

The academic use of plagiarism software in Physical Therapy educational research: a case study

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Abstract

Recently, cases of plagiarism in education have been on the rise with the underlying causes of their appearance being numerous. Due to the large extent of this phenomenon, specialised software has been developed and is available for users to check the presence or absence of plagiarism. The purpose of this paper is to study cases of plagiarism in education, as well as the available plagiarism software. Also, this case study presents a practical example of the implementation of the control process using plagiarism software, as well as its results, in an already published article. This case study points out the importance of performing a further quality control to those parts of the text where a textual coincidence was spotted by the plagiarism detection software.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Software, Control, Detection.

Introduction

Our everyday life has dramatically changed lately due to so many new technological achievements on one hand and the rapid spread of the Internet on the other. One of the affected sectors is education as it has become easier for the public to have access to both electronic libraries and databases of various educational content (Avramidou, 2014). Quite often, however, when searching for information and deploying the full range of available sources, the process is not always typical of the necessary critical thinking and appropriation of these sources for the production of new and authentic texts; nevertheless, it is characterised by their mere appropriation by third parties, in other words, copying –either wholly or partly - the work of another author without giving the source the credit through proper citation (Avramidou & Kekkeris, 2012; Avramidou, 2014). This is the root cause of the ongoing increase in plagiarism instances in education in recent years.

According to the articles, the number of underlying factors for the occurrence of plagiarism is not negligible. Lack of knowledge and uncertainties about methodologies are additional factors that are frequently associated with plagiarism. The study of Jereb et al. (2018) shows that students with a lower motivation for study spend much time on the Internet, which is considered to be the simplest method of studying. The extended occurrence of the above phenomenon has called for the recent development of specialised software solutions that check the presence or absence of plagiarism in the texts that are about to be tested/to undergo such a test. Intelligent (semantic) technologies may help detect more cases of plagiarism worldwide and across academic disciplines with inevitable retractions and dire consequences for plagiarists. Authors and editors should curb the problem by adhering to global editorial recommendations (Gasparyan et al., 2017).

1. The types of plagiarism

Plagiarism describes any act of appropriation of a third party's work without reference to it (Handa & Power, 2005; Mullin, 2009; Karasalidis & Embalotis, 2018). Plagiarism is considered deceptive (Koul et al., 2009) and involves stealing someone else's work.

Depending on the intention of the person who engages in plagiarism, it can be categorised into voluntary plagiarism and involuntary plagiarism (Kyridis & Chronopoulou, 2008). Voluntary plagiarism involves deliberate actions on the part of the perpetrator with the ultimate aim of deceiving. Such an act of voluntary plagiarism is the absence of using a citation within the text of a source being used (Howard, 1995; Kyridis & Chronopoulou, 2008; Baird & Dooley, 2014; Karasalidis, 2016). Involuntary plagiarism includes several situations such as ignorance, incorrect information reporting within the text, incorrect citation of the references being used, lack of knowledge regarding issues such as citing sources and paraphrasing the text (Kyridis & Chronopoulou, 2008; Gilmore et al., 2010; Schrimsher, Northrup & Alverson, 2011; Karasalidis, 2016).

Plagiarism can take different forms based on specific criteria. It is quite common at distance learning universities, given the fact that written assignments are the cornerstone of both learning and evaluation processes of students. Their progress is depicted through their written assignments, while their eligibility to sit for the final exams is secured by the grade of these assignments (Papalamprakopoulos, 2019). Among the practices of plagiarism are the following: copying text, insufficient paraphrasing of the text (concerning the source text), receiving external assistance as well as errors in the references used (Karasalidis & Embalotis, 2018).

Regarding the percentage of textual coincidence above which a text can be considered as a product of plagiarism, there is no such thing as an international percentage. Most universities, however, inform their students that when they copy more than three consecutive words from another author's text, this text should be accompanied by a reference to the source from which it was obtained (Kafantaris, 2012; Avramidou, 2014).

