



A Study of Research Ethics Related to Plagiarism among University Students

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Received: August 26, 2024. Revised: September 07, 2024. Accepted: September 15, 2024.

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to investigate and identify the current awareness of plagiarism among university students in their assignments and find ways to take measures against it. This study can be used as a basis for plagiarism prevention education for instructors and learners at universities, as well as for providing standards for plagiarism in assignment design and for dealing with distrust and conflict among students due to plagiarism. **Research design, data and methodology:** This study was conducted in July 2024 with a survey of 347 students majoring in aviation and tourism at a university in the Chungcheong-do region. In order to investigate the current status and perception of plagiarism in college students' class work, this study referred to previous studies on plagiarism among college students and conducted a questionnaire consisting of 22 questions, including 3 questions on general matters, 7 questions on plagiarism perception, 5 questions on reasons for plagiarism, and 7 questions on research ethics experience. **Results:** In the survey results through this study, it was found that most of the university students were aware of the concept of plagiarism, but more students were unable to accurately distinguish the recognition of specific content such as citations. The reason for plagiarism in assignments was found to be the easiest to use Internet data. Regarding the research ethics experience, it was found that most of the students lacked experience at school or during class.

Keywords: Research Ethics, Plagiarism, University Students

JEL Classification Code : C25, M31, Z33

1. Introduction

As the problems caused by the lack of awareness of research ethics in the educational system continue to arise, social interest in research ethics and learning ethics is increasing.

In recent years, the problem of plagiarism among college students has become serious in the changing educational environment, including the development of the Internet, advanced information and communication technologies, and the proliferation of digital databases, raising the need for separate learning ethics education in a

different dimension from the existing research ethics education (Lee et al., 2011).

Despite the fact that there is a broad consensus on the problematic and immoral nature of plagiarism among college students, plagiarism as a practical behavior is still widespread among students (Jung, 2014; McCabe et al., 2012).

Many students still plagiarize their assignments even though they are aware that it is wrong through various news and media sources. In addition, the development of the Internet has made it easier for anyone to gather the materials and literature they need. This has led to a growing number of cases of students recklessly stealing

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online materials in their assignments and reports without citing the source.

Student plagiarism is constantly evolving, from the relatively mundane practice of replacing only problematic phrases while consulting plagiarism detection software plagiarism rate values, to the more technical tricks of using image files that look normal to the naked eye but are undetectable by plagiarism detection software, to the practice of agencies buying and selling entire assignments for money (Oh et al., 2016).

The most common plagiarism-related behaviors in universities are mostly related to writing. Purchasing a report from a free or paid site and submitting it with a different name, submitting the same assignment with some modifications to a different course, or creating a report by paraphrasing the original text without acknowledging the source are some of the most common plagiarism-related behaviors currently seen in universities. In addition, plagiarism is becoming more prevalent with the development of AI and the launch of Chat GPT in 2022, which will be used as a writing assignment tool for elementary, middle, and high school students. With such a large number of assignments, plagiarism and related behaviors will be a problem faced by all universities.

As the educational environment changes due to the development of artificial intelligence, it is essential for instructors to actively understand the learning psychology of college learners and respond to possible problems related to artificial intelligence to improve the quality of university education.

In the National Research Foundation of Korea (The research ethics information portal, 2024). Guidelines for securing research ethics, designated by the National Research Foundation of Korea, defines academic ethics as “ethical awareness required throughout the entire process of academic learning” and “ethics that students should observe in all learning activities at universities, such as taking classes, writing and submitting assignments, and taking exams.” The education of academic ethics at universities in Korea and abroad is mainly focused on preventing and detecting academic misconduct through separate programs or measures other than the regular curriculum, such as learning how to write and report, introducing a plagiarism prevention system, and strengthening standards and punishments for plagiarism and exam cheating.

This study aims to investigate and identify the current awareness of plagiarism among university students in their assignments and find ways to take measures against it. This study can be used as a basis for plagiarism prevention education for instructors and learners at universities, as well as for providing standards for plagiarism in

assignment design and for dealing with distrust and conflict among students due to plagiarism.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Types of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of using someone else's original ideas or work and passing it off as your own without proper attribution (National Research Foundation of Korea, 2019). Plagiarism is an ethical concept, not a legal term. Plagiarism is problematic because it is like academic theft, taking something that is not yours and passing it off as your own.

In general, it's considered plagiarism when you use someone else's work, such as a book or article, in your own research and fail to properly cite the source.

However, just because an author attributes someone else's research does not mean that the author can use it without restriction. If students do use someone else's work, they must do so within reason, meaning that it is the main part of their own writing and that the quoted material supports their own writing.

