Strategies for improving students’ awareness of plagiarism

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Abstract

Plagiarism is a serious issue for all educational institutions. Therefore, providing students with proper knowledge and skills to avoid plagiarism is essential. This study reports a project which demonstrates strategies to help university students improve their awareness of plagiarism. It was conducted at a private university in Ho Chi Minh City. The project had 277 participants who were students of English majors. This was a mix-method study. Results show that strategies applied in the project were effective.

*Key words: plagiarism, strategies

1. Introduction

Helgesson & Eriksson (2015) suggested that plagiarism means using someone else’s intellectual product. Moreover, plagiarism can be changing the semantics of texts or adopting critical ideas and contributions of others (Alzahrani, Salim, & Abraham, 2011). Anderson, and Steneck (2011) added that plagiarism is the misrepresentation of someone’s work, without proper acknowledgement of the original authors.

Ramzan, Munir, Siddique, & Asif (2012) reported that a significant number of students in Pakistan admitted that they plagiarized intentionally. Ehrich, Howard, Mu, & Bokosmaty (2016) claim that plagiarism among students has been increasing in Australia and around the world. For example, 80% of university students in Australia plagiarized (Shang, 2019). In Nigeria, a study showed that plagiarism was growing in the scholarly communities (Olutola, 2016). The situation of plagiarism is an alert when it has been reported in many countries including Hong Kong (Li, 2015), China (Hu & Shen, 2020;
James, Miller, & Wyckoff, 2019), Iraq (Ismail, 2018), New Zealand (Adam, Anderson, & Spronken-Smith, 2017), South Africa (Mahabeer, & Pirtheepal, 2019) and Indonesia (Santosa, Paramartha, & Absari, 2019).

Many studies reported various strategies of avoiding plagiarism for students. Landau, Druen, and Arcuri (2002) provided students with skills for paraphrasing. Similarly, Jackson (2006) applied an interactive Web-based tutorial to train 2,829 students to avoid plagiarism. Teaching proper citation was applied for 19 postgraduate and 34 graduate students in a study conducted by Fazilatfar, Elhambakhsh and Allami (2018). Hidayat, Suhartoyo, and Fikri (2020) trained students how to use direct quotation technique correctly. In Taiwan, an online writing tutorial namely DWRight system was implemented (Liu, Lu, Lin, & Hsu, 2018). Kettel and DeFauw (2018) used RRLC strategies (read, reread, list, compose) to equip students with skills to paraphrase without plagiarism.

In addition to training students to avoid plagiarism, strategies to detect plagiarism using software among students also reported (Nirmala & Jayaraman, 2020). The majority of studies stated that Turnitin was an effective software in avoiding plagiarism (Stander, 2020; Alrabaiah, & Zaitoun, 2019; Meo, & Talha, 2019; Shang, 2019; Daoud, Nova & Utami, 2018). In other studies, iThenticate was used (Aceron, Perez, & Gequinto, 2021; Soltani, & Jalilifar, 2020). Not using available software, Kolhar and Alameen (2020) designed an anti-plagiarism software to detect plagiarism.

2. Research Methods

This is a mixed-method research which was conducted in the first semester at a private university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam in 2020. This study has two phases: investigating students’ understandings, attitudes, and experiences on plagiarism; and training skills for students to avoid plagiarism. 120 students participated in phase One of the study and 277 students participated in phase Two of the study.
In phase One, questionnaires were sent to students to collect data. In Phase two, the procedure of improving students’ awareness of plagiarism was divided into two stages: training writing skills including using software for students and organizing seminars for larger groups of students. Paired Samples Tests were used to evaluate the effectiveness of using software and training skills in improving students’ understanding of plagiarism. T-test in SPSS was employed to analyse collected data.

Two strategies were applied to improve students’ awareness of plagiarism: training using anti-plagiarism software and writing skills; and organizing seminars. These two strategies were acted as follows:

2.1 Training using anti-plagiarism software and writing skills

There were two groups in this section: group 1 (n=24), and group 2 (n=31). The training procedure for these two groups had four steps:

   Step 1: Students in two groups were assigned to have a semi-controlled writing task. The topic was about ‘the mid-autumn festival’. Students were requested to write a paragraph in 20 minutes without the word limitation.

   Step 2: After 20 minutes, students were asked to visit the website smallseotools.com and upload their work for checking plagiarism. Students then were requested to send the reports of percentage of similarity to the lecturer (also the researcher).