Self-plagiarism can describe a situation in which a researcher uses a part of his/her previous work, which has already been published, in a new publication without mentioning the original publication as a citation in the latter (Cosma & Joy, 2008; Karasalidis & Embalotis, 2018). What is more, both multiple publications and publication of research findings of scientific work in different articles, using common data, are also some forms of self-plagiarism (Scanlon, 2007; Kyridis & Chronopoulou, 2008; Karasalidis & Embalos, 2018). Copying refers to the use of information from a source without being accompanied by a reference to that specific source within the text (Handa & Power, 2005; Wan et al., 2011).

Paraphrasing can be defined as presentation of important information and ideas of a text that belongs to a third party in a different way than the original text. For the paraphrasing process to be considered methodologically sufficient, both different words and different lexical structures must be, yet by no means altering the original meaning or omitting important information in the paraphrased text (Davies & Beaumont, 2007). Paraphrasing involves several skills such as text analysis, text interpretation as well as composing a new text, to effectively integrate the ideas/opinions of a third person into the paraphrased text (Plotnick, 2010).

Inadequate paraphrasing can appear in different ways. More specifically, it can take one of the following forms:

- Paraphrasing some information without reference to its source (Hu & Lei, 2012)
- Word-to-word presentation of the information which is accompanied by a relevant reference to its author (Walker, 1998)
- A small (superficial degree) modification of the source vocabulary without, however, being accompanied by a relevant reference to its author (Ehrich et al., 2014)

Patchwork plagiarism occurs when a writer copies material from several writers and rearranges it with no attempt to acknowledge the original sources and create a new text. In the new text, there may or may not be relevant references to the sources used for its creation (Klausman, 1999; Tauginienė et al., 2018). This type of plagiarism includes both direct plagiarism and paraphrasing plagiarism (Klausman, 1999).

Getting help from another person to write a paper includes several practices related to providing help (Karasalidis & Embalotis, 2017, 2018). Practices such as borrowing an assignment, buying an assignment as well as outsourcing the writing of an assignment to another person are also expressions of plagiarism (Howard, 1995; Park, 2004; Karasalidis & Embalotis, 2018).

The incorrect way in which citations are presented and the errors in citations are also forms of plagiarism. Such an erroneous presentation of the citations in a text comprises errors in the citations, use of incomplete data as well as citations to non-existent bibliographic sources (Roberts, 2008; Karasalidis & Embalotis, 2018).

2. Available software for detecting plagiarism

Both technological evolution and the rapid development of the Internet have contributed to the upsurge in plagiarism cases (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2011; Lehman & DuFrene, 2011). More specifically, the evolution of the Internet along with the easy access and copying of texts belonging to third parties have fostered the plagiarism phenomenon (Lehman & DuFrene, 2011). Based on the above, it appears that this progress has taken its toll by increasing the incidence of plagiarism. Technology has now turned its attention to the effective detection of plagiarism (Lyon, Barret & Malcom, 2006).

A variety of software has, therefore, been developed to detect the presence or absence of plagiarism. These software products detect the existence or non-existence of similarities between the text to be examined and other scientific works, and thus calculate the percentage of an 'eventual' plagiarism (Avramidou, 2014). Given the fact that there is no software that can decide on its own whether a scientific paper/work is a product of plagiarism, we have opted for the term eventual

plagiarism (Avramidou, 2014). It should be also noted that after informing students about the use of plagiarism control software, there was a decrease in plagiarism cases (Mazer & Hunt, 2012). Barrett and Malcolm (2006) report that the use of authenticity report data by the students themselves (checking of own their work to improve their writing) resulted in a decrease in the percentage of plagiarism. Plagiarism software products appear quite similar in terms of how they work (Avramidou, 2014). More specifically, these software products compare the submitted file with a large volume of available web material, ultimately providing the user with a text originality report as well as the corresponding text coincidence (Avramidou, 2014; Karasolidis & Embalotis, 2018). The available software for plagiarism are the following (Avramidou, 2014; Naik et al., 2015):

- Turnitin software

The Turnitin software (<https://www.turnitin.com/>) is a relatively common control software for plagiarism. A text file or individual phrases are inserted in this specific software and once the check is concluded, a report is extracted where grammatical, syntactic and lexical errors noted. This software consists of a database that is used during the plagiarism check and it includes more than 45 billion websites, 337 million student articles and 130,000 scientific journals.

