

BEHAVIORS AND PERCEPTION ABOUT ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM IN STUDENTS OF FOUR UNIVERSITIES IN THE CITY OF AREQUIPA, PERU

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study aims to describe the behaviors and perceptions of academic plagiarism in university students. Plagiarism is considered one of the most frequent or common ethical problems in the academic community. Under these circumstances, the present study seeks to describe the behaviors and perceptions of academic plagiarism in students from four universities located in the city of Arequipa (Peru).

Methodology: For this, a quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional study was carried out. A structured questionnaire was applied to 1405 students from four universities in Arequipa, enrolled in the first term of the year 2019.

Main Findings: The results suggest that the students admit to having committed some of the acts in which plagiarism is recognized in the questionnaire. On the other hand, as to whether the students manage to perceive certain acts as plagiarism, the results indicate that they do so although in a medium degree (“It is almost plagiarism”).

Applications of this study: The present study is conducted in university students' academic production, where the students can be exposed and benefitted the importance of academic plagiarism in their works while producing the works.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The existing study will assist the university students to correlate more effectively. It is reported that there are marked trends that indicate that the students of the four universities admit to having carried out behaviors amounting to plagiarism; while the acts perceived as plagiarism are related to the management and registration of documentary sources.

Keywords: *Plagiarism, Behaviors, Perceptions, University, Information Technologies, Academic Success, Bibliography, Management and Registration.*

INTRODUCTION

Dishonest behavior in the performance of academic work is not a recent issue. However, the arrival of the internet has increased in recent years the cases of fraud at various levels of academic life (Park, 2003; Szabo and Underwood, 2004). While the development of the knowledge society and new information technologies have allowed the ways of learning by using digital resources, it has also allowed the intellectual property to be violated and as a result, plagiarism cases are on the rise.

Plagiarism is a type of academic fraud that manifests itself by its form (self-plagiarism, false authorship, submission to two editors at a time, material theft, unauthorized copies without source code) and method (copy and paste, inappropriate paraphrase, lost reference, missing reference, data fabrication and theft of ideas) (Soto, 2012). There are cases, however, in which this cheating practice is done unintentionally, for example, when a reference or citation is accidentally omitted or when the source data was incorrectly written. On the other hand, those who commit intentional plagiarism do so in a premeditated way and hide it so as not to be exposed. Its objective is clear: it deliberately seeks to deceive a reader through the appropriation of ideas or works of others.

Regarding the background, the research focused on the causes of this phenomenon among students stands out. In this line, the studies by Lidell and Fong (2008) and Stephens, Young and Calabrese (2006) —focused on quantifying the incidence of plagiarism in the classrooms of North American universities— are significant, and so are the studies on Spanish universities by Agud (2014), Comas, Sureda and Oliver (2011), Desfiandi, A et al., (2019) and Egaña (2012). In this line of research, we can also mention studies on the beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge of students about plagiarism in universities (Bokosmaty et al., 2017).

Plagiarism is considered one of the most frequent or common ethical problems in the academic community. Among the students, these practices have their origin in the need to pass the examinations and obtain good grades. Academic success is about not only the effort involved in acquiring knowledge but also overcoming obstacles without the least effort (Rajest, S. S., Suresh, D. (2018). In countries like Mexico, Peru, Spain, and Colombia, plagiarism is considered a crime and its classification are within its criminal codes. Despite this, cases of plagiarism have not diminished since it's considered as a normal activity and even consented within the university (Herianto, E. (2017); Ramos et al., 2019).

Reading and writing is a common activity in the university. Dialogue with written texts is a necessary practice when beginning to develop specialized works. This interaction between author and reader requires the command of certain conventions that are not always understood and assumed by the student. Learning them usually takes a long time,

although this elapsed time does not guarantee that they will succeed. In this situation, the students resort to practices that, in their view, are supposed to immediately overcome the difficulties of academic life. These practices considered “effective” sometimes imply the transgression of certain norms, which is the reason why they are called “dishonest practices” (Cebrián-Robles et al., 2016). Under these circumstances, the present study seeks to describe the behaviors and perceptions of academic plagiarism in students from four universities located in the city of Arequipa (Peru).

