

PLAGIARISM? I KNOW A DEFINITION, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS...

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Abstract: Most researchers believe that plagiarism is a serious problem and some actions have to be taken to reduce its occurrence. One aspect of this problem concerns unintentional plagiarism which takes place when a student accidentally, through carelessness or lack of skill, uses another person's words without acknowledging it (Gillet 2001). This may happen for many reasons starting from forgetting to include references, through difficulties with expressing another person's ideas in student's own words, to unawareness of the term plagiarism. Therefore, the first step in tackling the problem should be to define the concept of plagiarism and to make sure that students are aware of its meaning. On the other hand, having a definition included in the university policy or checking if students are familiar with the expression may not guarantee proper understanding of the rules and recognising differences between acceptable and unacceptable practice.

This study aimed at comparing definitions of plagiarism presented by the students with their real understanding of where the line between acceptable and unacceptable practice is. The author analysed the answers stated to the question: "define what you understand by plagiarism" by investigating the keywords visible in the presented definitions and qualitatively compared them with responses to the more practical multiple-choice question: "indicate your judgment on plagiarism" which, by asking to examine different examples of academic misconduct, aimed at applying theory into practice. Comparing these two sets of questions the author was able to investigate differences between the students' perception of the concept and their actual understanding of what constitutes plagiarism.

Results exposed cases of plagiarism which were not considered misconduct or, according to the students, should not be penalised, therefore might be perceived as perfectly acceptable academic practice. This advocates the need of making sure that students fully understand of what constitutes plagiarism which can then become a stepping stone towards teaching them how to avoid it.

This paper has been based on extracts from the author's unpublished draft PhD thesis.

Key words: Student plagiarism, definition and meaning of plagiarism, unintentional plagiarism

1 Literature Review

The word "plagiarism" was derived from the Latin phrase "plagiarius" which means kidnapper, thief, and plunderer (Online Etymology Dictionary 2014). Even though there is one historic meaning of the "plagiarism" word itself, it is interesting that in the modern world there are many definitions and interpretations of plagiarism as a concept. Common definitions are as follows:

- "Take and use another person's (thoughts, writings, inventions) as one's own" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary (6th edition) 1976)
- "To use (another person's idea or part of their work) and pretend that it is your own" (The Cambridge international Dictionary of English 1995)

- “To copy another person’s words or work and pretend that they are your own” (The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (6th edition) 2000)
- “The act of appropriating the ideas, writings, or inventions of another without due acknowledgement; specifically, the stealing of passages either for word or in substance, from the writings of another and publishing them as one’s own” (Funk and Wagnalls’ New standard Dictionary 1921)
- “Steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own: use another’s production without crediting the source; to commit literary theft: present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source” (Webster’s Online Dictionary 2011)

In 2003, Chris Park made an analysis of definitions and meaning of the word plagiarism by checking terminology used by other researchers. Park (2003) discovered that some authors describe plagiarism using more moralistic tone, for example by comparing it to a ‘sin’ (Colon 2001 and Miller 1993 cited in Park 2003). Other researchers, like Freedman (1994 cited in Park 2003), called plagiarism an ‘*attack on human right, property and identity*’, whereas Zangrando (1991 and 1992 cited in Park 2003) used the metaphor of a ‘*cancer that erodes the rich legacy of scholarship*’. Park (2003) also found out that some researchers use more legalistic language comparing plagiarism to ‘*theft*’ (Whiteneck 2002, Stebelman 1998, Hopkin 1993 cited in Park 2003), ‘*forgery*’ (Groom 2000 cited in Park 2003) and ‘*crime*’ (Franke 1993 cited in park 2003). Park noticed that other writers, like Leatherman (1993 cited in Park 2003) and Fialkoff (2002 cited in Park 2003) had less radical attitude, calling plagiarism a ‘*poor practice*’, or ‘*a lapse rather than a crime*’ (Gray 2002 cited in Park 2003). According to Park (2003), some authors were even more creative and used terminology like ‘*a disease of inarticulateness*’ (Bowers 1994 cited in Park 2003) or called plagiarism a form of ‘*mental illness*’ (Howard 2000 cited in Park 2003).

Furthermore, reporting lack of direct substitutes for the word ‘plagiarism’, Briggs (2009) separates plagiarism alternatives into two groups, depending on the level of moral accusation:

- Copying/borrowing
- Cheating/stealing

Briggs (2009: 66) believes that ‘*Copying*’ and ‘*borrowing*’ as morally neutral terms, describe the essential act constituting plagiarism, but without sufficiently indicating the inappropriateness of that act. IParadigms LLC on their website plagiarism.org (2014) also states that treating plagiarism as simply ‘copying’ or ‘borrowing’ someone else’s work might diminish its importance and camouflage its seriousness. On the other hand, terms like ‘*cheating*’ and ‘*stealing*’ only “underscore the seriousness of the ‘crime’—stressing the immorality of the act in order to encourage all right-minded students not to acquiesce to what might appear to be the easier way” (Briggs 2009: 67).

Lack of one universal definition, as well as ‘colourful’ language of plagiarism suggest that plagiarism is a complex concept which might provoke disputes in academic circles. According to Dahlia Yusof (2009), “on the surface, the meanings seem similar. In

practice, the meanings are rigorously subject to debates". Many teachers and authors present different opinions about plagiarism and argue about reasons for its prevalence and the forms of appropriate penalties. Such diverse opinions inside academia can also influence *students and their understanding of what constitutes proper and improper academic behaviour*.