- Ephorus or Turnitin | Ephorus software

The Ephorus software (<https://www1.ephorus.com/>) entails three services in total: the Ephorus Internet that compares documents on the Internet, the Ephorus group that compares documents with those of parallel student groups and the Ephorus database that compares documents with those already submitted in the past or documents that have been submitted to other educational institutions through an Ephorus account. When visiting the website of the specific program (<https://www1.ephorus.com/#/documents>) and at the very point of the software where the users sign in to the application, the Turnitin | Ephorus logo appears. This may be due to a possible collaboration between the Ephorus and Turnitin software. This software is referred to as Turnitin | Ephorus, as it was used in the practical example carried out for the dissertation.

- Copyspace software

The Copyspace software (<https://www.copyscape.com/>) is a free software for the detection of plagiarism which does not require any installation as it works online. When using it, the user enters only the URLs from web pages and examines their text to verify the existence or not of plagiarism.

- Urkund software

The Urkund software (<https://www.urkund.com/support/contact-support/>) is an automated plagiarism detection system. It is a user-friendly software as the whole check process is automated. More specifically, the whole process of both checking and giving information about its results is carried out by sending emails, while there is no need to access the site or register/connect to it. Based on the above, the only prerequisite for the user is to know how to send and read emails.

- Essay Verification Engine 2 (Eve2) software

To use the Eve2 software, you need to install it on your computer. The software accepts a text file and after checking it, it informs the user about the URLs of the web pages (links to web pages) containing the original text and extracts a report with the plagiarism rates. Should a case of plagiarism is detected, the software points it out in colour.

- Viper software

The Viper software (<https://www.scanmyessay.com/>) is a free plagiarism detection software that has no restrictions on the extent of the text to be checked. The database it uses for such check compares the text to be checked with over 10 billion online sources.

- iThenticate software

The iThenticate software (<http://www.ithenticate.com/>) is a free plagiarism detection and avoidance software. This software runs an online check and it is designed to be compatible with the most commonly used browsers. It accepts all types of text files such as MSWord, Open Office, WordPerfect, PDF, Word XML, PostScript, RTF, HTML and HWP. The only limitation it presents is related to the total size of the file to be checked (it should not exceed 400 pages or 40 MB), while once the check is completed, it does not store the file in question.

- Plagiarism Detector software

The Plagiarism Detector software (<https://plagiarismdetector.net/>) is an online software that can be used to check the eventuality of plagiarism. A free trial version of the software is available to the public for short text check (1000-word limit). This software uses an algorithm according to which the text to be examined is divided into sentences and after that, these suggestions are sent for check to a search engine that uses this software. These suggestions are further analysed via the search engine and a report with the results of the check performed is ultimately issued. This report includes the plagiarism percentage of the checked text, as well as a list of the files where a textual coincidence was observed.

- Plagiarism Checker software

The Plagiarism Checker software (<http://www.plagiarismchecker.com/>) is an online free plagiarism software. Thanks to its design and its ability to check files that contain text, it can also check websites for the existence of plagiarism incidents. This check is carried out using the URL of the website to be checked.

- Wcopyfind software

The Wcopyfind software (<https://plagiarism.bloomfieldmedia.com/software/wcopyfind/>) is also one of the available software for plagiarism detection. An advantage of this software is its ability to simultaneously compare many documents (candidates for check) and ultimately inform the user about the possibility of them being copies of each other or of some other document.

- SPLaT software

The SPLaT software is a specialised software (<http://splat.cs.arizona.edu/>) for detecting cases of self-plagiarism. This software searches the Internet for previously published articles/texts by the author of the text to be checked and basically compares the newly checked article/text with previous publications by the same author, so as to identify the rate of plagiarism (if applicable).

