DIFFERENCES IN LOCAL RESPONSES TO PLAGIARISM IN FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Erja Moore

Abstract:

Student cheating and student plagiarism are issues that have not raised national discussion in Finland. There are no statistics and no nation-wide research on the extent of cheating and plagiarism in higher education. The survey conducted in Finland within the IPPHEAE-project (Glendinning, 2013a) showed that the majority of teachers disagreed with the statement that similar cases of plagiarism lead to similar consequences.

This paper presents the implementation of plagiarism policies in Finnish universities. Web-pages describing plagiarism policies in all higher education institutions ($n = 39$) were analysed in order to develop a picture of the Finnish universities' policy and procedure dealing with the issue of plagiarism. Secondly, thematic content analysis was conducted on administrative procedures and decisions taken with regard to four different cases of plagiarism in theses, which were dealt with in different universities during 2012–2014.

This paper shows that explicit and implicit rules were used in decision making regarding plagiarism, and that the approaches taken by the higher education community differed. The administrative decisions and processes in case of suspected plagiarism differed in different universities and social contexts despite national recommendations and laws. The decisions taken also demonstrated the power relations between the actors (students, teachers and administrators) within a university and between two powerful social institutions – higher education and law.

Key words: plagiarism; plagiarism policy; Finnish higher education

1   Introduction

Plagiarism in higher education has raised a lot of discussion and research internationally. Plagiarism is seen as threat to the quality of the higher education institution to guarantee the high quality of learning outcomes and research, and plagiarism prevention policies have been developed on national and institutional levels. Plagiarism is one of the difficult issues that every higher education institution faces, and to deal with it the institution needs good practices and consensus (Sutherland-Smith, 2014, p. 40).

However, in Finland the situation seems to differ from that in many other countries that have put a lot of effort in research and development of plagiarism prevention. Plagiarism in studying and research are issues that still have not raised national discussion in Finland. There are no statistics and no nation-wide research on how common plagiarism in education is, and neither is there any knowledge about other forms of cheating. In a rare study about students' writing practices, the accuracy of referencing in electronically published theses in Finland was analysed, and it was evident that plagiarism is accepted in polytechnics as clear plagiarism was found in many theses that had been accepted and published in 2012 (Moore, 2014).

In Finland, there is a dual system of higher education consisting of 14 (research) universities and 25 universities of applied sciences (polytechnics) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015). Both sectors can award Bachelor's and Master's degrees, but

doctoral degrees are only awarded by research universities. In 2013, there were 167000 students in universities and 140000 students in polytechnics. In 2013, the universities granted a total of 30300 degrees and polytechnics 25000 degrees (Statistics Finland, 2015.) Universities and polytechnics enjoy public funding for the autonomy in their functions, and studying is free of charge for the students.

Legislation on universities and polytechnics states that every degree taken in a higher education institution must include a thesis. In universities, the Bachelor's thesis is allocated 6–10 study points and the Master's thesis 30–40 study points (Government decree on university degrees, 2004). The legislation on polytechnics states that in every degree there has to be a thesis, but it does not specify the size of the thesis. (Government decree on polytechnics, 2003.) Most common practice is that a Bachelor's thesis is 15 study points and a Master's thesis 30 study points. Many higher education institutions have started to publish students' theses electronically. Polytechnics have their own publication forum Theseus (Theseus, 2015). Universities publish some theses on their faculties' web-pages.

2   Plagiarism prevention and quality assurance in higher education

Electronic plagiarism detection systems are widely used in higher education in order to ensure the main purpose of education: learning. To earn a degree, the student is required to learn the subjects that have been included in the programme curriculum. Assessment of learning is one of the main tasks of university teachers. This is mainly through essays and finally in a thesis, and instead of evaluation of exams the teachers read and evaluate and give feedback on student writing. When it comes to writing, however, the availability of electronic publications has made copying and paraphrasing existing texts so easy that some students take the chance and copy such material when preparing their assignments.