What is more, having dissimilar educational experience and being guided by different sets of values, students may consider plagiarism in their own and very individual way. Steven Dutch (2005: 1) believes that "bad definitions of plagiarism confuse students and simultaneously trivialize the problem. The examples cited in style manuals are commonly so pedantic that students might be pardoned if they conclude the whole issue is a matter of academic nit-picking".

This suggests that plagiarism is not an easy to define concept and the existence of many, sometimes diverse definitions confuses academics as well as the students and may be one of the reasons for "accidental" plagiarism.

2 Methodology

This paper presents results of research conducted by the author as part of her PhD study and is based on extracts from the unpublished draft thesis. During the time of research design and data collection the author was a member of the Impact of Plagiarism Policies for Higher Education Across Europe (IPPHEAE) project which was funded through the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme, Multilateral Projects, under the Modernisation of Higher Education agenda. Questionnaires used in the author's thesis were part of the IPPHEAE project survey which asked teachers, students and managers from various EU institutions about their opinions regarding plagiarism meaning, measures for detection and possible prevention tactics.

As a Research Assistant to the project, the author contributed to the design of the survey. This allowed for the questionnaires to be worded in such a way that both IPPHEAE objectives and the author's own Research Questions could be answered. Since the thesis focused only on the student perspective, other angles of the IPPHEAE project concerning teachers and managers were not included in the analysis.

The survey contained a variety of questions regarding plagiarism awareness, perception and occurrence, institutional policies and procedures, plagiarism prevention and detection, as well as scholarly academic writing with an emphasis on citing and referencing. Questionnaires were distributed and completed electronically via a secure on-line platform. The survey was conducted on a group of bachelor and master's degree students from different HE Institutions across Europe. Questionnaires were available in 14 different language versions prepared by the native speaking project consultants.

Using contacts provided by the IPPHEAE project members, the author managed to conduct her study in nine European countries: Cyprus, Eire (Ireland), Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom (further called "Group 9"). The total amount of participants from the nine selected countries that completed the questionnaires was equal to 2170.

This paper focuses on one aspect of the author's research (*How do students understand and perceive plagiarism?*) and compares definitions of plagiarism presented

by students in the Survey Question 1 with their real understanding of where the line between acceptable practice and plagiarism is—measured by a series of practical questions (Q15.a–15.f).

The author analysed the answers stated to the question: “define what you understand by plagiarism” by investigating the keywords visible in the presented definitions and qualitatively compared them with responses to the more practical multiple-choice question: “indicate your judgment on plagiarism” which, by asking to examine different examples of academic misconduct, aimed at applying theory into practice. Comparing these two sets of questions the author was able to investigate differences between the students’ perception of the concept and their actual understanding of what constitutes plagiarism.

3 Results

Question 1 (open question)

Define in one phrase or sentence what you understand by the word plagiarism

In order to analyse the answers, the author translated all non-English responses by means of her own language skills and the use of Google Translator. During the manual analysis of each of the responses the author distinguished 29 keywords which were noticeable in the answers. These keywords were then grouped in the following categories:

Less serious connotations of plagiarism:

- The act of “copy-paste”
- Copying
- Using / taking
- Presenting
- Imitating / replicating / duplicating

More serious connotations of plagiarism:

- Theft / Stealing / Usurpation / Appropriation
- Fraud
- Crime / offence
- Paying / buying

Links with legal context:

- Illegal / unlawful
- Breaking copyright law
- Intellectual property (*Note: also included under the “intellectual” category*)
- Publishing / posting

Not mentioning the original author:

- Not referencing / quoting / citing
- Not acknowledging the author / not giving credit
- Not mentioning the author / the source of information
- Without permission / knowledge of the author / unauthorised

False attribution of authorship:

- Taking credit / attributing work to yourself
- As my own / under my name
- Gaining advantage / benefit / for my own interest

Links with intentional nature of plagiarism:

- Cheating / dishonesty
- Deliberate/ intentional
- Unethical

Links with unintentional nature of plagiarism:

- Accidental / unintentional

Textual object of plagiarism:

- Words / text
- Speech/spoken words
- Directly / word-for-word / without changes / quoting

Intellectual object of plagiarism:

- Ideas / thoughts / information / work
- Intellectual property (*Note: also included under the “legal” category*)

Plagiarism of other than external sources:

- Copying other students

Overall 2170 participants from Group 9 took part in the Survey of which 2103 provided answers to Question 1. In 109 cases, it was difficult to judge whether participants understood the concept of plagiarism—37 students used words like fraud, cheating, dishonesty, theft or stealing without further explanation, therefore their answers could not be classified as “showing understanding”. What is more, 17 participants’ responses did not present any understanding of plagiarism giving incorrect definitions, like “*Plagiarism means bribe*”, “*Stealing from the food store*”, “*To copy an exam / test*”.

In 1971 cases (94%), it was possible to interpret definitions as demonstrating understanding and presenting appropriate meaning of the term plagiarism.

