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## Plagiarism phenomenon in European countries: Results from *GENIUS* project.

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### Abstract

The present study aims to explore 170 teachers and 334 secondary school students' perceptions on plagiarism of seven European countries. Results indicate that both know that plagiarism is illegal; attribute plagiarism to the easiness on contents access on Internet but while teachers tend to attribute causes to students' lack of skills, students highlight the pressure to get good grades, laziness and poor management as well as the expectation that won't be caught. To prevent plagiarism while teachers suggest to promote students' skills, students focus on pedagogical issues. Similarities and differences are explored as well as the possible effects and implications.

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### 1. Introduction

The present study is a result of an European project - *GENIUS plaGiarism or crEativity: teachiNg Innovation versUs Stealing* - which aims at strengthening students' transversal skills in secondary students, preventing plagiarism and promoting innovative and attractive learning pathways. Plagiarism is a phenomenon that came to stay, and there is evidence that it is becoming common and widespread (Cheeman, Mahmood, Mahmood, & Shah, 2011; Jager & Brown, 2010; Koul, Clariana, Jitgarun, & Songsriwittaya, 2009; Lin, & Wen, 2007; Park, 2003; Strom & Strom, 2007). With this study, we intend to know more about plagiarism phenomenon especially among the project partners' countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom) given the lack of research on European countries.

Internet has increased plagiarism potential, as information is easily accessed through new technologies (Sureda, Comas, & Morey, 2011). Besides this, findings of several international studies support that students are confused about what kind of behaviors are accounted as plagiarism, expressing their lack of awareness about it, difficulties in referencing skills and its consequences in students' plagiarism knowledge (Anyanwu, 2004; Davies, 2008; Roig, 2006). However, students' responses are more complex and extend beyond their intentional – unintentional attitude,

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and cultural as well as educational backgrounds interfere with student's concern about plagiarism avoidance (Davies, 2008).

Literature suggests gender differences (plagiarism is more frequent among boys), age differences (among younger students), academic performance differences (among lower performers) (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes & Armestead, 1996). One of the pointed reasons for plagiarism is the desire to be successful in some task (Faria, 2009) which is associated with lower self-efficacy and reduced learning goals (Marden, Carroll & Neill, 2005), permeability to peer pressure (Nora & Zhang, 2010), lack of time management and personal organization skills (Comas-Forgas & Sureda-Negre, 2010). Besides this, students tend to adopt such behaviors when it is felt as a familiar behavior, in settings with sparing monitoring or supervision, and when students believe that their gains are higher than the losses, due to minor penalties applied (Teixeira & Rocha, 2010). So, to handle plagiarism, detection software is being used, reporting positive results on decreasing plagiarism rates (Batane, 2010; Pittam, Elander, Lusher, Fox, & Payne, 2009), as well as an open dialog on expected academic behaviour, and student-family counselling on balancing academic and extracurricular commitments to result on honest work are also proposed (Geddes, 2011).

Considering the relevance of this issue, and the lack of researches especially in the secondary educational level, the present study aims to highlight students and teachers perceptions of plagiarism, students reasons and strategies in order to prevent plagiarism and promote more individualized and creative homework and assignments.

## 2. Objectives

The present study is to understand teachers' and students' perceptions on plagiarism, in order to discuss implications and suggest interventions to promotion. Descriptive statistics will be use to present a brief description of the main results, as well as inferential statistics to capture (in) dependence of some variables or behaviors.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Sample

Our sample was composed by 170 teachers (25 from England, 27 from Turkey, 25 from Romania, 20 from Portugal, 21 from Italy, 32 from Greece and 20 from Spain), 80 males (47.1%) and 90 females (52.9%), 27% had less than 5 years of professional experience, 24% between 5 and 10 years and 29% between 10 and 20 years. Most of the sample has a graduate degree (46%), 26% post-graduate and 22% a master degree. The number of students involved in the study was 334 (39 from England, 60 from Turkey, 37 from Romania, 76 from Portugal, 41 from Italy, 42 from Greece and 20 from Spain), 52.5% boys, 53.1% from vocational courses. The majority (69.5%) wanted to go to university, and parents' educational level is mostly primary and secondary.

### 3.2. Instruments

*Genius: Plagiarism or creativity – Students' questionnaire* and *Genius: Plagiarism or creativity - Teachers' questionnaire* were specially developed for this study. Teachers' version comprises 20 questions, to gather socio-demographic information, knowledge about plagiarism, perceptions of students' plagiarism behaviors, reasons, consequences and strategies to prevent plagiarism and promote creative learning. Students' version is composed by 27 questions, about socio-demographic information, knowledge and perceptions on plagiarism behaviors, motives, consequences and strategies to prevent plagiarism and promote creative learning.