The use of plagiarism detection can be seen as part of universities' quality assurance in their pursuit to provide high quality learning results. Sutherland-Smith (2014, p. 29) states that *"in universities around the world, plagiarism management is an ongoing issue of quality assurance and risk management"*. She introduces three national contexts of plagiarism management, United Kingdom, Australia and Sweden, and finds competing discourses in plagiarism management. Plagiarism management can follow the discourse of legality, discourse of teaching academic writing or it can be a discourse of quality assurance. (Sutherland-Smith, 2014). In plagiarism research, two approaches towards handling plagiarism are often identified: (the student-friendly) preventive model approach and the punitive model approach focusing on sanctions. In the preventive model of plagiarism policy students learn about academic integrity, ethics and writing. The main focus is on the first year of studies, and electronic plagiarism detection is used in the phase of learning academic writing and referencing. The punitive model is seen to just to concentrate on sanctions, and teachers can be seen as "police officers". (cf. e.g. Sutherland-Smith, 2014; Walker & White, 2014.)

In Finland, until 2014, The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) was responsible for monitoring and assuring quality in higher education. The institu-

tions' quality assurance systems were audited (and some institutions re-audited) in 2005–2014. The audit manual highlighted the self-evaluation report prepared by the institution. The word plagiarism was not mentioned in the audit manual (FINHEEC, 2011) and it is not mentioned in any of the institutional audit reports (FINHEEC, 2015)[1]. In 2014, a new council, Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, took over the task of evaluation of education at all levels. In national higher education discourse, the quality assurance of higher education has been placed on the institutions themselves. The audits of quality assurance include a self evaluation report, which is provided by the institution, and audit visits where the evaluators meet staff chosen by the institution. In the new Audit Manual by Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (2015) plagiarism or plagiarism detection are still not mentioned.

Universities report their results to the Ministry of Education and Culture and data about quantitative measures (e.g. number of degrees, number of study credits) are collected. However, no qualitative data about the learning or assessment of the level of learning and knowledge of students is reported. With regard to issues of plagiarism in higher education, quality evaluation data is completely missing in Finland. Performing audits of quality assurance systems that rely only on self evaluation and on quantitative data, and the lack of (external) evaluation on teaching and learning practices and outcomes, have led the education system to a situation that there is no evidence of the quality of learning and qualifications provided by current higher education institutions. As Sutherland-Smith (2014, p. 36) has put it: *"It is likely that a university will construct a position during the audit phase that does not necessarily reflect its true working situation"*. Furthermore, aspects of ethical issues on quality are missing and not discussed (Finnish Education Evaluation Council, 2015), even though all higher education institutions have agreed to follow national guidelines of good scientific practice and procedure for handling allegations of misconduct (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012). In the guidelines plagiarism is defined as *"unacknowledged borrowing"*, *"representing another person's material as one's own without appropriate references."* The definition also specifies that *"plagiarism includes direct copying as well as adapted copying"* (p. 32).

The survey conducted in Finland within the IPPHEAE-project (Glendinning, 2013a) showed that the majority of teachers disagreed with the statement that similar cases of plagiarism lead to similar consequences. There was no consensus about what constitutes plagiarism. If plagiarism is found or suspected in student's work *"there is no consistent response within or between institutions"* (Glendinning, 2013a, p. 14). The only Finnish study evaluating student's writing and referencing skills gave an unexpected result: even without the use of electronic plagiarism detection system, 12 percent of the theses (n = 91) published in Theseus contained plagiarised material, and further 13 percent of theses contained sloppy and misleading referencing. (Moore, 2014.)