The criteria for plagiarism in the Guidelines for Research Ethics of the General Federation of Korean Academic Organizations include using the key ideas of others without attribution, paraphrasing the work of others, and using key ideas, sentences, tables, figures, etc. contained in the unpublished work of others such as research plans, proposals, lecture materials, etc. without proper attribution.

According to a study by Gye (2023), the types of plagiarism include plagiarism, self-plagiarism, reverse plagiarism, falsification, copying, piracy, imitation, masterpiece, and uncertain citation and attribution.

2.2. University Research Ethics

McCabe et al. (2012) comprehensively analyzed studies related to academic dishonesty among U.S. college students and presented nine types of typical academic dishonesty as follows.

- ① Copying sentences from original materials without citing the source when writing assignments
- ② Citing materials that are not actually referenced when writing an assignment
- ③ Copying publicly available materials verbatim when writing an assignment
- ④ Unfairly obtaining test information from someone who has taken the test before you.
- ⑤ Using someone else's help to write an individual

assignment (in violation of the instructor's principles)

⑥ Submitting part or all of another student's work as your own.

⑦ Providing answers to other students during an examination.

⑧ Copying another student's answers during an examination.

⑨ Sneaking in prohibited materials during an examination.

As there are very few empirical studies on college student plagiarism, we can infer the main variables affecting plagiarism from previous studies on academic dishonesty, which is a relatively similar concept to plagiarism.

Bennett (2005) and other studies have shown that the most influential factor on academic dishonesty is the ease (or likelihood of success) of cheating, which encompasses a variety of personal characteristics and situational variables.

Oh (2013) measured the information ethics awareness of university students and identified the prevalence of plagiarism, and suggested ways to foster information ethics awareness in the curriculum. Despite the high level of information ethics awareness among college students, the plagiarism of assignments was serious, and the reasons for plagiarizing assignments were too much work but not enough time and no feedback on assignments.

In this study, we synthesize the conditions that constitute plagiarism and define plagiarism as 'omitting the source of the referenced material in the assignment or citing it in an inappropriate manner'.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Model

This study was conducted in July 2024 with a survey of 347 students majoring in aviation and tourism at a university in the Chungcheong-do region. The reason for selecting the research subjects is that students majoring in the convergence social sciences of aviation and tourism are required to study and investigate various social phenomena such as the past, present, and future, and it is a major that requires various data research to grasp the current status of the aviation industry. In addition, research and presentation are conducted in the curriculum of all majors, so it was selected as a research subject.

3.2. Research Tools

Table 1: Survey Question

Factors	Number of Question	References
General and types of plagiarism	3 questions	Kim & Kang (2015)
Plagiarism awareness	7 questions	Ahn (2022)
Reasons for plagiarism	5 questions	Kang & Lee (2017)
Research ethics experience	7 questions	Lee & Kim (2023)

In order to investigate the current status and perception of plagiarism in college students' class work, this study referred to previous studies on plagiarism among college students (Kim & Kang, 2015; Ahn, 2022; Kang & Lee, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2023) and conducted a questionnaire consisting of 22 questions, including 3 questions on general matters, 7 questions on plagiarism perception, 5 questions on reasons for plagiarism, and 7 questions on research ethics experience.

4. Results

The students who participated in the survey in this study were 53 males (15%) and 295 females (85%), as shown in Table 1. In terms of academic year, 78 (%) were freshmen, 84 (24%) were sophomores, 93 (27%) were juniors, and 92 (27%) were seniors.

Table 2: Characteristics of Subjects

Classification		N (%)
Gender	male	52(15%)
	female	295(85%)
Grade	freshmen	78(22%)
	Sophomore	84(24%)
	junior	93(27%)
	Senior	92(27%)

4.1. Types of Plagiarism Utilized

In this study, 302 out of 347 respondents (87%) reported using Internet sources for plagiarizing assignments, indicating that Internet searching is certainly accessible. 15 (4.3%) of the respondents used materials from their peers or classmates, 12 (3.4%) used materials such as reports, 12 (3.5%) used books from the library, and

only 4 (1.2%) used research papers, and the least number of students (1.2%) used sites that buy and sell assignments.

Table3: Types of Plagiarism Utilized

Classification	N (%)
Library (books, e-books)	12(3.5%)
Research papers	4(1.2%)
Internet websites	302(87%)
Assignment sales site	2(0.6%)
Reporting or research materials	12(3.4%)
Resources from coworkers and friends	15(4.3%)
Total	347(100%)

4.2. Plagiarism Recognition Degree and Reason

When asked if college students are aware of plagiarism when performing assignments, 81% of students answered yes to the question, “To what extent do you know the concept of plagiarism?” However, only 7% of students answered yes to the question, “Can you distinguish between plagiarism and citation?” and 93% of students answered no, indicating that they have difficulty distinguishing between the two. When asked if plagiarizing is copyright infringement, all students answered yes. When asked if plagiarizing is copyright infringement, 61% of students answered yes, and 39% answered no. 100% of students answered yes to the following three questions: “Copying and binding textbooks is copyright infringement,” “Submitting someone else's work as your own is plagiarism,” and “I think plagiarism is ethically problematic.