### 3.3. Procedures

Questionnaires were translated to each partner country language, being data collected by *Webquest* or by paper and pencil, after parents', schools' and teachers' authorization. The objectives of the study were properly presented, highlighting the voluntary, anonymous and confidential nature of their answers. Once collected, data was codified and analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-v.20) for statistical analyzes.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Teachers results

The majority of the teachers *know that plagiarism is illegal* (n=148, 87.1%), they *talk with their students about this issue* (n=110, 65.5%) and classify as *a problem that deserves attention* (n=81, 56.3%) or *a serious problem* (n=61, 42.4%). The majority of the teachers revealed that there is no *school policies and plagiarism guidance*, except among the UK teachers, who said plagiarism policies exist – *Yes* (n=25, 100%). Similarly, only the UK teachers revealed that *school electronic plagiarism detection* exists *Yes* (n=22, 88%) while almost all the other teachers don't have *electronic plagiarism detection* support. When asked what are the sources of plagiarism, teachers mostly pointed out that their students often copy often Internet (*often* n=103, 60.6%; *sometimes* n=49, 28.9%); and sometimes from *books* (*sometimes* n=73, 43%; *often* n=42, 24.7%).

By teachers' experience, some behaviors are common among students when preparing their homework and coursework (see Fig.1). On average, most of them *Copy a minor or major amount of text without referencing* which is the most frequent behaviors (*Often*, n=93, 54.7%, or *Sometimes* n=77, 45.3%; *Often*, n=81, 46.6% to *Sometimes* n=47, 27.7%, respectively). For UK teachers, downloading the work from a site never or rarely happens among their students, probably due to detection software (*Rarely*, n=13, 52% to *Never*, n=9, 36%), once plagiarism behavior common in other countries.

In part, some of these behaviors might be related to consequences. In fact, in most of the types of plagiarism, teachers tend to give a *Warning* (n=68, 40%), a *Mark Deduction* (n=53, 31.2%) or *Nothing Happens* (n=27, 15.9%). Teachers believe that the main reasons for students' plagiarism are the easiness access to Internet (M=2.59), and to new technologies (M=2.49), followed by students' lack of critical approach to analyze and examine information (M=2.26), and laziness and poor time management skills (M=2.24). So, to prevent plagiarism teachers suggest that students would benefit from more *Positive Guidance on creativity and learning; thinking in the negative impact of plagiarism* (M=2.32), improve guidance on *how to Critically Analyze Information*, particularly from the internet (M=2.31), the need for *More Time to design lessons and assessments/coursework* (M=2.26), *Promotion of Students Time Management Skills* (M=2.25) and *Use of Detection Software* (M=2.24). As we may see, most of the strategies tend to assume plagiarism as a students problem that might be fixed by promoting skills.

### 4.2. Students results

Like teachers, the majority of the students know that plagiarism is illegal (n=166, 68.6%), being a Problem that deserves attention (n=150, 45%). The Students also revealed that teachers are attentive to plagiarism in students work (n=187, 61.3%) even though only about one third of the students have referred that their teachers talk about plagiarism (n=116, 38.3%). The majority of the students agree that there are not proper resources to promote students awareness about plagiarism: No - (n=203, 68.8%), except the UK students who are nearly equally divided on this subject (Yes 51.3%, No 48.7 %). The majority says that no electronic plagiarism detection exists in their school (n=248, 82.7%), except the UK students who are nearly divided (Yes 48.7%, No 51.3%) or Spanish (Yes 50%, No 50%).

In general, students admit they *often copy and paste from books without references* (n=155, 46,5%) while *Copying from Internet* occurs *Sometimes* (n=93, 31%) to *Often* (n=140, 46.7%). In fact, the majority of the students from all countries revealed that they *Sometimes* (n=130, 38.95%) *copy minor amounts from a book/ Internet without*

*citations or references*, while *Copying major amounts of text* is *Rare* (n=112, 33.5%) to *Never* (N=96, 28.7%), except Spanish and Italian students. Results on *Downloading essays from Internet and Collusion* are similarly distributed all over the possibilities (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often). Many students say that they *Never* (n=103, 30.8%) *receive inappropriate guidance from parents/ careers*, *Copying school work from another student* (n=149, 44.6%) or *submitted a work from another student* (n=209, 62.6%).