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[1]There is one exception. In an audit report published in 2014 plagiarism is mentioned twice in one sentence. The wording is vague, though, and refers to research and international students: *"TTY has taken into use a database application to detect plagiarism and as in the thematic interview on quality assurance of international affairs it was pointed out also cultural differences are taken into account in the information about plagiarism in research in TTY."* (Mäki et al., 2014, p. 43)

Although a plagiarism detection system was acquired by some Finnish polytechnics in 2009, data on the extent of plagiarism were not produced (Moore 2010). In 2012, however, an appeal to survey the procurement and use of electronic plagiarism detection systems was responded to by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the issue was delegated to a project (Raketti) that had been appointed in 2007 to develop *"a current, encompassing and reliable and also automatically updated data base" for management of higher education institutions and for the use of the whole university level system* (Raketti, 2015). The steering group of the Raketti-project stated in their memorandum in June 2012 that *"the assurance of high quality of research ethics in theses is a central issue in credibility of higher education; this quality question, however, has not one clear owner in Finland"* (Tuhkanen, 2014a, p. 8). This sentence is the only national level statement about plagiarism with reference to quality in higher education that was to apply, however, only for theses and not as a means for education and learning. The task to clarify technology, division of labour and service infrastructure and networking of users and educators of plagiarism detection systems was appointed to one man who then organized four different teams with experts to compose a report on the subject (Tuhkanen, 2014a). As a conclusion about the use of plagiarism detection, Tuhkanen (2014b) has estimated that many universities have chosen to acquire a plagiarism detection system, but the level of use or plagiarism policy have not been defined.

3   Aim, method and presentation of cases

In order to address the implementation of plagiarism policies in Finnish universities it was first investigated how higher education institutions ensure that student work (essays, written assignments, theses) are plagiarism free. Data were first collected from universities' web pages. Key words 'plagiarism' ('plagiointi' in Finnish, 'plagiering' in Swedish), 'ethical' (both singular and plural forms in Finnish and Swedish), 'plagiarism detection' (in Finnish and in Swedish, and also 'Urkund' and 'Turnitin') were used as key words to identify the presence of an ethical code for dealing with plagiarism and the use of plagiarism detection methods. It is to be noted that the institution's own search function was used and only the internet open to everyone was analysed. These data were collected in January 2015. As an additional and supportive data on the same issue two documents produced in the Raketti-project were used (Raketti, 2013; San Miguel, 2013). These two documents present data collected in 2013 from higher education institutions on their plagiarism detection procedures. The analysis of the policy information is descriptive and informative.

Secondly, it was investigated how plagiarism policies are implemented locally in cases of suspected plagiarism in theses. The administrative procedures and decisions in dealing with plagiarism were analysed for three Master's theses and one Licentiate thesis. Data were in the form of university's administrative documents about the plagiarism detection process and the decisions taken (cases 1, 2 and 3), and the decision given by an Administrative Court (case 4). Since public institutions are subject to Publicity Law (Act on the Openness of Government Activities, 1999), the universities and Administrative Court sent the material on request. These are plagiarism cases that were known to have been dealt with through an administrative process in 2012–2014.

The analysis of the cases was deductive thematic content analysis in which the main actors and their position in the process and decision about plagiarism are described. The themes formed are: defining plagiarism, student views on suspected plagiarism, justification of decisions and processes, and disordered administrative decisions.

Presentation of cases

Case 1.

The student had presented a plagiarized text as his own to be evaluated as his Master's thesis (business) in 2012. The evaluation process was interrupted after the supervisor noticed similarity of text to another thesis in another university and made a formal announcement to the Dean according to the procedure of the university. The student was requested to submit his view in writing about the suspected plagiarism. The case was forwarded to the rector who requested an evaluation of the plagiarism case by two teachers and the student's response to their evaluation, and then the case was transferred to the **university board**. The student received a warning and was suspended from studies for six months. Plagiarism was considered as a violation of University Law, which was used as the grounds for the decision to suspend the student. Later, in 2013, the student graduated with a Master's Thesis on a completely new subject.

Case 2.