Table 4: Degree of Plagiarism

Contents	Yes (%)	No (%)
Understanding of the concept of plagiarism	281(81%)	66(19%)
Distinguish between plagiarism and citations	23(7%)	324(93%)
Plagiarism is copyright infringement.	347(100%)	0(0%)
Quoting is not copyright infringement.	212(61%)	135(39%)
Copying and binding the textbook is copyright infringement.	347(100%)	0(0%)
Submitting someone else's work as your own is plagiarism.	347(100%)	0(0%)
Plagiarism is ethically problematic.	347(100%)	0(0%)

When asked why they plagiarized, 54% of students said “because it's easy to find resources online,” followed by 18% who said “because I want to submit a good paper,” 13%

who said “because I have difficulty writing,” 12% who said “because I don't have the confidence to write properly,” and 3% who said “lack of time.

Table 5: Reasons for Plagiarism

Contents	N (%)
I'm not confident I can write it properly	41(12%)
Struggle with writing	47(13%)
Since internet resources are easy to find	188(54%)
Due to lack of time	9(3%)
Want to submit a good result,	62(18%)
Total	347(100%)

4.3. Research Ethics Experience

When asked about their experience with research ethics, 54% of students answered 'yes' to 'I have used AI programs such as Chat GPT for assignments'. 44% of students answered 'yes' to 'I have submitted an assignment using paraphrasing', and 13% of students answered 'yes' to 'I have modified an assignment and submitted it as an assignment in another subject'.

Only 12% of students answered “yes” to the question “My professor has talked about plagiarism in my classes” and only 3% of students answered “yes” to the question “My professor has taught me how to cite references in my classes”. Finally, only 2% of students answered yes to the question, “Have you ever received training on plagiarism or research ethics?”

Table 6: Research Ethics Experience

Contents	Yes/N (%)	No/N (%)
I have experience using AI programs like Chat GPT for assignments.	189(54%)	158(46%)
I've used paraphrasing in my assignments before.	154(44%)	193(56%)
I have experience revising an assignment and submitting it as an assignment for a different course.	45(13%)	302(87%)
I've looked up how to cite an assignment before.	12(3%)	335(97%)
There was a class I took that taught me how to cite references.	9(3%)	338(97%)
I have received training on research ethics, including plagiarism.	8(2%)	339(98%)
In one of my courses, my professor mentioned the topic of formatting assignments.	43(12%)	304(88%)

5. Discussion

In this study, we propose the following suggestions to improve college students' plagiarism in their assignments as shown in the responses of college students in Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6.

First, despite the recent increase in social attention to the controversial issue of plagiarism and research ethics, there are not many opportunities for college students to receive plagiarism-related education or learn about plagiarism, such as forgery, falsification, and proper attribution, through classes or other methods. Universities should provide students with accurate cognitive education about plagiarism and encourage them to feel confident in writing papers that represent their own arguments and ideas. In order to prevent plagiarism in assignments, students need to be made aware that plagiarism is wrong and not just a matter of borrowing from others. They should also reinforce the impact with ongoing education, not just a one-off session.

Second, the most popular source of reference for assignments is the Internet. It is necessary to develop educational programs to prevent plagiarism and to develop software development and search programs at the university level that can be used properly when using Internet resources.

Third, while students are aware that plagiarizing assignments is wrong, they also need to be made aware that they can be the victims of plagiarism. Students will compare their grades to their peers in terms of the amount of time and effort they put into an assignment, and if they perceive that others are gaining an unfair advantage by plagiarizing their work, they will feel deeply resentful and frustrated. If they perceive that the equity system is not operating as it should, they may be motivated to plagiarize themselves as a form of misguided self-help.

Fourth, with the development of AI and the Internet in schools, there is an ongoing debate about how to teach writing using these tools. In universities, writing and reading are being taught in liberal arts courses to promote creative thinking. It is necessary to think about how these two different social phenomena can be combined and utilized by university students. Instead of thinking that AI should not be used or that writing is outdated, it should be applied to university education with the goal of enabling creative writing as a tool according to AI utilization capabilities.

The results of this study need to be supplemented. This study was conducted on students in one university in the Chungcheong region, not a national sample, so there are limitations in generalizing the results of this study. Efforts should continue to be made to find specific and practical ways to improve the current situation of plagiarism in

college students' assignments by utilizing various digital information sources.

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