EXAMINING PLAGIARISM FROM CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE. SOME CONSIDERATIONS

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ABSTRACT
This paper is an analysis of a major problem for the academic environment around the world, regardless of priority area of interest or the prestige of universities: plagiarism. The aims of this paper are: a) reviewing the recent literature focused on plagiarism and b) highlighting the influence of cultural factors on the development of the individual's identity and consequently on its professional integrity. Beyond the moral/legal discourse used in this analysis, also the view capture the major differences between East and West in terms of awareness, defining and sanctioning plagiarism.

KEYWORDS: *plagiarism*, *academic dishonesty*, *academic integrity*, *cheating*, *ethics*, *university policy.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *Z19.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism is a serious problem faced by many academic and research institutions in the world. In the fight against this phenomenon, universities have resorted to various methods of prevention, detection and deterrence of fraudulent behaviors. For instance, many universities' internal regulations contain clear information on academic standards and norms, and sanctions on plagiarism. Moreover, there are guides, works and lectures through which all these aspects are notified to the students from the first year of college. Of all the forms of intellectual fraud, plagiarism is, "one of the greatest challenges currently facing academia" (Shenton, 2012, p.10, quoted in Kayaoğlu et al., 2015, p.1). In the broadest sense, plagiarism is the "misappropriation of the ideas, methods, results or words outlined by another person" in a restricted form or more nuanced, presented by someone else as his own production without a proper citation (Bilic-Zulle et al., 2008, p.140; Bilic-Zulle et al., 2005, p.126; see also, Park, 2003, p.472; Harper, 2006, p.673). This practice is still common from ancient times (Mallon, 1989). In this respect, Park (2003, p.473) has made the following statement: "copying from other writers is probably as old as writing itself, but until the advent of mass-produced writing, it remained hidden from the public gaze."

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2. DETECTING PLAGIARISM AND DEFENDING ACADEMIC VALUES

The establishment of organizations such as The US Office of Research Integrity (occured in 1992) and the UK Research Integrity Office (occured in 2006) were important steps in the fight against plagiarism (Vasconcelos et al., 2009). Several studies show the importance of using software and programs packages for identifying plagiarism (e.g., Kayaoğlu et al., 2015; Kutz et al., 2011; Jocoy & DiBiase, 2006; Chao et al., 2009). But they can not provide a maximum guarantee regarding the accuracy of the verified manuscripts. First, we talk about the access capability, checking and storing information (e.g., books and articles in electronic format, free of charge or databases with international academic journals). For instance, there are many papers that are not in electronic format and to which access is limited. As Walker (2010, p.47) put it, for example, "Turnitin matches only material that is found on the Internet. Generally, material taken from university textbooks can be matched only if that material has already been put on the Internet in some form, for instance through a prior student assignment lodged in the Turnitin database." Secondly, problems may occur when the verified works are written in a language other than English. If these programs are designed to recognize plagiarism situations by referring only to a specific foreign language, what happens with "the translations" of this texts? In Romania, many universities (e.g., The Bucharest University of Economic Study, University of Bucharest, and others) use such programs in order to prevent, detect and deterr the occurence of plagiarism. It should be noted, however, that many of the softwares packages are limited to literature written in Romanian with online access or materials that are stored therein (e.g., Ph.D and Bachelor thesis). Also, the academic journals have a very clear position on plagiarism. For example, Martinson et al. (2011, p.2) concludes in their editorial that opened the number 92 of the "Cardiovascular Research" journal with an assertion that did not support interpretation: "plagiarism and data manipulation will not be tolerated in manuscripts submitted to this journal". The reason for such an attitude may be identified at least in the fact that plagiarism has a reprehensible character, often presented as theft or deception (Sikes, 2009; Kaposi & Dell, 2012; Voelker et al., 2012). Of course, the issue of plagiarism is not new in the scientific world (Sutherland-Smith, 2010), but currently, its visibility reached a high level. For example, a simple search for the term on Google generates 26.500.000 results in 0,61 seconds. Moreover, the Internet, by the huge amount of information available that can be accessed with minimum cost and effort, may be considered a contributing factor of plagiarism, especially in the context of a limited knowledge of the definition of plagiarism and the attribution of responsibility addressing this phenomenon only to universities (Voelker et al., 2012). Plagiarism is therefore an issue of "other" people and not a "personal" one.