Every student presented his/her own interpretation of the word “plagiarism”, but some words and themes appeared more often than others. It was interesting to see how many participants mentioned aspects other than just “text”, for example plagiarism of “ideas”, “thoughts”, “information” and “work”. These “more than just words” themes

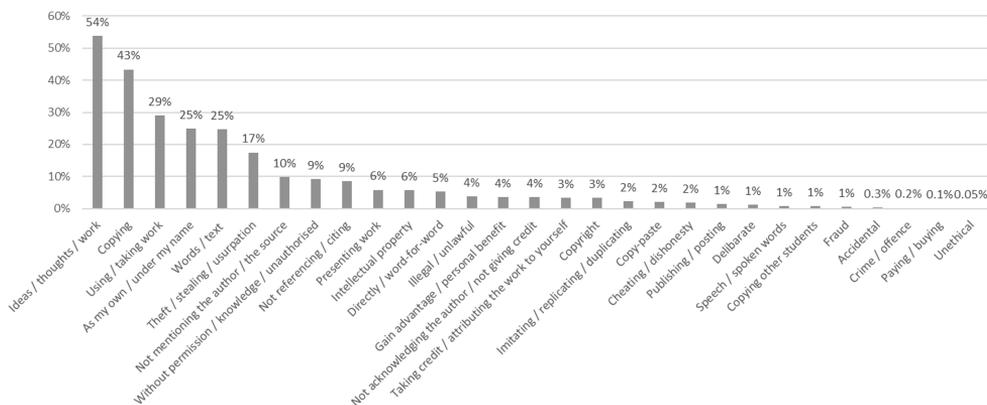


Figure 1. Question 1—Overall result for Group 9

were present in 54% of answers, however due to difficulties with translation the author experienced problems with finding the real meaning of definitions written by the students. For example, in Polish language the word “work” in academic sense can also denote student paper or coursework, therefore sometimes it was difficult to decide what meaning was intended by individual participants.

Large number of participants (43%) used the words “copy” and “copying” to describe plagiarism. 29% mentioned “using” or “taking”, whereas 17% of participants highlighted words like “theft”, “stealing”, “usurpation” and “appropriation”. Interestingly, 9% of students described plagiarism mentioning that it typically happens “without the knowledge” or “permission” of the original author. Very small number of respondents (24 = 1%) focused on “deliberate” nature of misconduct, whereas only 7 participants (which equals to 0.33%) mentioned possibility of “accidental” plagiarism.

Below are the results of each of the countries from the Group 9. Negligible results of 0% were not included in the graphs in order to focus on more frequently used terms and definitions.

Cyprus

38% of Cypriot respondents mentioned “words” and “text” plagiarism, whereas 21% talked about “ideas” and “work”. 31% described this concept by “copying” and 28% mentioned “using” and “taking”. At the same time 27% used words like “theft” and “stealing” which was ranked number 1 among the nine countries. Interestingly, 8% of participants mentioned “copyright” law and 4% also used the term “speech” or “spoken words” to express the object of the plagiarism act (which was the highest result among the nine countries). Cypriot participants also used the term “copy-paste” (5%) and linked plagiarism with “publishing” copied materials (1%). What is more, fewer respondents (compared to other countries) talked about plagiarism of “ideas / thoughts / work” (21%).

