The Ethical Practices of Plagiarism Management in Higher Education

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Abstract. This research aims to explore and identify students' approach to minimize the plagiarism result. The method used is descriptive method with a sample of 241 students' undergraduate thesis and final report from accounting department of State Polytechnic of Malang in 2020. The plagiarism test itself is conducted with Turnitin. Furthermore, before the document is tested, the researchers will first skim over it to make sure that there is no cheat to be found. The result is 139 documents need to be sent back to the students, since it is not feasible to be tested while 29 documents did not pass the plagiarism tolerance of 25%. It can be concluded from this result that students, particularly students in their last year of college in accounting department in state polytechnic of malang, needs to be more aware of how to construct a report in a constructive way and at the same time comply with the academic integrity.

Keywords: Plagiarism · Ethics · Research integrity

1 Introduction

Undergraduate thesis or final report is a research article that college students must complete to get their degree before they graduate. Thus, it is important to confirm that these reports comply with the guidelines to complete it. Guidelines are made so that students could write their thesis in accordance with their scope as well as uniforming the thesis itself. Each Universities or colleges has their own guidelines that differ from each other, but quite similar at the same time. Nowadays plagiarism test has become one of the requirements that is put in the guidelines. Thus, passing this test is an obligation for students to complete their thesis.

Plagiarism is an act of replicating other people's work without asking their permission or acknowledging their work [1]. Several meanings from different language like latin even define the word plagiary as theft or act of stealing [2]. The consequences of plagiarism in the academic should have been known for researchers. The lightest penalty comes form the ban of publishing their articles for several time, whilst the heaviest are being stripped of their position, even if their position is as high as the president of the university or college, or being stripped of their degree, even if he/she is already a professor.

In developing countries, the emergence of this test may not be as prominent as in the developed countries. However, several studies stated that due to the awareness of plagiarism that happened in developing countries and the advance of technology in detecting it, the plagiarims case in developing countries has continued to surface [3–5]. In developing countries, the plagiarism cases are mostly detected in higher education institutions. In addition, most students who has done the plagiarism may not be aware of doing it or the implications. They mostly took the source from the internet such as Google or other classmate's work and put it in their assignment with minimum or no paraphrasing. This practice stems from the assumption that doing so in class assignment is a normal occurrence, what with the teachers will have a hard time to pinpoint which work is plagiarised and which one is the original [4]. This practise should be prevented from the early stage, as early as the beginning of enrolment, to make sure that it will not be used when it is the time for the students to make their final report.

Due to the significant importance of testing the final report or thesis to be 'free' of plagiarism of a certain level, higher education institutions should make sure that the students understand the importance of this practise, as well as the compliance with the guidelines. State Polytechnic of Malang is one of a higher education institution that focused on developing the hand-to-hand skill of the students as part of their courses. Approximately, the proportions for it's course is 40% theory and 60% practical skill. Thus, students in Polytechnic might not be often to do writing assignment as many as university students. Consequently, their writing skill might be somewhat not as polished as their peers in the university. Hence, it depends on the teacher's guidance to make sure that the students can write well and at the same time prevent them from doing it in the wrong way.

There are several ways to find plagiarism among the students's work. One way to verify it is by using plagiarism software. This test is conducted to determine that students do not use other people's idea and make is as their own without putting their own ideas or acknowledging the original author. Most plagiarism software itself is user friendly and can be customized according to the user's need. So, it should be easy for teachers to operate and check the student's assignment for detecting plagiarism. However, the cost of the software itself is not cheap. In this college for example, the software itself is only available for teachers's research and recently for testing the final report of the students. Hence, it is quite costly if teachers want to check the plagiarism for every assignment. On the other hand, there are free similarity checker online that could check plagiarism for around 1000 words for every paper, and it's completely free. Teacher could use this, besides checking it manually, to approximate the plagiarism percentage on the student's assignment.

If this method is applied at the very beginning of class, then the students will have to learn how to write accordingly and prevent them to pursue the illegal act such as plagiarism in the future. However, it is important to understand that technology is a double-edged sword. The more advanced it is, there will be more benefit as well as disadvantage for using it. In the case of plagiarism, more cases will be surfaced when people are more aware of it and how it is checked by the plagiarism software. The software has several loopholes that can be exploited by those who want to bypass the test without paraphrasing the source. And this practice is sadly widely spread through social media,

and it will take time to check the document manually. Thus, in this paper the researchers want to explore and identify students' approach to minimize the plagiarism result, particularly in State Polytechnic of Malang as one of the higher education institutions that use plagiarism checker to verify the quality of the final report of its students.