MATERIALS AND METHOD

A quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional study was conducted to evaluate behavior and perception of academic plagiarism among students from four universities in the city of Arequipa, Peru. The unit of analysis and observation was the student, who was administered a structured questionnaire that included 10 questions. This questionnaire was based on a structured scale by Schlosser (2014) based on the questionnaires by Scanlon and Neuman (2002) and Razera (2011). The sample considered for the research was 1405 students enrolled in the first term of the year 2019. The universities in which the study was conducted were National University of San Agustín de Arequipa (UNSA), La Salle University (USalle), Continental University (UC) and University of San Martín de Porres (USMP), the latter two being local branches of universities head-quartered in Huancayo and Lima, respectively.

The sample size was calculated according to the parameter estimation, accepting a 95% confidence level, an error of 5% and an expected proportion of 0.5. The selection of the sample was carried out through an intentional sampling using as a sampling frame the lists of students enrolled in each university, provided by the admission offices (Suman Rajest S, Dr. P. Suresh (2018).

The variables considered in the questionnaire were: (a) student affiliation data, (b) objective questions about academic plagiarism behaviors, and (c) objective questions about how they perceive plagiarism. The data collection work was carried out by four (4) researchers, one in each of the four campuses who were previously trained in the use and administration of the instrument. During the application, the interviewees only answered questions related to the type and form of the questionnaire; the interviewers neither gave opinions nor suggested answers so as not to skew the results.

Microsoft Excel v software, 2016, was used to record data and then processed with the help of the SPSS v 25.0 statistical package, obtaining frequency tables and distribution graphs for the analysis of each variable (Dr. P. Suresh and Suman Rajest S (2019). The comparison of perception between different universities was carried out through the Chi-square test of homogeneity. A significance level of 0.05 was accepted to refute a null hypothesis.

RESULTS

1405 regular students whose average ages fluctuate between 18 and 19 years were surveyed. 18 years is the average age in the USalle and UNSA and 19 years in the Continental and USMP universities. Gender is predominantly male in the USalle and UC, and female in the USMP and UNSA universities. These results reflect the time that elapsed between his graduation from school (which, in general, for the Peruvian case, is between 16 and 17 years old) and his admission to the university. This time allows us to infer that during the first term of university studies, behaviors learned at school are repeated (see table 1).

Table 1: Ages and gender of students surveyed by the university

	Age				Gender			
	USalle	UC	UNSA	USMP	USalle	UC	UNSA	USMP
N	210	310	499	352	210	340	501	353
Mean	18,41	18,85	18,23	18,53	2	2	1	1
Standard deviation	2,07	3,15	2,26	2,91	,46	,50	,49	,50
Minimum	15	16	15	16	1	1	1	1
Maximum	25	49	39	33	2	2	2	2

Nota: 1: Female. 2: Male

Regarding whether the students recognize having committed acts related to plagiarism during their academic activities, it's observed that the responses have a marked tendency to Option 3 (“Sometimes”) in the four universities evaluated. It should be noted that the students in the first question (“Have I provided my class notes or notes to a classmate to copy?”) and in the fourth one (“Have I copied information directly from the web without recognizing the author?”) present greater regularity in their responses, which means that they are recurring acts by students (see Table 2).

Table 2: Behaviors towards academic plagiarism

	I have given my class notes or notes to a classmate to copy				I have used a classmate's notes or class notes to complete my work				I have copied work information from a partner				I have copied information directly from the web without acknowledging the author			
	Universidad				Universidad				Universidad				Universidad			
	SALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP	SALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP	SALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP	SALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP
N	196	332	501	353	196	332	501	353	196	331	498	353	196	332	501	353
Mean	3,00	2,92	2,92	2,84	3,14	3,16	3,05	3,15	3,48	3,36	3,26	3,40	2,95	2,93	2,82	2,74
Standard deviation	,797	,737	,654	,720	,765	,680	,647	,640	,761	,687	,662	,624	,815	,818	,732	,747
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Nota: 1: Always. 2. Many times. 3. Sometimes. 4. Never