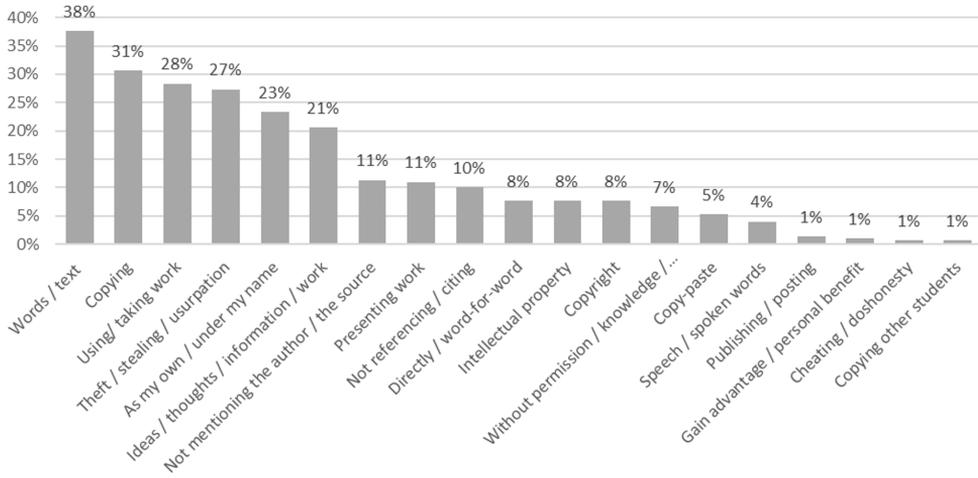


Figure 2. Question 1—Results for Cyprus

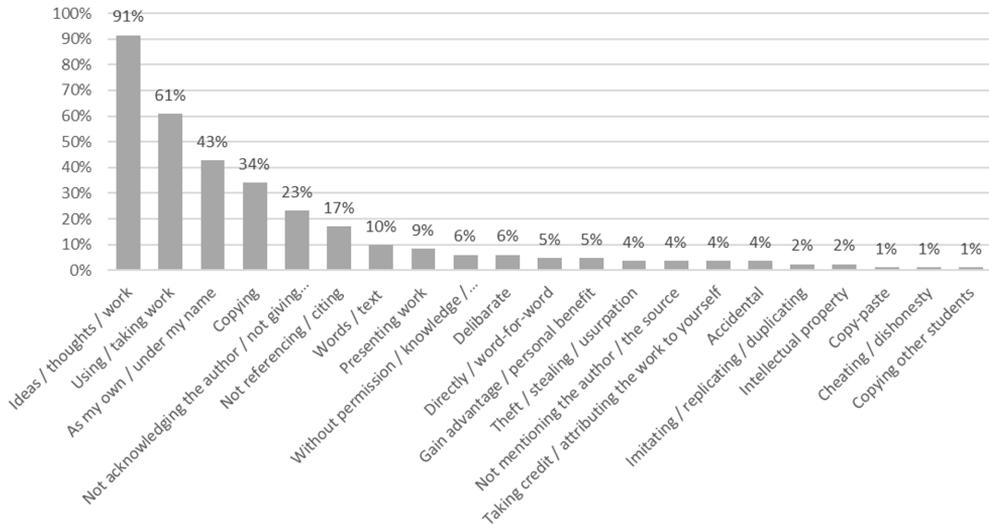


Figure 3. Question 1—Results for Eire (Ireland)

Describing plagiarism as “copying”, “using / taking” and a few times also “stealing” students presented rather moderate approach. Using a term “copyright” suggests placing plagiarism in legal context. This advocates that students in Cyprus might require more practical training on plagiarism, in order to relate it more to their day-to-day academic practice.

Eire (Ireland)

91% of Irish students mentioned “ideas”, “thoughts” and “work” when describing plagiarism (which was the highest result among the nine countries). 23% of answers also contained aspects like “not acknowledging the author” or “not giving due credit” (again ranked number 1). Interestingly, only 4% of definitions contained references to “theft” or “stealing” (which was the lowest result among Group 9), while many participants (61%) rather focused on “using” and “taking” the work of others—students used these terms even more often than “copying” (34%). 5% of respondents mentioned “gaining advantage” from plagiarism (2nd in the repeatability rank), whereas 4% talked about “accidental” nature of the concept which was ranked number 1 in terms of frequency among the nine countries.

Students presented rather good understanding of the plagiarism concept. On the other hand, their perception of plagiarism was shifted towards milder seriousness defining it more often as “taking / using” and “copying” and only in very few cases “stealing / theft”. Participants also mentioned possibility of accidental plagiarism and discussed more sublime issues of “not acknowledging the author” 9) which suggest more practical understanding of plagiarism.

Although a small number, but compared to other countries where these connotations were almost non-existent, 5% of Irish students mentioned “gaining advantage / benefitting” from plagiarism as one of its characteristics. This could advocate that some students may not properly recognise cases of plagiarism when gaining benefits is not involved, which means that plagiarism in less important pieces of work may not be considered a problem.

This might suggest that although being able to recognise more obvious cases of plagiarism, students are not aware of its other forms and so they believe they do not commit any misconduct.

Finland

Participants from Finland focused on “copying” (57%) (which was the highest result among the nine countries), as well as “using / taking” (30%) rather than “stealing” (5%). 11% of students also mentioned that plagiarism happens “without permission” or “knowledge” of the author. Interestingly, a few (4 = 2%) respondents said that plagiarism is “illegal” and talked about the concept of “accidental plagiarism” (1%) which resulted in the 2nd place among Group 9.

Although participants from Finland seemed to understand the concept of plagiarism some mentioned aspects that are not commonly included in the definitions and in fact are not characteristics of plagiarism (talking about “lack of permission or knowledge of the original author”). Presenting plagiarism as “stealing” and being “illegal” means placing plagiarism in a legal context and suggests that some students may still have difficulties seeing plagiarism in more practical terms.