- Dupli Checker software

The Dupli Checker software (<https://www.duplichecker.com/>) is a free software for detecting plagiarism. There is no need to install the program on the user's computer as the latter can enter and perform the control online. To do so, the user enters the text to be checked in the Dupli Checker software either by copying and pasting it or as a file with specific extensions (.tex, .txt, .doc, .docx, .odt, .pdf, .rtf). What is more, this software can also check websites for the possibility of plagiarism. The process is quite simple as you only have to enter the URL of the website to be checked in the corresponding part of the online software.

3. Disadvantages of plagiarism detection software

Although plagiarism control is a very useful tool for those who are involved in science, the corresponding software products have the following disadvantages (Avramidou, 2014):

- The database used by the control software does not include all available online resources, but only some of them.
- The control performed by this software is limited to the comparison of the file to be checked with the digital sources included in the program database. The possibility of checking the textual coincidence of the file to be checked with pre-existing printed material is, therefore, excluded during the control process.
- There are issues related to their proper operation (i.e., the software effectiveness to detect textual coincidences) in case the text to be checked is in a different language from the language of the source/control or happens to be a translated text.
- The authenticity report of the text to be checked provides the user with hints only of plagiarism expressed in terms of a textual coincidence percentage (%), while the user has to carry out further quality control. During the quality control, the text to be checked is compared to the proposed sources in order to conclude whether there is plagiarism or not.

4. Methodology of reviewing bibliography

The final dissertation was based on a systematic search for relevant published studies and the content of specific web pages. The compilation of articles was founded on a thorough research in scientific databases using combinations of the following keywords in Greek and English: Plagiarism, Education, Software, Check and Detection. The methodological limitation of this paper was that the search and collection were carried out for articles written only in the Greek and English languages. In this particular article, we performed a check for plagiarism in an already published research article (Gkrilias et al., 2018), an example of which can be downloaded at the following link (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6016287/pdf/jpts-30-888.pdf>). This task was tested using the Turnitin | Ephorus software.

The purpose of this study was to inform its readers, through a review of the existing literature, about the cases of plagiarism in education and the available software that can be used to check the existence or non-existence of plagiarism. Also, in this particular project, we performed a check for plagiarism in an already published research article (Gkrilias et al., 2018) as an example. This task was tested using the Turnitin | Ephorus software.

The research questions that this paper was bound to answer were the following:

1. What are the types-cases of plagiarism according to the literature?
2. Is there any available software and what is its function in checking the presence or absence of plagiarism?
3. Are there any results obtained through plagiarism control in terms of a practical application example?

5. Data analysis and presentation of results

In this paper, an example of plagiarism control (as a case study) was carried out. The object of such a control was an already published research paper (research article in a foreign journal) entitled 'The relationship between isokinetic strength and functional performance tests in patients with knee osteoarthritis', in which I participated as the main author; you can download it at the following link: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6016287/pdf/jpts-30-888.pdf>. This case study was tested using the Turnitin | Ephorus software (<https://www1.ephorus.com/>) and consists of three services in total: the Ephorus Internet that compares documents on the Internet, the Ephorus group that compares documents with those of parallel student groups and the Ephorus database that compares documents with those of previous timesheets or documents that have been submitted to other educational institutions with an Ephorus account (Naik, Landge & Mahender, 2015). Both the steps and the control process, as well as the test results are presented in the steps below:

- Step 1

We first found and downloaded in .pdf format (Fig.1) this article from the PubMed database (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>).



Fig. 1. The PubMed database

- Step 2
Once the article was found and downloaded (in .pdf format) from the PubMed database via the link given in parenthesis (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6016287/pdf/jpts-30-888.pdf>), we logged in (by entering the appropriate credentials, i.e., the email account and username) the Turnitin | Ephorus website (<https://www1.ephorus.com/#/documents>).
- Step 3
After successfully logging in the Turnitin | Ephorus software website, we created, imported and uploaded the folder as a control file (article in .pdf format) to the Turnitin | Ephorus control software.
- Step 4
Immediately after completing the creation, importing and uploading of the folder to be checked (article in .pdf format), the Turnitin | Ephorus control software performed the test procedure for the detection of presence or absence of textual coincidence both with other sources/files found on the Internet and with previously submitted files within the Turnitin | Ephorus. Screenshots of the checking process (article in .pdf format) and its results are shown in Fig. 2.