Regarding whether the students of the four universities analyzed are able to recognize if the acts under study are considered plagiarism, the tendency of the answers leads to option 3, that is, they partially recognize the fraud (“It’s almost plagiarism”), compared to option 4, which is a response with a high degree of security (“Certainly it’s plagiarism”), which did not have any presence in the universities analyzed. The answers to the questions “If the source of information is mentioned in the literal quotations and this quotation is not placed in quotation marks” and “When only the bibliography is placed at the end of the work” (both related to citation processes of referencing from sources), in which the tendency to Option 3 is not very high. This result evidences ignorance about the aspects of the method in the management and registration of sources (see Table 3).

Table 3: Actions in which students perceive plagiarism

	If the source of information is mentioned in the literal quotations and this quotation is not placed in quotation marks				When writing using and / or changing some ideas from a written source and the source of the information is not recognized				When only the bibliography is placed at the end of the work				When literally cited and the source of information is not indicated				When Internet sources are used and not cited			
	Universidad				Universidad				Universidad				Universidad				Universidad			
	USALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP	USALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP	USALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP	USALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP	USALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP
N	188	327	497	353	188	328	493	351	187	325	495	348	187	327	497	349	189	328	497	353
Mean	2,51	2,63	2,77	2,63	3,14	2,70	3,03	2,86	2,30	2,04	2,07	2,11	3,20	2,70	3,05	2,92	3,32	2,88	3,17	3,12
Standard deviation	1,10	1,01	1,04	1,10	,91	,92	,87	,90	,99	,91	,96	,94	,83	1,0	,96	,99	,83	1,0	,92	1,03
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Nota: 1: Certainly it’s not plagiarism; 2: It’s almost not plagiarism; 3: It’s almost plagiarism; 4: Certainly it’s plagiarism.

Finally, Table 4 shows that with respect to plagiarism behaviors universities maintain level 3 as predominant (“Sometimes”), the USalle having the highest value (3.14), followed by the Continental University (3, 09), USMP (3.03) and UNSA (3.01). Regarding the perception of plagiarism, the tendency is towards level 3 (“It’s almost plagiarism”), with the highest value being the USalle (2.89), followed by the UNSA (2.82), the USMP (2.73) and the Continental University (2.60). These results show that students recognize certain acts as plagiarism and admit to having sometimes carried out activities related to behaviors in which cases of plagiarism can be recognized.

Table 4: Plagiarism behaviors and perception of plagiarism in the four universities analyzed

	Plagiarism Behaviors				Perception of plagiarism			
	University				University			
	SALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP	SALLE	UC	UNSA	USMP
N	196	332	501	353	189	328	498	353
Mean	3,14	3,09	3,01	3,03	2,89	2,60	2,82	2,73
Standard deviation	,608	,481	,461	,462	,547	,574	,533	,584
Minimum	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
Maximum	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

DISCUSSION

Plagiarism is a problem that in recent years has put politicians, artists, and academics in the eye of the storm. Its practice violates intellectual property rights and the most basic ethical copying it or trying to disguise the copy through alterations, will be punished with up to 8 years in prison (Law 28289, 2004). Regarding the age of the respondents, the present investigation found that this fluctuates between 18 and 19 years. 18 years is the average age at USalle and UNSA universities and 19 at UC and USMP. Age is a factor to take into account since it allows establishing the relationship between secondary school and university in aspects such as learning styles and behaviors (in Peru, the average age of a student who graduates from high school is 16 years). This period allows us to infer that the students who enter university still maintain, at least in the first terms, behaviors learned in the school.