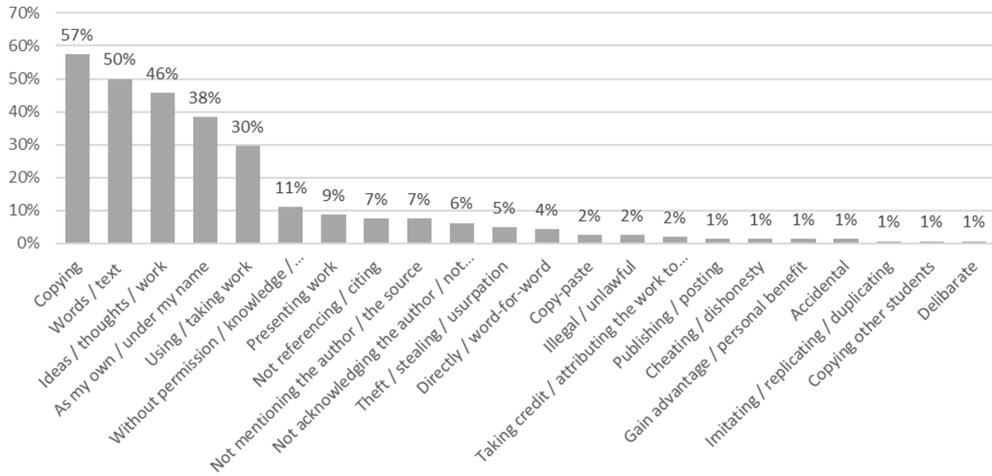


Figure 4. Question 1—Results for Finland

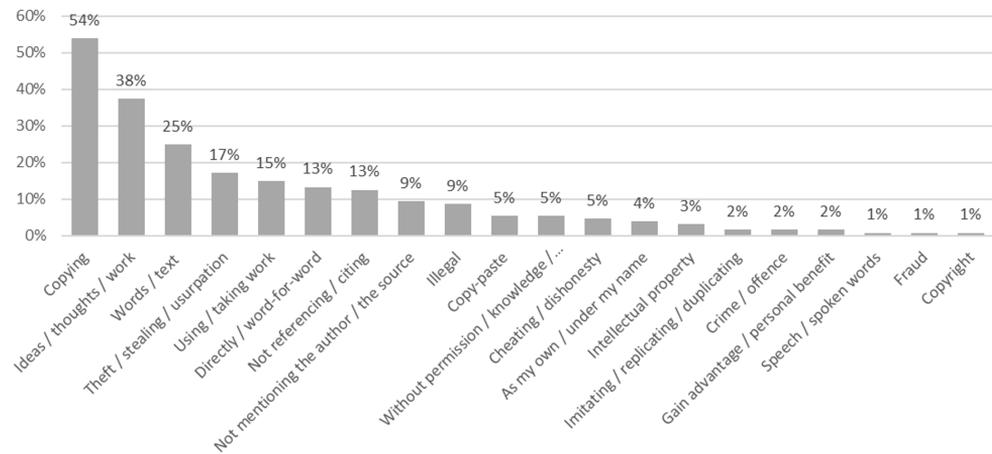


Figure 5. Question 1—Results for France

France

Students from France also presented the term “copying” as best describing the concept of plagiarism (54%), but 17% also mentioned “stealing / theft”. 9% of participants talked about “illegal” nature of plagiarism and 2% called plagiarism a “crime” (which for both themes was ranked as number 1 among Group 9). 13% described plagiarism as “word-for-word” (which was the highest result among the nine countries). Interestingly, 5% of respondents also mentioned the concept of “cheating” in their definitions.

When asked to provide definitions of plagiarism, views of the participants varied from “copying” to “stealing”. Interestingly, many respondents talked about “illegality”

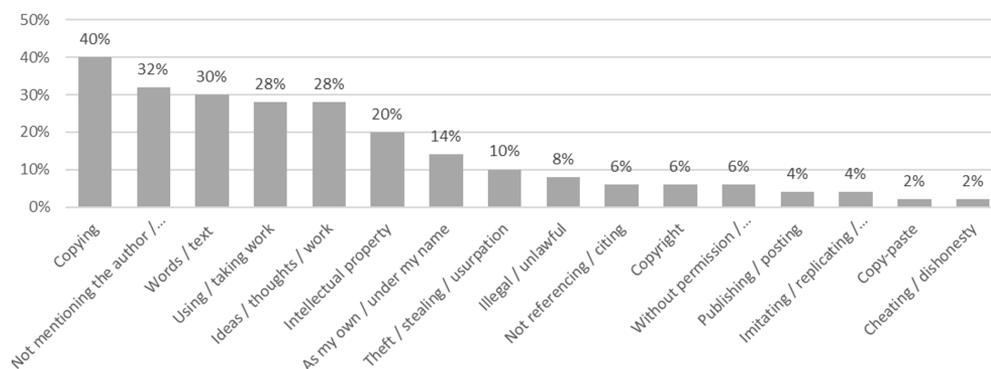


Figure 6. Question 1—Results for Germany

and “crime” which placed plagiarism in the legal context. Calling plagiarism “cheating” suggests deliberate nature of this form of misconduct.

Germany

German students again preferred the term “copying” (40%), however, in their definitions they also highlighted lack of source and “not mentioning the author”. 20% of participants focused on “intellectual property” (which was the highest result among Group 9) and 6% mentioned breaches in the “copyright” law. 8% of students said that plagiarism is “illegal” or “unlawful”. These results placed plagiarism in the legal context.

4% of participants mentioned that the act involves “publishing” or “posting” plagiarised material (which placed Germany at number 1 among the nine countries) focusing on more formal aspects of the misconduct.

Presented results suggest that students in Germany might be confused about the real meaning of plagiarism separating it into two forms: plagiarism in professional life and plagiarism in the academic context.

Poland

42% of Polish participants used the term “copying” when describing plagiarism, but 18% also talked about “theft” and “usurpation” of material. Moreover, 17% respondents discussed “lack of permission” or “knowledge” of the author (which is actually not a condition of plagiarism), whereas 11% mentioned “intellectual property” as the object of plagiarism. 8% described this concept as “unlawful” and 7% mentioned “gaining advantage” and “personal benefit” as the idea behind plagiarism (which placed Poland at number 1 among Group 9). Interestingly, 5% of respondents mentioned “imitating / replicating” which was again the highest score among the nine countries.