3. FORMS OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism represents "passing off other's work, words or ideas as one's own by failing to attribute them to their creator/originator and it is, perhaps, the commonest type of authorial offence" (Sikes, 2009, p.14). With regard to the forms of plagiarism, we mention "buying or procuring of papers, cutting and pasting from works on the internet, not using quotation marks around direct quotes, paraphrasing and not citing original works, and it is having someone else write your paper or a substantial part of your paper and turning it in as if it were new and original to you" (Liddell, 2003, p.49). A controversial form of plagiarism is self-plagiarism which consists of reuse by the author, in a new paper, parts of a material previously published without mentioning it or even completely republish of a work and presentating it as new (Bruton, 2014). Reusing parts of a material is not considered a form of plagiarism unanimously, and the arguments used in this sense refer to the fact that the author does not "steal" ideas of another person, but uses his own ideas previously very well outlined, into a new approach, which is more complex in the later case. Chapman (2007) raises the issue of unnecessary time used in changing the form of presentation of ideas: "what is the point,

precisely, in me spending hours manicuring, paraphrasing and in every other way trying to express the same basic arguments that I originally felt I expressed as well as I could? All in the name of not self-plagiarizing" (quoted in Bruton, 2014, p.191). The discussion in this respect is even more delicate since Enghagen (2011) warns us not to confuse self-plagiarism with copyright infringement; the first constitute a breach of the professional rules and procedures in some cases, while in the second case, it means breaking the law. In practice, the line between the two concepts is however extremely fragile.

Returning to forms of plagiarism, we must also remember cryptomnesia, which means the appropriation of ideas read or heard, that may be faced by those who are specializing in one area, as frequent exposure to similar ideas related to their topic of interest get them to forget their origin (Dow, 2015). In such a situation, we ask ourselves, naturally, how can one trace plagiarism?

Kaposi & Dell (2012) stress also the importance of plagiarism analysis for a fair and comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. According to the two cited authors, in academic literature, plagiarism is decrypted by using the following approaches: moralistic, procedural, developmental, and inter-textual.

With regard to the first approach, it should be recalled, first, that "plagiarism" comes from the Latin word *plagiarius* which means "(a) predator", respectively *plagiare* which translates to "steal" (Newton et al., 2014, p.1180). It is a mention extremely relevant, because the origin of the word is the one underlying the moralistic approach. As a specific element of this approach, we distinguish the attention on the author's intent to plagiarize, that, on one hand, translates into the theft of another author's effort, and on the other hand, by deceiving the reader (Kaposi & Dell, 2012, p.816). In addition, Compton & Pfau (2008) believe that addressing plagiarism morally, involves the consideration of the influence of cultural factors on the perception of this phenomenon, and also the forms of plagiarism. For example, according to Hayes & Introna (2005, p.225), "in Asian, Chinese and Greek universities, lectures often systematically cover the material in the textbook, and the exam requires students to demonstrate that they can recall all relevant material from one textbook and their lecture notes – often verbatim". Similar points of view have also other researchers (e.g., Sun, 2012; Ammari; 2010), making a comparison between Eastern and Western academic institutions. If in the universities in the West, students are taught to think, interpret, and express in their own words in writing, in the East it does not happens the same. Here, "reproducing information" from books and different materials remains as a "basic training" in the learning of students. It should be noted that this is a practice that is still the "norm" in some cases, in Romanian middle and higher education. According to Xin (2006), China faces major problems in determining cases of plagiarism among researchers in the social sciences. Wang Xuming, the spokesman of the Ministry of Education, recognized the gravity of the situation (Xin, 2006). Also in the field of social work such problems occur. It is an eminently humanistic area, often governed by a hard bureaucracy (Postle, 2009). Often, in practice, legal and economic regulations in conjunction with specific cases of concern raise real ethical dilemmas (McDonald et al., 2008; Harris, 2003). The biggest challenge in the field of social work is to create a clear and distinct identity (Payne, 2004). Currently, social work involves a multi-disciplinary approach. That is why students who opt for social work must be learned to develop a range of skills necessary for practice and "professional identity" preservation (Postle, 2009). In the absence of coherent and consistent data treated using logical memory (and not the mechanical way!), the plagiarism temptation will be impossible to deny! And so, those who resort to such practice have a poor training and lack of skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Postle, 2009). Therefore, it is logical to ask whether social work students, who resort to plagiarism and chooses to practice (as academics or practitioners) can be considered honest? Plagiarism leads to debates also in the economic field, especially in terms of the effects they generate. The discussion includes both the perspective of the author on the publication of the results of his work in relation to the risk of being plagiarized by others or being found to have plagiarized and the point of view adopted by the editor of a journal (Arce et al., 2008). On first view, avoiding plagiarism should be a concern of every author. This explains the transparency

