

5<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Educational Sciences - WCES 2013

## Plagiarism in Portugal – secondary education teachers’ perceptions

Paulo C. Dias \*, Ana Sofia Bastos

*Philosophy Faculty of Catholic University of Portugal, Praça da Faculdade,1, 4710 - 297 Braga, Portugal*

---

### Abstract

Plagiarism is growing among students due to Internet easy access. This has generated several challenges to educational systems and teachers. This study aims to explore teachers’ perceptions on plagiarism and present results from a sample of 67 Portuguese secondary education teachers. Results show that teachers attribute plagiarism to the easy access to Internet contents, students’ lack of critical approach to analyze information, students’ laziness and students’ poor time management skills. The most common behaviors are copying amounts of text from books and Internet without referencing. The heaviest penalties are applied to collusion and text copy without referencing. To prevent plagiarism teachers suggest to address students’ skills promotion, introduction of honor codes, and plagiarism detection software. Approaching plagiarism at school is urging and it is a way to avoid its occurrence.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).  
Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

*Keywords:* Plagiarism, learning approach, Portuguese teachers

---

### 1. Introduction

This study presents data collected from teachers, which allow us to understand their perceptions on plagiarism, reasons for students’ plagiarism, consequences applied as well as potential strategies to avoid plagiarism, in order to enhance effective learning and creativity.

Recent cases reported by media have amplified the growing concern on plagiarism (P. Storm & R. Storm, 2007). This phenomenon seems to be boosted by the popularization and easy access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (Cardoso, 2007; Comas-Forgas, Sureda-Negre & Salva-Mut, 2010; Monteiro & Osório, 2008).

Even if plagiarism has mainly been studied in universities, it also exists in a wider context point of view, essentially as a sequel of previous strategies (Almeida, Gama & Peixoto, 2010). So, plagiarism behavior is not confined to certain places or institutions. There are few European statistical data on that subject, but we have some American studies expressing huge percentage of plagiarism behavior among students. These results reach 60% of secondary students who admit having copied on tests or on other schoolwork/homework (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2006 cit. in P. Strom & R. Strom, 2007). This percentage may even be higher among university students (Marsden, Carroll & Neill, 2005; Teixeira & Rocha, 2010). Typically, research on plagiarism focus on students’ gender and age differences (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes & Armestead, 1996), and on individual and relational

---

\* Corresponding Author: Paulo C. Dias. Tel.: (+351) 253 208 076  
E-mail address: Paulo C. Dias. Tel.: (+351) 253 208 076

variables (Anderman, Cupp & Lane, 2010; Anderman, Griesinger & Westerfield, 1998; Comas-Forgas & Sureda-Negre, 2010; Koul, Clariana, Jitgarun & Songsriwittaya, 2009; Marden, Carrol & Neill, 2005; Nora & Zhang, 2010). However, teachers' role on plagiarism is also an important matter. As per Debora Reeeds (2011), plagiarism isn't just an issue for students, and such dishonest behavior is linked to their perception gains. So, by plagiarizing, students expect to have real gains and they feel their performance will be more positive, especially in environments with less teacher supervision, in more theoretical classes (Comas-Forgas, & Sureda-Negre, 2010), or when consequences are minor (Teixeira & Rocha, 2010). On this subject, although teachers share a general agreement on the need to consistent responses towards plagiarism, there is a great variety of consequences that are actually applied by the teacher (Robinson-Zañartu, Peña, Cook-Morales, Peña, Afshani & Nguyen, 2005). There is also a diversity of beliefs on the appropriate consequences to be applied to each particular plagiarism behavior (Bennett, Behrendt & Boothby, 2011). The trend is to follow and suggest punitive practices, but in fact the punishment is not always applied. Some studies (Bennett, Behrendt & Boothby, 2011) suggest that the consequences applied are a result of teachers' perspective on plagiarism. Teachers who believe that paraphrasing is a common behavior tend to attribute minor consequences to plagiarism in general, they have less stringent criteria, either in applying the consequences, or in the way they face plagiarism.

Beyond this, teachers must be more industrious and rigorous in the appreciation and value criteria of students' schoolwork and homework, as well as on the way they present the learning contents. In fact, students frequently regard schoolwork as a repetition of resources information, putting aside the important role of their creativity or knowledge construction process, because contents are not presented as original ideas, but as facts to be learned (Power, 2009).

Having in mind that teachers have a central on the implementation of educational practices, we intend to explore their perceptions on plagiarism in order to tailor potential paths to improve teachers' continuous training.

## **2. Objectives**

The present study aims to explore teachers' perceptions on plagiarism, its occurrence, consequences and preventing strategies in the classroom.