In 2012, a student complained about the evaluation of her Master's thesis (Health Sciences), which was disqualified (to be corrected) by the external evaluator due to incoherence, sloppy referencing and suspected plagiarism. The student appealed, demanded the thesis to be accepted and accused her former supervisor and the evaluator for unethical judgements. The former supervisor, following procedures, notified the rector in writing explaining that this was a case of suspected plagiarism. It was stated that the thesis contained large proportions of plagiarized text and thus it had been disqualified. The rector gave his decision after meeting the student and some members of staff. No text comparisons were used and no written statements were required from any of the parties. The **rector** did not address plagiarism. Shortly after the rector's decision the thesis was accepted as a Master's thesis.

Case 3.

A Licentiate thesis (Law studies) had been accepted in 2009. The university had been informed about suspected plagiarism one month after acceptance, and it took three years to come to a decision about the case. First, in 2009 the faculty council asked the two original evaluators and the student for written statements about the suspected plagiarism. The faculty then asked the rector to deal with the case, and the rector started the preliminary inquiry, which did not remove the suspicions of plagiarism and as a result an investigation team (two professors, researcher, lawyer) was appointed to do the investigation proper. The investigation team gave their written report and

the rector asked the faculty council to take the appropriate action for addressing plagiarism in the thesis. In two faculty council meetings in 2010, the thesis was dealt with as a case of plagiarism. The matter was seen as a factual error in administrative decision (both in accepting the thesis and granting the Licentiate degree). Due to *protection of law,* the **faculty council** decided to ask the supreme Administrative Court to cancel the administrative decisions that had been given in accepting the thesis and granting the Licentiate degree. The case was, however, never forwarded to Supreme Administrative Court. In 2012, the student had contacted the faculty and asked the removal of administrative decisions. Three years after the acceptance of the thesis and the degree both decisions were removed on grounds that the person in question had himself asked this to be done after noticing that his Licentiate thesis *"does not fulfil the requirements of scientific research"*. No sanctions were used and the student was given a new instructor to continue work with his thesis. Later, in 2014, the faculty council decided that the manuscript for licentiate thesis by the same student was disqualified.

Case 4.

A Master's thesis (Science) was accepted and a Master's degree granted in December 2011. In November 2012, the author of the thesis had sent an article co-authored by three other researchers to an international journal, which gave a formal warning to the university due to plagiarism in the article. The article was rejected. The rector asked, in December 2012, the ethical board of the university to investigate the student's scientific work by all accounts. In March 2013, the ethical board stated that the student had committed misconduct in scientific research. In April 2013, the rector decided for a re-evaluation of the thesis and correction of factual error based on administrative law. The evaluators suggested the retraction of the thesis based among other issues on plagiarism. The **dean** rejected the thesis in May 2013 and retracted the Master's degree. The student immediately complained to the Appeal Committee of the university, which transferred the appeal to Administrative Court. The **Administrative Court** gave a decision in October 2014 that the dean's decisions to retract the thesis and the degree have to be cancelled and the student has a right to his degree based on the principle of *protection of confidence*. (Eastern Finland Administrative Court, 2014).

The thematic analysis of the four cases is presented in subchapters 4.2–4.4.

4   Results

4.1   *Plagiarism policies in Finnish higher education*

Analysis of the policies advertised in the webpages of the universities showed that in general, ethical issues are more accessible and public in the web pages of universities than of polytechnics. Some higher education institutions, mainly polytechnics, have no coverage of ethical issues or any ethical guidelines available in the internet (Table 1). Since institutions may only publish guidelines in their intranet it was not possible to assess the kind of information available to students.

Issues of plagiarism are covered in all but one university, but in almost half of the polytechnics (n = 12) the term 'plagiarism' (in Finnish 'plagiointi', in Swedish

Table 1

Search results for plagiarism policy on universities' web pages (n = number of institutions, range= range of term hits on institution's webpages)

	Term plagiarism mentioned *n*/total (range)	Electronic plagiarism detection used in theses *n*/total	Ethical issues of education and/or research covered *n*/total (range)
Universities (*n* = 14)	13/14 (1–577)	13/14	13/14 (less than ten hits in 2 universities, range 4–1940)
Polytechnics (*n* = 25)	13/25 (1–5)	10/25	18/25 (zero hits in 7/25, 1–9 hits in 8/25, range 1–768)

'plagiering') was not found in the search and it was not mentioned on any pages or documents available on webpages. The searches about publicising ethical issues about studying and research showed a similar pattern. While almost all universities (*n* = 13) covered ethical issues on their webpages there were seven polytechnics that had nothing on ethics or ethical issues available on their webpages.