Fig. 2. Turnitin | Ephorus screenshot

With a simple observation in the report (Summary report), it can be seen that the only parts that show textual coincidence according to the Turnitin | Ephorus software are the following:

- A section of the copyrighted text (this is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution) and inserted by that journal into the final format of articles published in it.
- Some of the sources in the last part of the article (References) where, as in all published articles, authors fully list the

sources they used in the article. This specific point of textual coincidence cannot be considered as something 'problematic', but as something normal.

Conclusions

In recent years, there has been both an accelerated development of technology and a rapid spread of the Internet with a great impact on many areas of our lives, including education. This can be attributed to the easy access of the public to both electronic libraries and databases of various educational content (Avramidou, 2014). It has become a commonplace to search for information material through a multitude of available sources without the necessary critical treatment and understanding of these sources for the composition of new material, leading inevitably to its appropriation by third parties, in other words, to the actual copying of texts without reference to their author (Avramidou & Kekkeris, 2012; Avramidou, 2014). So, in recent years, there have been an ever-increasing number of plagiarism instances in education. According to the articles, there are several underlying factors for the occurrence of plagiarism. Due to the large extent of the phenomenon in question, specialised software solutions have been developed and are available for use to check the presence or absence of plagiarism. The readers of this present paper have been informed both about cases of plagiarism in education and the software available to be used to check the existence or non-existence of cases of plagiarism.

What is more, as mentioned before, a case study for plagiarism was carried out in the context of this paper. The subject matter of this case study was an already published research paper. This task was tested using the Turnitin | Ephorus software.

In the Summary report that was exported by the Turnitin | Ephorus software after the analysis of the case study, the only parts of the text that show textual coincidence with other files are the ones highlighted in red. A simple observation of this Summary report reveals that the only sections that show textual coincidence according to the Turnitin | Ephorus software are the following:

- A section of the copyrighted text and inserted by that journal into the final format of all articles published in it.
- Some of the sources in the last part of the article (References). This specific kind of textual coincidence cannot be considered as something problematic, but as something rather normal.

Based on the above, it appears that although the Turnitin | Ephorus control software estimated a text coincidence score of 5%, this score cannot practically be considered as something problematic, given the fact that the quality control concluded that the textual coincidence came from parts of the text where such an incident is absolutely normal to happen. This issue can also be considered as one of the major drawbacks of plagiarism software. More specifically, the authenticity report of the text to be checked provides the user with hints only of plagiarism by extracting its textual coincidence percentage (%), while the user has to perform a further quality control. During the quality control, the text to be checked is compared to the proposed sources to determine the existence or not of plagiarism (Avramidou, 2014). In our specific case, comparison of the text to be checked (article in a journal) with the proposed sources led to the conclusion that there is no substantial issue of plagiarism. This example pointed out the importance of performing a further quality control to those parts of the text where a textual coincidence was spotted by the plagiarism detection software.

As already mentioned, the quality control did not reveal anything problematic in the article. Nevertheless, in other cases where the quality control may highlight cases of textual coincidence in the main part of an article/document, the following question arises: Above which textual coincidence percentage may the text in question be considered as a plagiarism product? More specifically, and as mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper, in relation to this issue, there is no universally established textual coincidence percentage above which the text under consideration can be considered as a plagiarism product. According to Foltýnek et al. (2019), non-textual feature analysis and machine learning are particularly beneficial for detecting strongly obfuscated forms of plagiarism, such as semantics-preserving and idea-preserving plagiarism. In an attempt, however, to avoid such phenomena, most universities inform their students that any copy of more than three consecutive words from a text by another author should be accompanied by a reference to the source from which it was obtained (Kafantaris, 2012; Avramidou, 2014).

In conclusion, a review of the existing articles/literature was conducted where the main focus was laid on the cases of plagiarism in education and the software that are available for the detection of plagiarism. An example of such a plagiarism control (as a case study) was also carried out in the framework of which the acquired knowledge was put into practice. The control process stages as well as the information on the actions of each stage were presented in this specific way, so that this part of this paper can serve as a guide for future controls.

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