## **3. Method**

### *3.1. Sample*

Our sample was composed by 67 teachers, 34 males and 33 females, aged between 22 and 60 years old ( $M=38.84$ ,  $DP=8.185$ ), and an average of 13.31 years of working experience. Most of the sample has a graduate degree (79.3%). Some have a master degree (12.1%), and few post-graduates (8.6%). They are teachers from different domains from vocational (68.0%) and general education (32.0%).

### *3.2. Instruments*

To collect data, we have built a protocol, which was composed by three parts. The first part refers to socio-demographic information (gender, age, professional experience, teaching domain and qualification). The second one consists of a questionnaire about plagiarism, its occurrence, detection methods, and consequences. In the third part of the protocol, teachers answered to questions on reasons for students' plagiarism and to give their opinion on the best strategies to prevent it.

### *3.3. Procedures*

Firstly, we started to build the protocol to collect data, by analyzing plagiarism bibliography: existing research and instruments. This allowed settling the experimental version that was present to judge reflection, to reach the final

version. Then, the protocol was applied to teachers by using the “snowball” methodology. The objectives of the study were properly presented, highlighting the voluntary, anonymous and confidential nature of their answers. Once collected, data were codified and analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences program (SPSS-v.15) for statistical analyzes.

### 3. Results

Results allow us to verify that the majority of the teachers are aware that plagiarism is *illegal* (96.9%), for 56.1% of the teachers plagiarism is a *serious problem*, and for 43.9% it is a *problem that deserves attention*. They revealed also that teachers say they are attentive to students’ plagiarism (90.9%), *approach plagiarism* with their pupils in the classrooms (70%), despite having 49.3% of them considering that plagiarism goes *sometimes undetected* and for 13.4% *often undetected*.

Regarding the source of plagiarism, teachers believe that their students *often* (65.7%) and *sometimes* (28.4%) *copy assignments and other coursework* from Internet; and 50.7% *sometimes* from books. Usually, the *copies are of small parts* (M=2.55, DP=.751), but we also find Copies of bigger parts of the sources (M=2.16, DP=.994).

When teachers detect plagiarism behaviors, the heaviest consequences are for collusion, followed by Copying from a source without citations (Table 1).

Table 1. Plagiarism Consequences

	Nothing	A warning	Mark deducted	A mark of zero	Disqualification
a. Incomplete referencing	3,0	51,5	37,9	4,5	3,0
b. Collusion	3,0	6,1	43,9	28,8	18,2
c. Paraphrasing	10,4	34,3	44,8	7,5	3,0
d. Copying from a source without citations	-	25,4	62,7	7,5	4,5
e. Parents/ careers providing support and advice	28,1	31,3	26,6	9,4	4,7

When asked about detection of students’ plagiarism percentage, 35% of the teachers say that 20% to 50% of plagiarism cases are identified; 33.8% say that 1% to 20% of plagiarism cases are identify, and 27.7% of the teachers believe that more than 50%.

Amazingly, when asked about their own ability to identify plagiarism, 42.9% of the teachers feel that they are able to identify more than 50% of plagiarism cases, 31.7% of the teachers say that they are able to identify 1% to 20% of plagiarism cases, and 22.2% believe identifying 20% to 50% of plagiarism cases. The majority of the schools neither have plagiarism policy or guidance (52.3%), nor electronic plagiarism detection methods (88.1%).

In teachers’ opinion, students do plagiarize due to the *Easy access to technologies* (e.g. mobile phones, computers) (M=2.46), Internet access that enables copy and paste (M=2.39), Students’ lack of critical approach to analyze information (2.16), Students’ laziness or poor time management skills (M=2.15), and Students thinking that they won’t be caught (M=2.03).

In what concerns preventive strategies against plagiarism behavior, Portuguese teachers emphasized the importance of *Honor codes* (M=2.42), *Student time management skills* improvement (M=2.23), availability to use *detection software* (M=2.21), to improve *Students’ confidence on with their own opinions* (M=2.16), to foster *students’ positive guidance* (M=2.11) for the benefit of creativity, learning and thinking, by highlighting the negative impact of plagiarism on that process.

### 4. Discussion

Our results are clear on teachers’ awareness of plagiarism illegality and seriousness for learning process. Teachers believe are attentive to students’ plagiarism, despite considering that plagiarism is sometimes undetected, which is in

accordance with other studies that reveal and alarming frequency of plagiarism among students (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2006 cit. in Strom & Strom, 2007).

As in other studies they attribute plagiarism to ICT use (Comas-Forgas, Sureda-Negre & Salva-Mut, 2010; Cardoso, 2007; Monteiro & Osório, 2008), highlighting the role of easy access to ICT as the main motivation for students' plagiarism, but also emphasizes students' lack of critical approach to analyze information, laziness or poor time management skills, and because they think that they won't be caught. In fact, the majority of the schools of this study neither have plagiarism policy or guidance, nor electronic plagiarism detection methods. So, it might be that students perceive a weak supervision as well, which may encourage dishonest academic behaviors (Comas-Forgas, & Sureda-Negre, 2010). Besides the perceived lack of supervision, the expected consequences may also determine the behavior. As we can verify on the results, teachers apply minor consequences when they detect plagiarism, probably for their lack of understanding of the extent of this behavior and their own visions on what plagiarism is (Bennett, Behrendt & Boothby, 2011).