Use of electronic plagiarism detection systems started in 2010 by three universities. The remaining universities have slowly started to report such acquisitions. The polytechnics acquired a plagiarism detection system in 2009 as a consortium (Tuhkanen, 2014a, p. 18). However, by 2015, only 10 out of 25 polytechnics are publicising the use of the system. This result is similar to that reported by San Miguel (2013) that plagiarism detection is used systematically only in a small proportion of polytechnics for thesis assessment.

All higher education institutions are committed to follow the ethical guidelines of Finnish Advisory Board of Research Integrity (2012), but this information is not available on the webpages of all institutions. Only one university has named plagiarism prevention on title level in a document aimed to guide students in writing ('*Skilful writing and plagiarism prevention*'). No other university had any such named policies. Plagiarism was mentioned within degree regulations and in guidelines concerning writing and thesis. In all instructions concerning plagiarism detection it was stated that detection is to be used in checking the theses. There was no evidence of instruction for the use of plagiarism detection in the first (or second, or third) year of studies as part of the evaluation of written assignments.

4.2   Procedures in defining plagiarism

In the plagiarism cases (presented in section 3), all suspicions had been raised by a whistle-blower who was the instructor or a journal editor. In one case the whistle-blower's position is unknown. In three cases the whistle-blower was not involved in the process of defining plagiarism. In the three cases in which plagiarism was addressed, text comparisons were used and the student's text was compared to the originals that the whistle-blower had named. In the documentary data of these four plagiarism cases, there is no mention about the use of electronic plagiarism detection before or after the suspicion arose.

The following two extracts from the investigative team's final report show the type of plagiarism the team had identified: *"There are about 40 pages that are identical to another thesis. There are no references to this other thesis and it is not mentioned in the sources. Also appendices 1 and 2 are identical." "Even the typing errors in N.N.'s text are identical, which indicate the use of cut and paste technique. There are ten identical references in the two theses, and in two of the internet sources N.N. has given the same date as the date the source was retracted."* Based on this comparison, the team states that the student had committed misconduct in form of plagiarism in his thesis.

The notification from the journal about plagiarism in the manuscript (case 4) stated that text, figures and plasmonic nanoconstruct are copied from a previously published article. The investigation team requested to examine the author's thesis stated that *"similarities in the Master's thesis and a previously published article are too extensive in order that this could be a case of coincidence"*. The investigation team defined N.N. to have committed research misconduct in form of plagiarism, fabrication and misleading the scientific community.

Defining and addressing plagiarism can also lead to contradicting processes and conclusions. The university board's conclusion in case 1 was based on the report of the evaluators *""N.N's thesis is centrally plagiarised and he has presented it to be evaluated as his own Master's thesis. (. . .) Plagiarism has been performed by making systematically mainly technical changes in the sentence structures of the plagiarised text, the aim of which has been to make it more difficult to notice plagiarism in the evaluation process.* The university board also ponder the seriousness of the deed: *"Contrary to the view presented by N.N. in his written reply this deed can even be seen as more severe as word-to-word plagiarism."*