displayed by many authors in regard to the mentioning of all references used and indication of the accessed academic data. On the other hand, "fear of plagiarism and uncertainty over editorial responses to it have led some economists to advocate web-based dissemination of initial results as means for establishing intellectual property, while others maintain that secrecy prior to submission is the only way to ensure priority" (Arce et al., 2008, p.232). A second approach describes a conduct that the editors should adopt when they assume such responsibility. In other words, the verification of the meeting the journal's standards (the rules of citation, writing sources, sharpness and fluency in expression, novelty of the information) by the authors who have sent their manuscripts to be considered for review and publication is the most important indicator for the journal's prestige.

Investments in research and development have their say. Thus, in Latin American countries such as Brazil, researchers publish in prestigious journals constantly, many of their articles being indexed by Thomson Reuters (Vasconcelos et al., 2009). The Brazilian Ministry of Science and Technology pointed out that from the Latin American countries, Brazil has the most significant number of published articles in journals indexed Thomson Reuters (for example, in 2006 - 49.8% and in 2009 to 54.42%).

Procedural approach, on the other hand, goes beyond the author's intention to plagiarize and the morality of the act, referring to the writing policy violation in academic institutions. From this point of view, plagiarism is a problem of the universities who have a duty to provide students and academic staff with accurate and comprehensive information on the definition of plagiarism and writing skills or to punish misconduct behaviors. The act of plagiarize is not associated with the character of the person, but with his role (as a student or academic staff) and with the failure to comply with the obligations related to writing a scientific work (Kaposi & Dell, 2012).

The third frame of analysis places the topic of plagiarism into the context of the author's identity considering his writing technique and formation, and does not fully consider it to be a learning error of writing rules. Finally, the latter approach, considers writing to be a "complex social practice in which there is a negotiation of identities and values," and not just a technical process based on learning and implementing rules (Kaposi & Dell, 2012, pp. 821-826). Therefore, an analysis of plagiarism, being either "black or white", only reduces the issue to a technical error which, of course, can always be subject to interpretation. This argument is also discussed by Fisher & Partin (2014) in an article titled "The Challenges for Scientists in avoiding Plagiarism." Since plagiarism is a complex issue, with strong moral implications, the question arises underlying the reasons for such action. Based on the emphasis that the analysis must take into account the seriousness of committed plagiarism, Goh (2015, p.82) identified the following reasons for students plagiarize: fear of failure, the desire to increase GPA, personal/family issues, low level of English knowledge, and confusion on drafting rules and definition of plagiarism. In addition, Pearson (2002) presents the following reasons: students do not understand what plagiarism is, they think they will never get caught, while other students believe that if they are caught, there will be no penalty. Moreover, there are students who want to see how much they can use this practice without being caught, students that wish to finish a course with minimun effort and, not least, students for whom to plagiarize or not to plagiarize does not mean anything (quoted in Liddell, 2003, p. 45).

Given all the above issues, we follow the line of Sutherland-Smith (2010, p.13) when he says that "[...] approaching plagiarism cloaked in the traditional discourse of the law is proving to be only moderately successful in terms of formulation of policies and processes. Systemic focus on deterrence and punishment is addressing only part of the issue and the educative value of those approaches alone is questionable".