2   Methodology

The method used is descriptive method with a sample of 241 students' undergraduate thesis and final report from accounting department of State Polytechnic of Malang in 2020. The researchers will first check the documents manually to verify the there is no cheat to be found and the documents are feasible to be tested. The plagiarism software that is used is Turnitin with a tolerance of 25%. The tolerance of 25% is decided because this is the first time the department will use plagiarims software to check the plagiarism in the final reports of its students. When it is found that there are cheat in the documents, the researchers will send it back to the student to revise it before testing it in the software. The documents will be send back too if the plagiarism number is higher than 25%.

The departments at first are using 3 kinds of software, which is Plagscan, Ithenticate and Turnitin. However, due to the easy use of turnitin, it is decided to use only this software in the middle of testing. Nonetheless, the result among the 3 software is similar. Thus, the data from all 3 software will be included in this research.

3   Results and Discussion

The result is among 241 documents, 139 need to be sent back to the students, since it is not feasible to be tested while 29 documents did not pass the plagiarism tolerance of 25%. There are several reasons as to why the documents is not appropriate to be tested.

3.1   Students' Approach to Pass Plagiarism Test

- Using Typo

  Typo is most commonly used tricks to decrease the plagiarism result. By deliberately mistyping several words in the document, it proves to reduce the percentage of plagiarism. To detect this trick, researchers must skim over the documents manually, and while it took time to find it, it will be worth it if the students understand that using this kind of trick will not make them pass the plagiarism test. Usually the most popular typo that the students use is using space and make it into double space, triple space, etc., or they will erase the space altogether so the words will combine together and pass the plagiarims software check.

  Another kind of typo is mistyping the citation in the documents, either by mistyping the author's name or use incorrect way of citing. This kind of typo is harder to find, since the researchers must check in the internet whether the name of the author that the students cited is correct or not.

- White Font

  White font is one other trick that is tremendously able to reduce the plagiarism test. White font means that students use font that is colored white which is invisible if the paper color is white. At first glance it is hard to detect this practice since the white font is perfectly hidden among the words in the document. The first time the researchers found out about this is when the plagiarism result is exceptionally low even if several sentences in the document is matched with sources in the internet. As the researchers try to find out whether the result is due to the error in the plagiarism software, which is unlikely, one of the researchers found out that the cursor seems to drop and become smaller between words. After being zoomed in, it is clear that there are some kind of character in between words. Thus, to make sure of that, all of the word in the document are changed to size 12 and switch the color font to black. What was found in the document astonished the researchers. There are a lot of hidden characters being slipped between words. The hidden characters almost covered the entire document. Hence it is no wonder that the plagiarims result is incredibly low, considering that the software could not even detect any word since almost every word are unreadable due to the slipped character.

  As this finding is certainly important, the researchers send the document back to the student with a warning that if the student do not revise this and persistently using other kind of trick, then he or she will have to face the department since this is clearly a breach of research integrity.

- The one (1) and L similarity

  The guidelines for the final report in State Polytechnic of Malang describe that one of the font type that is allowed to be used is times new roman. This font is commonly used in writing scientific article since reading in this font is easier and generally more preferable than other fonts [6]. However, there is an interesting characteristic in this font, in which the letter of l (L) and one (1) is written similarly. This characteristic was then being abused by the students by replacing the word that contain L letter in it with number one. When being skimmed over, this trick is quite harder to notice since those letters are indeed similar with each other. However, once all the font type is changed into another, such as arial, then the difference is glaringly obvious.

  The researcher will send this kind of documents back to the students to be revised with a similar warning when they use the white font trick. This is because doing it is the same as breaking the guidelines as well as preventing them to be able to write with integrity.

- Pictures

  One obvious loophole in plagiarism software checker is that they are not able to check the similarity of an image in the documents. If the image in the documents are images of graph or chart, then there is no problem. However what the researchers found is that many of the images in the documents are tables, formula and even some part of the paragraph. It is not quite hard to find these images, since based on the quality of the images, they are pretty obvious. In addition, the cursor will skip them if the researchers cannot see them clearly.

  The documents that was found containing this will be sent back to the students also, and the researchers will ask them to revise it by changing the pictures back into word.

- Language

  In Accounting Department State Polytechnic of Malang, the students are free to choose whether they want to write their final report in Indonesia Language or in English. However, they should be consistent in which language they want to use, and not to mix the languages. There are certain terms that is only available in English, however there are also terms that is being transitioned into Indonesian, so the students should understand not to mix them up. To check whether the terms they want to use is available in Indonesia, the researchers encourage the students to check it in the KBBI (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia), which is an Indonesian dictionary that is also accessible online.