Although 65% of responses were classified as discussing more than just “words/text”, as it was mentioned before, the Polish word for “work” can be understood in two different ways—as achievements of someone’s work or student’s submission/coursework,

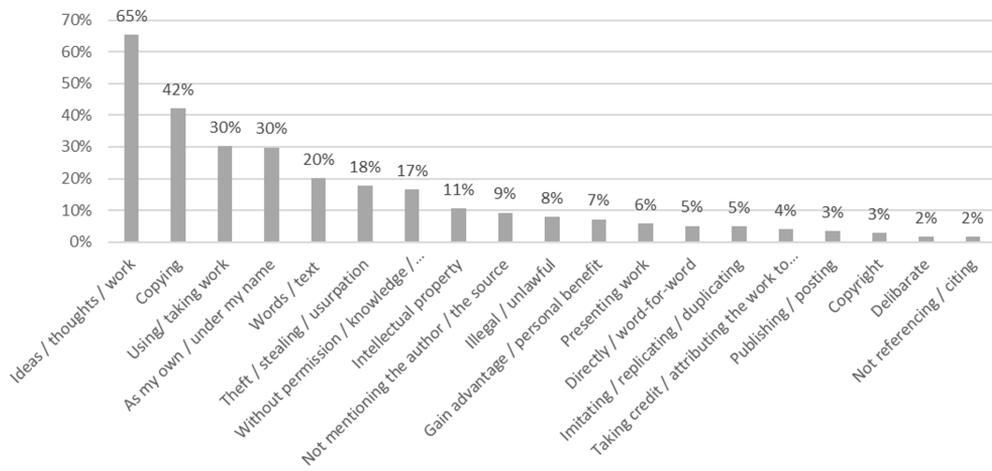


Figure 7. Question 1—Results for Poland

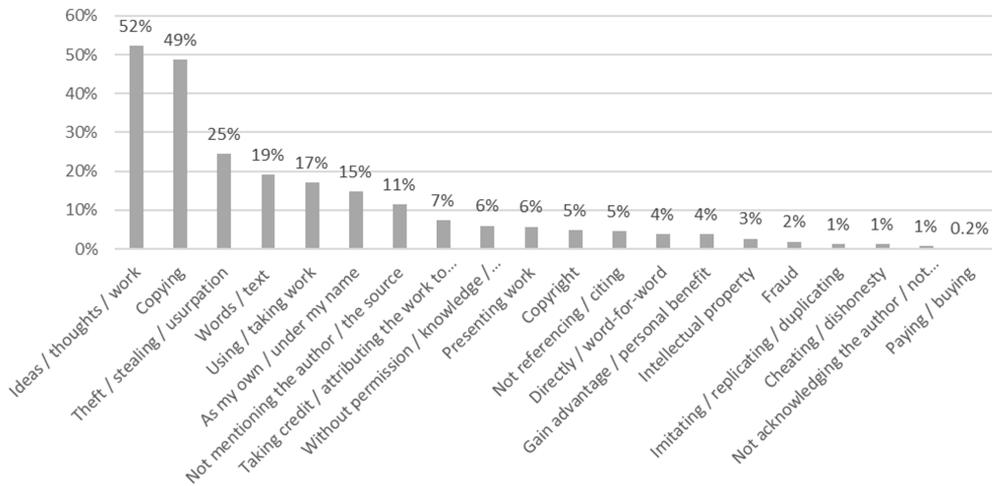


Figure 8. Question 1—Results for Romania

therefore it was impossible to prove that Polish participants knew about more than just “text” plagiarism.

Romania

49% of participants from Romania used the word “copying”, but 25% mentioned “theft” and “stealing” to describe plagiarism (which gave a second place among the nine countries). 52% of students talked about “ideas”, “thoughts” and “work”. Interestingly, 7% mentioned “taking credit” and “attributing the work” of someone else (ranked

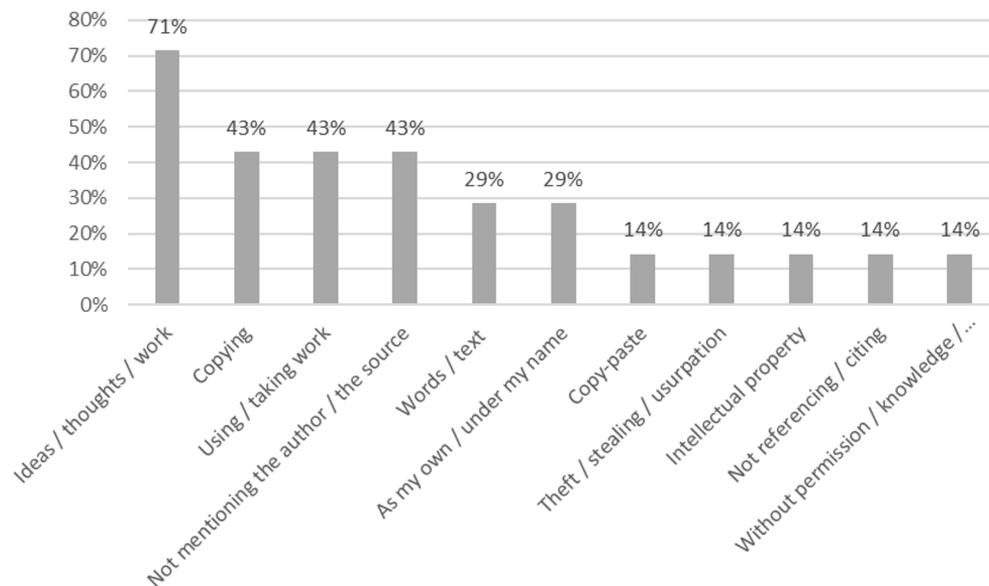


Figure 9. Question 1—Results for Sweden

number 1). 6% of students talked about “lack of permission or knowledge of the author” and 5% discussed breaking the “copyright” law. What is more, some students (0.2%) discussed the problem of “buying” the work which resulted as the second highest score among Group 9 (participants from only two countries mentioned this characteristic of plagiarism). 2% of participants described plagiarism as “fraud” (which was the top result).