Considering that students frequently regard schoolwork as a repetition of information (Power, 2009), teachers from this study settle a range of strategies that should be helpful to avoid plagiarism, by creating Honor codes, enhancing student's time management skills improvement, by having an available detection software, by improving Students' confidence on their own opinions, and by fostering students' positive guidance. However, it's interesting to verify that most of the strategies highlighted by teachers focused students lack of skills, which may indicate that in teachers opinion plagiarism is a student's issue (Reeds, 2011). Considering their central role on the educative process, that information is relevant once it claims the urgency to promote efficient teachers' continuous training that could allow them to understand the implications of their practices.

## 5. Conclusions

As major conclusions of this paper, we understand the teachers' point of view on plagiarism, as an illegal phenomenon but important issue to be addressed. Considering that they are promoters of students' significative learning, the implications of this study lead us to the need to know more about their attributions to this behavior. Further research should address this issue and should deepen the relationship between teachers' plagiarism attributions and their practices. As major limitations of the study, we may point out the sample size and the lack of psychological variables that could allow us to have a deeper understanding on teachers' attributions determinants and its relationship with teachers' practices. Considering this almost epidemic issue, remains the challenge to a broader understanding of this phenomenon and the need to improve teachers methods in order to promote significative and creative learning.

## Acknowledgements

*GENIUS - Plagiarism or creativity: teaching Innovation versus Stealing* project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

## References

- Almeida, F., Gama P., & Peixoto, P. (2010). La ética de los alumnos de la enseñanza superior: un estudio exploratório sobre el fraude académico em Portugal. *Oficina do Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra*, 348.
- Anderman, E.M., Cupp, P.K., & Lane, D. (2010). Impulsivity and Academic Cheating. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 78, 135–150.
- Anderman, E.M., Griesinger, T., & Westerfield, G. (1998). Motivation and cheating during early adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 84-93.
- Bennett, K.K., Behrendt, L.S., & Boothby, J.L. (2011). Instructor Perceptions of Plagiarism: Are We Finding Common Ground? *Teaching of Psychology*, 38(1) 29-35.
- Cardoso, G. (2007). *E-Generation: Os Usos de Media pelas Crianças e Jovens em Portugal*. Lisboa: CIES-ISCTE.

- Comas-Forgas, R., & Sureda-Negre, J. (2010). Academic Plagiarism: Explanatory Factors from Students' Perspective. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 8, 217–232
- Comas-Forgas, R., Sureda-Negre, J., & Salva-Mut, F. (2010). Academic plagiarism prevalence among Spanish undergraduate students: an exploratory analysis. *Biochemia Medica*, 20 (3), 301 -306.
- Koul, R., Clariana, R. B., Jitgarun, K., & Songsriwittaya, A. (2009). The influence of achievement goal orientation on plagiarism. *Learning and Individual Differences* 19, 506–512
- Marsden, H., Carroll, M. & Neill, J. T. (2005), Who cheats at university? A self-report study of dishonest academic behaviours in a sample of Australian university students. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 57 (1), 1-10.
- Monteiro, A.F., & Osório, A.J. (2008). *Mediação no uso da Internet por crianças e jovens: Contornos do problema*. VI Congresso Português de Sociologia, Mundos Sociais: saberes e práticas. Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Retrieved October 2013, from: em: <http://www.fcsh.unl.pt/eukidsonline/docs/ComunicacaoAFM-AJO.pdf>
- Newstead, S.E., Franklyn-Stokes, A., & Armestead, P. (1996). Individual Differences in Student Cheating. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(2), 229-241.
- Nora, W.L., & Zhang, K.C. (2010). Motives of cheating among secondary students: the role of self-efficacy and peer influence. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11, 573–584.
- Power, L.G. (2009). University Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80 (6), 643-662.
- Reeds, D. K. (2011). Plagiarism isn't just an issue for students. *Journal of Staff Development*, 32 (1) 47-49.
- Robinson-Zañartu, C., Peña, E.D., Cook-Morales, V., Peña, A.M., Afshani, R., & Nguyen, L. (2005). Academic Crime and Punishment: Faculty Members' Perceptions of and Responses to Plagiarism. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 20 (3), 318-337.
- Strom, P. & Strom, R. (2007). Cheating in Middle School and High School. *The Educational Forum*, 71, 104-116.
- Teixeira, A., & Rocha, M. (2010). Academic Misconduct in Portugal: Results from a large scale survey to University Economics/Business Students. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 8, 21-4.