In Romania, plagiarism is regulated both legally and professionally, by the codes of ethics of the universities. With regard to legal approach, the first law aimed to protecting copyright dates from 1923 – the Literary and Artistic Property Law - followed in 1946 by the Law on Publishing Contract and Right of the Author to Literary, which suffered successive changes up to 1952. Also,

Romania is a signatory to the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works which she ratified it by Law no. 77/1998. Currently, the framework law in the field is the Law no. 8/1996 on copyright and related rights, as amended and supplemented, which sets moral and patrimonial rights of the author, and the penalties for infringements thereof.

Regarding the academic ethics codes, Miroiu (2005, p.5) considers that they "occupy the place left open between moral behavior and law" and are defined as "the explicit expressing, in writing, of ideals, values, principles, and moral norms that members of the academic community (universities) agree to respect and follow". According to the Code of Ethics of the University of Bucharest, for example, the promoted principles and values refer to academic freedom, transparency, justice and equity, merit, professionalism, honesty and intellectual correctness, accountability, respect and tolerance, and not least, kindness and care.

Turning to the issue of plagiarism, the same Code, Chapter II, art. 8 pt. C, states that "to respect the intellectual property and copyright is a *tight professional obligation* of all members of our academic community. Proven violation of this obligation is a serious fault and it will be dealt with severely, with penalties that can go up to expulsion, dismissal, etc. interruption of collaboration." Further on, art. 9, violation of intellectual property and copyright is defined as "any complete or incomplete reproduction of intellectual contributions must be appropriately attributed, by specifying its author, opera etc. Inappropriate recognition can lead to confusion and can damage the moral rights of authors; it is an academic impropriety and a weakness (in the best case) or a fault (in severe cases) regarding academic integrity. At the same time, it constitutes a serious breach of professional duty."

If we consider the analysis of plagiarism proposed by Kaposi & Dell (2012), we see that the approach advanced by the University of Bucharest is of a moralist type, focused on identifying the intention to plagiarize, in terms of voluntary action for violation of the principles and values that it promotes. A decade ago, in 2004-2005, a research regarding ethical issues on 13 Romanian universities was conducted. The results indicated the existence of a university environment "inertial and uncritical" in which daily activity is organized around an "university clique" with low performance of research and teaching, and the favoritism is the main ethical problem (Miroiu, 2005, p. 60). Unfortunately, also the awareness among respondents (students, Ph.D students, teachers, management or administrative staff) as well as the existence of a code of ethics or an ethics committees at the university level was differently perceived: 60% among management staff, 39% among professors, and only 12% among students (Miroiu, 2005, pp. 57-59). Regarding their perception on plagiarism, 47% of the management staff was aware of such cases among teachers; 62% of the teachers have identified this phenomenon among students, and 44% among their colleagues. On the other hand, 67% of students surveyed said they had copied at least once in an exam, 57% of the students known cases among colleagues and 51% of them said they had identified plagiarism in the work of teachers interacting with (Miroiu, 2005). Therefore, the image is that of a Romanian academic environment prone to breach legal and moral obligations. Or, worse, ignorant in this regard.

4. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS…

In 2011, an analysis of the "Quality of Higher Education in Romania: An Institutional Analysis of Current Trends" (Păunescu et al., 2011, p.19) started with the following definition: "the overall image of the quality of our higher education, as shown in the teachers, students and employers perceptions, is that of a relatively high level of quality. In terms of trends, however, if teachers' and employers' perceptions remain stable, the students' perceptions recorded a significant depreciation". Which may explain the tolerant attitude of students towards plagiarism, especially when teachers lend themselves to such conduct (Voicu & Tufiş, 2011). And teachers that do not plagiarize, they stop to identifying the phenomenon. And then we can conclude that if the Western

plagiarism is equivalent to the risk of ending a career in the field (Martinson et al., 2011), for the Eastern, it appears to be an informal accepted rule of professional ascent, in many cases.

NOTES

University of Bucharest Ethics code is available at:
http://www.unibuc.ro/n/despre/Codul_de_etica_al_Universitatii_din_Bucuresti.php. Viewed on: 23.10.2015. Also see Applied Ethics Researc Center (CCEA). (2014). *A Guide Against Plagiarism*. Bucharest: University of Bucharest. Available at
http://www.unibuc.ro/depts/limbi/literaturi_orientale/docs/2014/oct/16_09_46_47Ghid_impotriva_p lagiatului.pdf

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