Such connotations placed plagiarism in the legal context and suggest that practices of buying the work might be prevalent in Romania.

Sweden

Although only 7 participants took part in the Survey, most of them (71%) discussed “ideas / thoughts / work” as the object of plagiarism. 43% focused on “copying”, but 43% also talked about “lack of sources” or “not mentioning the original author” (which was the highest result among Group 9) demonstrating a link with scholarly academic writing. 1 person (14%) used the term “copy-paste” and 1 person (14%) also mentioned “intellectual property”.

The United Kingdom

42% of participants from the United Kingdom discussed plagiarism using the term “copying”, but 40% also mentioned “using” and “taking” to explain the concept. Only 10% presented plagiarism as “theft” or “usurpation”, but 23% discussed “lack of referencing” in their definitions (which was the highest result among Group 9).

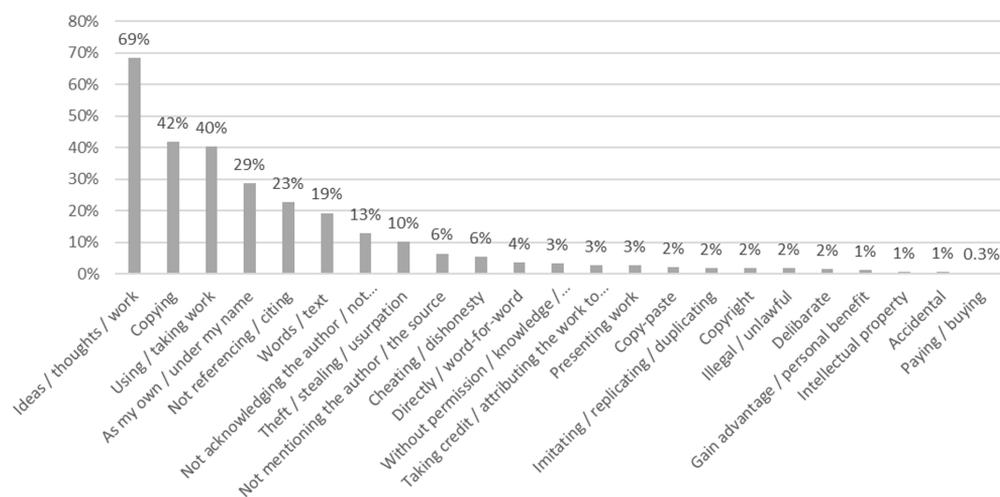


Figure 10. Question 1—Results for the United Kingdom

13% talked about “not acknowledging the author” and 6% mentioned that plagiarism involves “cheating” and “dishonesty” (which placed the UK at number 1). Interestingly, only 1% discussed “intellectual property” (which was the lowest result among the nine countries). On the other hand, although small (0.3%), but at the same time the highest number of participants talked about cases of “buying” the work. The United Kingdom was also the only country where respondents characterised plagiarism as “unethical” (0.3%).

Participants from the United Kingdom presented good understanding of the plagiarism concept. Survey respondents used “milder” terminology, such as “copying” as well as “using / taking” rather than “stealing”. Talking about “lack of referencing” and “not acknowledging the author” students presented evident links with academic practice.

It is also important to remember that universities in the United Kingdom comprise of many international students who might come from countries where plagiarism issues are not recognised or discussed.

Question 15.a

Question:	Answers:
Assuming that 40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied word for word into the student's work with no quotations, indicate your judgement on plagiarism (<i>by ticking one of the boxes</i>) and answer as to whether a penalty should be applied in each case (<i>by ticking YES or NO</i>)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is serious plagiarism 2. This case is plagiarism 3. Not sure about this case 4. This is definitely not plagiarism 5. Penalty applied? YES 6. Penalty applied? NO

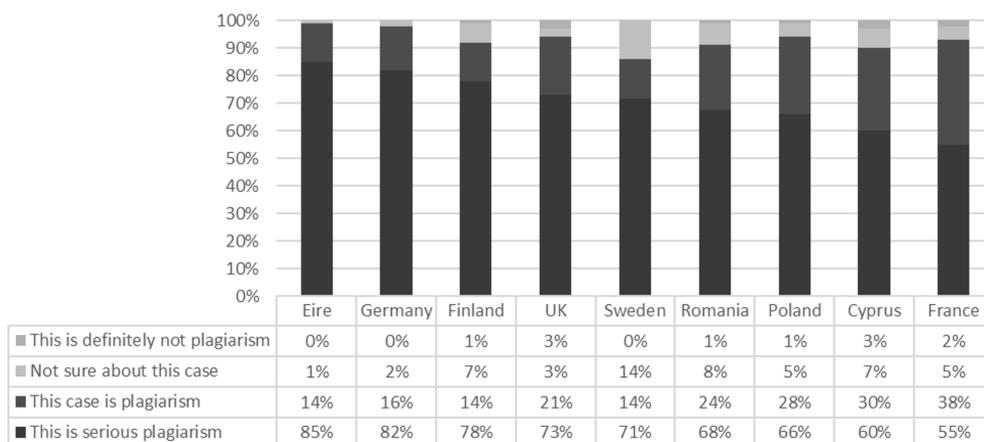


Figure 11. Question 15.a—results

This scenario was a case of serious plagiarism and was rather clear and easy to assess for the students. Most of the participants agreed that this is a serious case of plagiarism (71% of Total 27) or that it was plagiarism (22% of Total 27) and that the penalty should be applied (90% of Total 27).

