assignment by themselves. However, they changed their mind and use the information just from any sources when time was short and that they had not yet written anything.

## VI. CONCLUSION

PhD papers and theses are recognized a master piece of work produced by the PhD student with several years of study and with supports from the university. They are therefore required to demonstrate complexity and quality. Plagiarism is considered a failure to comply with these requirements and may result in serious harms in the community (e. g., faking drug research). PhD students are critically required to avoid plagiarism in their work. In addition, this issue should be taught to students when they are young and as soon as they begin to write papers.

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(Arranged in the order of citation in the same fashion as the case of Footnotes.)

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