With regard to behaviors about academic plagiarism, the results show that students admit to having performed some of the actions considered in the survey as plagiarism, however, they do not know all the ways in which it can be presented. This result coincides with those of [Castro et al. \(2018\)](#); [Espinoza, G. A. P et al. \(2017\)](#), [Soni, S et al. \(2017\)](#) who determined that 53.3% of students surveyed in dentistry know what this phenomenon is. Likewise, the act of copying information directly from the web without properly citing the source is recognized as a recurring activity among the students surveyed in this study, a result that coincides with what was found by [Molina et al., 2011](#) who determined that more than 50% of Chilean secondary school students and 40% of higher education admitted having taken information from the internet without citing the source. Other results that confirm this problem are those of [Sureda et al., 2009](#) who conducted a survey at a Mexican university with students 15 years and older, which showed that more than 44% of students had committed “cyberplagiarism” (information taken from the internet without citing), while 30% admitted having “copied and pasted” internet information in their academic work. They also highlight the results found by [Diez-Martínez \(2015\)](#); [Singh, S. \(2016\)](#) in which the percentage of students who claim to have copied the work of one of their classmates and the web is close to 50%. The results highlight practices of copying and allowing to copy, behaviors that are closely linked to academic dishonesty. These results indicate that the internet is the main source of academic documentation among university students ([Sureda & Comas, 2006](#)).

Regarding how students perceive plagiarism, the responses are oriented to a medium level of security, that is, the students recognize that plagiarism is being committed (Option 3 “It’s almost plagiarism”) although they do not completely assure it (option 4 “Certainly it’s plagiarism”). The answers to the questions “If in the literal quotations the source of information is mentioned and this quotation is not placed in quotes” and “When only the bibliography is placed at the end of the work”, which keep a slight tendency to attract attention Option 2 (“It’s almost not plagiarism”), however, there is a high probability that students know how to recognize when they are faced with a dishonest act, as evidenced by the studies of [Sharma \(2007\)](#) who showed that 97% of students were aware that plagiarism in academic work was an illegal practice. However, other studies such as those by [Pant, I et al., \(2016\)](#) and [Ramos et al., \(2019\)](#) show that students have the belief that practices such as copying some sentences from a book without quoting, copying and pasting from a classmate’s work or from the internet were not a serious academic violation, but rather a normal practice and, up to a point, allowed. ([Haldorai, A. Ramu, et al., 2019](#)) On the other hand, the results of this variable show ignorance about the aspects of the method in the management and registration of sources. About. This result is close to the mechanistic conception of a citation, given that in many cases students often perceive this process as repetitive without much input ([Angulo, 2013](#)).

CONCLUSION

Finally, it’s observed that, with respect to plagiarism behaviors, universities maintain level 3 as predominant (“Sometimes”). This result coincides with the findings of [Mejía and Ordóñez \(2004\)](#) and [Szabo and Underwood \(2004\)](#), who reported that 94% of the students in their survey admitted having made at least one fraud in the university and that more than half of the university students admitted having copied from the internet in their subjects, respectively. As for the perception of plagiarism, the tendency is towards level 3 (“It’s almost plagiarism”). These results show that students recognize certain acts as plagiarism and admit that they have sometimes carried out actions related to behaviors in which cases of plagiarism can be recognized, which would suggest that by recognizing these acts the probability that they will

be committed would below. However, studies such as those of [Sharma \(2007\)](#) confirm that, although students recognize these acts as dishonest, they commit it because they know that teachers will not notice. Similarly, [Babalola \(2012\)](#) and [Wijaya, N. \(2016\)](#) determined that there is a significant relationship between the level of knowledge and the incidence of academic plagiarism, which shows that the fact that students know and are able to identify an instance of plagiarism being committed does not prevent them from doing it. However, from the answers, it can be deduced that this supposed “normality” is justified by various factors such as fear of failure, the pressure to pass the subjects (Medina and Verdejo, 2016), by the academic load ([Mejía and Ordonez, 2004](#); [K. Mythili et al., 2013](#); [Muhney et al., 2014](#)), laziness ([Batane, 2010](#)) and ignorance ([Molina et al., 2011](#); [Babalola, 2012](#)).

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY AND FINDINGS

Given these findings, it's important that educational institutions foster the culture of academic honesty as well as include activities about the implications of violating copyright and source authorship. In that sense, it would be important to follow the line of the research proposed in the present study in order to determine if there are differences between behaviors and perception of plagiarism among senior students in order to have a complete picture of this phenomenon. It's important that teachers have the ability to recognize fraud at the academic level, not to punish it but to prevent it.

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