However, in another university the rector takes a completely opposite view to similar kind of plagiarism. In the notification, the student's research plan was compared to another previously published thesis and a company's product manual, and five pages of the plan were considered to be copied or modified from the existing two publications. In addition, the research plan had been copied with a "save as a copy" function from another student's thesis plan which was evident in the features of the Word document. In the notification, 17 paragraphs of the thesis were given as examples of plagiarism of text copied from seven publications. In text citations were identical and references were identical with original authors' referencing styles. In his official response to the written notification the rector explains why this is not a case of plagiarism: *"It surely is true, that N.N.'s thesis has been disqualified for a reason. It has borrowed text, sloppy referencing, inadequate language. This is due to the hurry caused by student's life situation or due to other reasons a careless and quickly produced manuscript (. . .) In spite of the weaknesses of the thesis, I don't hesitate to state that in this case plagiarism accusations play only a side script and this is clearly a case of twisted exercise of power, or at least an effort of that, in which a hurt teacher aims with help of an accusation of fraud to prevent or at least seriously complicate the graduation of the student."* The rector's perception of what constitutes plagiarism is not evident in his decision.

4.3 Student views on suspected plagiarism

In all cases the students deny that they have committed plagiarism. The reasoning behind the denial varies. In one written statement the student wrote to be sorry for the trouble, but as he had so far studied successfully, he presented mitigating circumstances. He admits that he had used the other thesis as a base for his work, but that "*in no phase my purpose was to cite or copy the thesis in question.*" He claims to have done this completely unintentionally. Also claims as an explanation to his view that "*in no sentence the word order is the same as in the original*".

The student who had copied 40 pages from a thesis published earlier states that the reason he did not mention this author in his references was based on "*a writing that I found in the Internet, in which it was recommended that theses that are on the level of polytechnic are not recommended to be used in comparisons or as sources in a Licentiate level thesis.*" He also denies intent to deceive. "*Intent was completely missing from my deed with regard to that mistake.*" "*This mistake was, as seen afterwards, based on lack of knowledge.*" In case 4, in which the retraction of the degree was taken to Administrative Court the student appeals as follows: "*I wrote my Master's thesis in good faith sincerely. I was not acting intentionally but it has been a case of misapprehension with respect to references and referencing.*"

Lack of intention to deceive is mentioned in all student views. In the IPPHEAE Report, Comparison of policies for Academic Integrity in Higher Education across the European Union (Glendinning 2013b, p. 38), it is stated that in many countries, including Finland, "*plagiarism requires "intent to deceive" before any case could be brought*". However, this kind of statement cannot be found in any written guidelines, but it seems to be a very strong cultural belief about how to explain plagiarism. In the guidelines provided by Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012, p. 32) it is stated: "*"Violations of the responsible conduct of research consist of actions that may have been committed either intentionally or through negligence.* Thus, the fluent use of the expression "lack of intent to deceive" in student responses forms an interesting aspect to student learning. Even if there is no common understanding of what plagiarism is or why plagiarism is not accepted students have learned what to say if they face plagiarism suspicions. As students in their views evidence they are aware of this cultural belief that plagiarism is a violation only if it is intentional, and almost like speaking with one voice students use the expression "lack of intent" as a reason to deny the deed of plagiarism.

4.4 Justification of plagiarism detection processes and disordered administrative verdicts

In the guidelines provided by Finnish Advisory Board of Research Integrity (2012) the responsibility on decisions about misconduct lies on the rector of the university, who conducts the preliminary inquiry and appoints the investigation committee. The membership of such a committee was named in three of the cases. In all cases, however, several additional people were involved in defining plagiarism.

In only one of the cases (case 1), the procedures dealing with plagiarism followed fully the guidelines provided by Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012).

The suspicion rose before approval of the thesis and the matter was investigated accordingly. The suspension for half a year proposed as punishment was defined within the University Law. The options for sanctions included in the University Law (2009) range from a written warning to a suspension for a year. For the other three cases, two were suspected for plagiarism after thesis approval and one was approved and published even if there was evidence for plagiarism. In one case the rector did not identify plagiarism and thus encouraged the publication of the thesis.