There is some agreement in students on plagiarism reasons when doing their schoolwork. It is especially due to the fact that *Material is easily accessible from Internet* (M=2.28), and because of the *easy access to new technologies* (M=2.21). The *Pressure to get better grades* (M=2.17), their *Laziness*, their *poor time management* (M=2.13), and the *Expectation that they won't be caught* (M=2.10) are pointed as reasons. Regarding sanctions, students think that their teachers would do *Nothing* (n=108, 35.6%) or just a *Warning* (n=86, 28.4%) if they are caught. As teacher's results, students believe that *Collusion* is the most severely sanctioned behavior, with a *Zero Mark* (n=51, 16.8%) or subject *Disqualification* (n=9, 3%); followed by *Copying without referencing*: with *Zero Mark* (n=27, 9%) and *Disqualification* (n=20, 6.7%). In this case, we point out the UK students who reveal that something would happen if *copying without citing the references*. For students some strategies could encourage creativity and prevent plagiarism, namely (in order): *more innovative and engaging lessons* (M=2.41), *more confidence on their own views and opinions* (M=2.34), *more freedom to choose schoolwork themes* (M=2.32), *tasks correctly distributed across the year* (M=2.30), *feedback could be included into assessment design* (M=2.27), *time management skills were improved* (M=2.27), *more help available on how to reference properly* (M=2.26), or *if coursework/homework was more practical and less academic* (M=2.20).

## 5. Discussion

Plagiarism is profoundly ingrained in partner countries secondary school. Regarding plagiarism relevance, it seems that it is not seen as a very serious problem, both for teachers and students, as they believe that it is a problem that deserves attention, being teachers more concerned than students. Among teachers we have found country differences in what concerns the existence of school policies and guidance and the existence of electronic plagiarism detection software, except from the UK. On this subject country differences are found among students opinion, too: the majority of the students from all countries said that no detection software, nor school policies and guidance exist, except the ones from the UK and Spain, who showed being divided in their opinions. Anyway, we believe that detection software could play an important role decreasing plagiarism rates as for suggested by other studies (Batane, 2010; Pittam, Elander, Lusher, Fox, & Payne, 2009).

Teachers believe that students adopt wrong practices when preparing their assignments and homework, in a certain degree. Students' opinions are mainly different from teachers ones, at this point. In general, students say adopting these plagiarism practices mainly rarely/never (against often/sometimes and sometimes/rarely from teachers perceptions), except on copying minor amounts of text from books and Internet without referencing (sometimes) and downloading an essay from Internet (never, rarely, sometimes and often). Many reasons are greatly noted, by teachers and students, like students' laziness and students' poor time management skills. As for other studies results, such behaviors may be due to the need and to the desire to be successful (Faria, 2009), low academic performance (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes & Armestead, 1996), or other personal characteristics as low perception of self-efficacy, reduced learning goals (Marden, Carroll & Neill, 2005), peer pressure (Nora & Zhang, 2010), lack of time management skills, and organization skills (Comas-Forgas & Sureda-Negre, 2010). But the main reasons pointed by the majority of all countries' teachers and students are the easy access to material from Internet and the easy access to new technologies, which is in accordance to several studies stating that Internet has increased plagiarism potential (Sureda, Comas, & Morey, 2011).

When plagiarism is detected, teachers say they tend to give a warning as consequence for the wrong behavior. However, students do not perceive sanctions the same way. They agree with teachers that they will be warned about their negative behavior, but many of them also say that nothing happens. Collusion is the most severely sanctioned practice, and copying without referencing will surely entail consequences, from the UK students' point of view. For the other countries' students, this behavior may not lead to a sanction (30% believe that nothing will happen). Students results are more in accordance with previous other studies which reveal that students tend to adopt such behaviors because they believe that their gains are higher than the losses (Teixeira & Rocha, 2010).

Geddes (2011) states that an open dialog on expected academic behaviour, a correct balancing of the academic and extracurricular commitments could lead to honest works. The present study adds a range of strategies to prevent plagiarism and promote creativity. For teachers, the best way to achieve this is to support students with more positive guidance on creativity and learning, and enhancing students' own thinking. For students, preventing plagiarism and promoting creativity could be achieved, especially if lessons were innovative and engaging, and if they were more confident on their own opinions.

## 6. Conclusions

This study shows that plagiarism is a widespread behavior in partner countries, growing hand in hand with the increase of new technologies and easy access to information. The UK reveals to be different from the other countries in presenting and adopting responses to academic fraud yet, and plagiarism rates have been falling, there. Sample size is the main limit of this study, so for future research, we suggest to improve stratification and sample size, as well as other variables that have been pointed out as possible predictors as self-efficacy, motivation or self-regulation.

Efforts to eliminate plagiarism and enhancing creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship in our schools and universities are needed. This does not seem to be an easy task. However, further efforts should be made to provide a valuable contribution in the development of students' transversal skills and provision of innovative and attractive learning pathways, matching the necessary skills for employability, coping with the emergent issue of digital fluency are determinant. Contextual interventions must be promoted to improve teachers' practice, as well as clear school policies, focusing on the advantages of the individual and creative work, rather than on memorization and repeating content.

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