   Step 3: Students were taught about citing, and paraphrasing techniques for three weeks (nine hours).

   Step 4: Students were asked to revise the paragraph about the Mid-Autumn Festival they had written before, using citing and paraphrasing techniques; then, uploading their works to the website smallseotools.com to check for plagiarism again, and compare the difference.
2.2 Organizing seminars

277 students were divided into four groups to attend four seminars. In each seminar, students were equipped a comprehensive understanding of concepts of plagiarism as well as ways to avoid plagiarism. To measure the effectiveness of the seminars, before each seminar, students in every group were invited to answer nine key questions about plagiarism via Kahoot game. After the seminar, students were asked to answer the nine questions again to compare the improvement of their awareness.

3. Results

3.1 Training using anti-plagiarism software and writing skills

This section compares the effectiveness of training using anti-plagiarism software and writing skills on two groups of students.

As seen in Figure 1, the mean of Group 1 before training (Pre-test) is 31.13 while the mean of Group 1 after training (Post-test) is 39.96. The difference between two means is -8.833, which means the mean of Post-test is higher than that of Pre-test. In addition, the
Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.001<5%, which means the paired differences are meaningful. Therefore, we can conclude that the training in this section for Group 1 is effective.

Similarly, as seen in Figure 2, the mean of Group 2 before training (Pre-test) is 21.84 while the mean of Group 1 after training (Post-test) is 27.45. The difference between two means is -5.613, which means the mean of Post-test is higher than that of Pre-test. In addition, the Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.001<5%, which means the paired differences are meaningful. Therefore, we can conclude that the training in this section for Group 2 is effective, too.

**Figure 2. Group 2: Pre-test and Post-test Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Statistics</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Std Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group: Pre-test</td>
<td>21.84</td>
<td>14.337</td>
<td>2.575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group: Post-test</td>
<td>27.45</td>
<td>17.376</td>
<td>3.121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paired Samples Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paired Samples Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3.2 Organizing seminars

This section compares the effectiveness of organizing seminars on four groups of students.

**Figure 3. Four groups: Pre-test and Post-test Results**
As seen in Figure 3, the mean of Group 1 before seminar (Pre-test) is 36.00 while the mean of Group 1 after seminar (Post-test) is 48.33. The difference between two means is -12.333, which means the mean of Post-test is higher than that of Pre-test. In addition, the Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.001<5%, which means the paired differences are meaningful. Therefore, we can conclude that the seminar in this section for Group 1 is effective.

As seen in Figure 3, the mean of Group 2 before seminar (Pre-test) is 37.89 while the mean of Group 2 after seminar (Post-test) is 46.22. The difference between two means is -8.333, which means the mean of Post-test is higher than that of Pre-test. In addition, the
Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.001<5%, which means the paired differences are meaningful. Therefore, we can conclude that the seminar in this section for Group 2 is effective.

As seen in Figure 3, the mean of Group 3 before seminar (Pre-test) is 40.44 while the mean of Group 3 after seminar (Post-test) is 46.11. The difference between two means is -5.667, which means the mean of Post-test is higher than that of Pre-test. In addition, the Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.029<5%, which means the paired differences are meaningful. Therefore, we can conclude that the seminar in this section for Group 3 is effective.

As seen in Figure 3, the mean of Group 4 before seminar (Pre-test) is 39.33 while the mean of Group 3 after seminar (Post-test) is 50.67. The difference between two means is -11.333, which means the mean of Post-test is higher than that of Pre-test. In addition, the Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.006<5%, which means the paired differences are meaningful. Therefore, we can conclude that the seminar in this section for Group 4 is effective.

4. Discussions and conclusion

Three results in this project align with many previous studies. First, the study found that before training, there was a high percentage of plagiarism among students. This finding is similar with other studies including (Bokosmaty, 2016; Olutola, 2016; Shang, 2019). Second, this study proved that providing students with writing skills for paraphrasing and proper citations was effective to avoid plagiarism. This result supports Druen, and Arcuri (2002), Fazilatfar, Elhambakhsh and Allami, (2018), Hidayat, Suhartooyo, and Fikri (2020). Third, the study discovered that training students on how to use anti-plagiarism software would help them reduce the similarities in their writing. This result is supported by (Nirmala & Jayaraman, 2020). Finally, this study added a new result that by organizing seminars would improve students’ understanding of plagiarism.

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