Cases where the university is informed about suspected plagiarism in thesis after graduation are complicated because there is no established procedure for a retraction of thesis (Moore, 2013). As shown in case 3, the slow reaction of the university to bring the case to Supreme Administrative Court gave time for the retraction of the degree without any sanctions. The decision of Administrative Court in a similar case (case 4) led the court to abrogate the university's decision of the retraction and the degree to be reinstated based on the reasoning that since the thesis has been accepted to begin with, the student has to able to trust the institution and retain the degree based on the principle of *protection of confidence* – even if it could be seen as a fake degree since the learning objectives of a Master's thesis are not accomplished.

5   Conclusion

Plagiarism prevention policy in higher education has been connected with quality assurance and quality of education in general (e.g. Sutherland-Smith, 2014). In Finland, this is not the case. Issues of plagiarism and plagiarism policy have been invisible in the national steering of higher education, and plagiarism policies are not mentioned at all in the context of higher education quality assurance. The data and analysis of policies that are available on the web pages of Finnish universities regarding plagiarism indicate that higher education institutions differ greatly in the openness of dealing with it. The universities have much wider implementation of plagiarism policies than polytechnics, and universities clearly are more open to the public in dealing with plagiarism. Most polytechnics do not publish anything on their webpages concerning plagiarism or ethical issues in general.

Electronic plagiarism detection has been taken up by some universities in Finland in order to detect plagiarism in theses. There are no data available of how systematic their use is, and there are no data about their use in the earlier years of undergraduate studies. This kind of technology driven plagiarism policy focuses on detection, not prevention, and thus we might be in a situation that Sutherland-Smith (2014, p. 40) has warned about: *"simplistic band-aid solution is unlikely to have any sustainable effect"*. Reported discussions about the effectiveness and usefulness of electronic plagiarism detection software cannot be found in Finnish higher education. Based on many years of evaluating the usefulness of such software, Weber-Wulff (2014, p. 70) has concluded that plagiarism detection software is not very useful at all. According to Weber-Wulff (2013), *"plagiarism detection software should not be used generally, but only when something is suspected"*. She also reminds us that the results must be critically evaluated, a detection program can indicate the presence of plagiarism, but it cannot prove absence of plagiarism.

The cases, the processes and actions taken on reported plagiarism are examples of the differences in dealing with plagiarism between Finnish universities. The number of cases for 2012–2014 is small. This may indicate that plagiarism is only dealt with when there is outside pressure, or that plagiarism cases may be silenced within universities because teachers and management may understand plagiarism differently within an organisation (Moore 2008). On the other hand, this could be a phenomenon well known in plagiarism research, that of the problematic nature of dealing with plagiarism suspicions and the vulnerable position of whistle-blowers (e.g. Martin, 1994; Martin, 2013). With plagiarism suspicions there is a tendency both to cover up and end the discussion (Mallon, 2001, p. 152), and in this manner the institution aims to maintain its reputation.

However, from a quality assurance perspective higher education is transparent only if students are in fact expected to learn, avoid plagiarism and follow general ethical rules in learning (Moore 2010). Since in some Finnish institutions plagiarized text is accepted (Moore 2014) the learning goals set for the student are not reached. The analysis of the cases showed that a lot of time and resources may be required to deal with plagiarism if the thesis has been approved and the student graduated. This could have been avoided if the thesis had been screened for plagiarism beforehand. More so since a student has the right to appeal to the Administrative Court and maintain the degree based on *protection of confidence*. The Finnish legislation here is in sharp contrast to that for example in Germany, where numerous PhD degrees have been retracted based on plagiarism addressed afterwards (Weber-Wulff 2013; 2014).

The lack of plagiarism policy, procedures and a consensus on what plagiarism is may prevent universities from taking the appropriate actions in the cases of plagiarism or when suspicion is raised. Students, on the other hand, however, do not hesitate to plea for "lack of intent" to plagiarise when they do so. Plagiarism is one of the issues that have been almost completely silenced, and thus there will be a huge workload for future quality evaluators to assess the level of learning and qualifications that are acquired in the current learning programmes in Finnish higher education.

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Author

Erja Moore (erja.moore@gmail.com), Finland