  Even if the students have been told not to mix the language, the researchers still found in several documents the mix of language not only in English and Indonesian, but also Malay. Some even use word that is not found in the dictionary as they 'invent' the word themselves. This kind of practice can help to reduce the plagiarism, but it will reduce the quality of the article, since it will be hard to read or understand it.

  Grammar is also part of the reason the researchers are sending the documents back to the students. The students might not have as many writing assignments as their peers in the university. However, this should not prevent them to try writing a scientific article with a correct grammar. However, bad grammar is one of the most reason for the researchers to send the paper back to the students, besides mistype. Many of the grammar in the paper is deliberatly being messed up so it can pass the plagiarism test, however in doing so, the meaning of the paper is lost and it is hard to understand what the students want to convey in their writing.

  Using acronym or abbreviation is also one way the students want to reduce the plagiarism result. It should be noted that before using the acronym, they should explain what it is and write the meaning behind the word. However, there are several word that is put in the documents without the explanation of the acronym, making it hard for the reader to understand when they read this paper. Thus, the researchers will ask them to revise it thoroughly until it is deemed readable before testing it to the plagiarism software.

- Citation

  How to cite from sources such as internet, journal or books has been explicitly written in the guidelines for the final report. However, the researchers still find some citation that is not written correctly. The mistakes consisted of not putting the years of the citation, writing the full name of the authors instead of the last name, and messing up the order of the citation. Since the incorrect way to cite will also affect the result of the plagiarism, the researchers will send the paper back to the students, as well as reminding them to follow the guidelines in citing sources.

  Several approach that is used by the students to pass the plagiarism test is mostly consisted of practice that has not comply the guidelines or follow the research integrity. These practices also should be checked manually before being tested by plagiarism software. This kind of detection will take a lot of time as well as energy to do it, since the number of the documents to check is not little. Thus, there should be more efficient way to prevent this practice to happen. There are several suggestions to decrease this practice as well as preventing the plagiarism result above the tolerance level.

3.2 Workshop of Plagiarism

First and foremost, important thing to raise the awareness of plagiarism is to provide information about plagiarism. Most students usually do this practice due to their limited knowledge about it. This workshop could cover from the definition of plagiarism, the impact of it, why is it must be prevented, etc. [7]. Combining the workshop with paraphrasing exercise as well as in depth discussion about it could also help students to understand more about it. This kind of workshop could not work well if it is only held once at the last semester. Since plagiarism is also an act that thrive from culture, it is best to cut it from the bud by emphasizing the importance of it since the beginning. Thus, it is suggested that this workshop is held at the beginning, in the middle and also at the end of semester.

3.3 Setting a Clear Guidance for Plagiarism

Another way to prevent plagiarism is to set a clear guidance for plagiarism (Walker, 1998). Aside of understanding what a plagiarism is to the students, it is also important to set rules as well as sanctions for those that try to bypass the plagiarism test by illegal means. This set of rules not only will make the students aware of the consequences at the lightest, but also to culture their ethics to do what is right.

3.4 Designing Specified Curriculum

Building ethics is a tremendous effort that should be done not only from the academic staff but also from the students and institutions' stakeholder [8]. Hence, it is important to build it form the core of the academic. Promoting integrity could be inserted in courses that cover and encourage it, such as subjects in behavioral or ethics. By doing this, hopefully this concept will not only be introduced to the students, but also seeped into their behavior.

3.5 Make a Team that Focused on Testing Plagiarism

It is also suggested that there should be a team of individuals that dedicated themselves to plagiarism work [9]. This way, if there are students who want to understand more about this, they will know where to go. The existence of this team should also help the academic staff to operate the plagiarism software as well as giving them help in reducing the plagiarism result if it is still above the allowed tolerance. This will push and encourage the teachers and students alike to pursue more research and publications without worrying about plagiarism.

4   Conclusion

Based on the findings in this paper, it can be concluded that plagiarism in Department of Accounting, State Polytechnic of Malang is still high. Considering that this is the first time the department conducted this test to the student's final report, there are a lot of

students that find this test to be confusing as well as not used to paraphrase sentences. The result that differs from other papers are the findings of the bad practices that is done before the document is tested with plagiarism software. It means that checking the documents before it is put to the software also prove that it is an important step to do. It is also important to note that to prevent plagiarism, it is not enough with just introducing this term at the end of the semester for the preparations of writing final report for the student. This prevention method should be applicable at the beginning of the semester to culture the students about their integrity and ethics.

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