Figure below shows graphical representation of the results.

Question 15.b

Question:	Answers:
Assuming that 40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied word for word into the student's work with no quotations, has correct references but no in text citation, indicate your judgement on plagiarism (<i>by ticking one of the boxes</i>) and answer as to whether a penalty should be applied in each case (<i>by ticking YES or NO</i>)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is serious plagiarism 2. This case is plagiarism 3. Not sure about this case 4. This is definitely not plagiarism 5. Penalty applied? YES 6. Penalty applied? NO

Most of the students correctly judged the scenario recognising it as a case of plagiarism (54% of Total 27), but there was also a substantial proportion of students who were not sure (26% of Total 27). Participants were not necessarily convinced that the penalty should be applied (57% from Total 27 said yes to this question).

Interestingly, students from France were even more divided with 42% saying "this is plagiarism" and 43% saying "I'm not sure about this case". What is more, most of them (63%) decided that the penalty **should not** be applied.

Examining answers of participants from Sweden, although 71% agreed that this is a case of plagiarism, only 43% would apply the penalty.

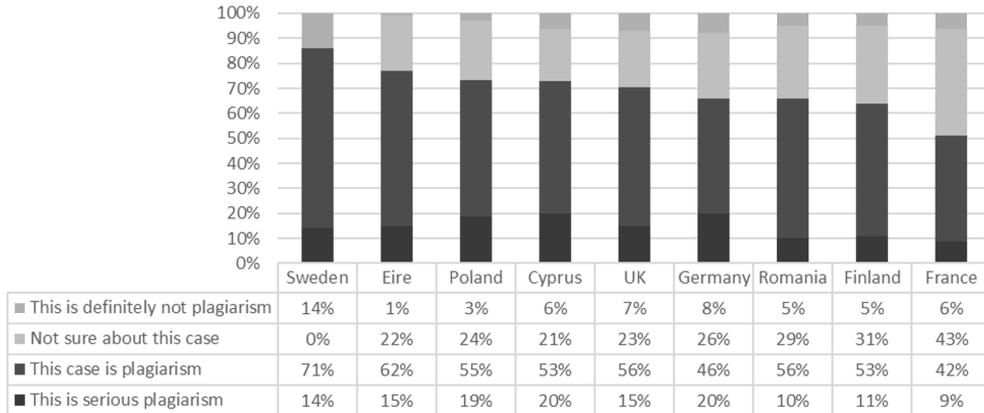


Figure 12. Question 15.b—results

Figure below shows graphical representation of the results.

Question 15.c

Question:	Answers:
Assuming that 40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied word for word into the student's work with no quotations, but has correct references and in text citations, indicate your judgement on plagiarism (<i>by ticking one of the boxes</i>) and answer as to whether a penalty should be applied in each case (<i>by ticking YES or NO</i>)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is serious plagiarism 2. This case is plagiarism 3. Not sure about this case 4. This is definitely not plagiarism 5. Penalty applied? YES 6. Penalty applied? NO

Although the scenario describes a case of plagiarism, students' answers were varied ranging from "this is plagiarism" (32% of Total 27), through "I'm not sure about this case" (36% of Total 27) to "this is definitely not plagiarism" (25% of Total 27). Interestingly, relatively small percentages of participants from Poland (16%), Romania (14%) and Sweden (14%) decided that this was not a case of plagiarism. Most of the participants (74% of Total 27) suggested that a penalty should not be applied.

Figure below shows graphical representation of the results.

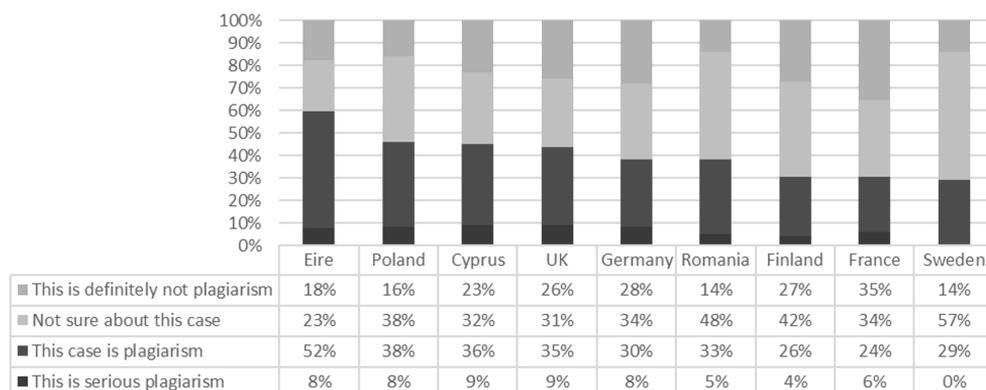


Figure 13. Question 15.c—results

Question 15.d

Question:	Answers:
Assuming that 40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied into the student's work with some words changed, with no quotations, references or in text citations, indicate your judgement on plagiarism (<i>by ticking one of the boxes</i>) and answer as to whether a penalty should be applied in each case (<i>by ticking YES or NO</i>)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is serious plagiarism 2. This case is plagiarism 3. Not sure about this case 4. This is definitely not plagiarism 5. Penalty applied? YES 6. Penalty applied? NO

Large proportion of students correctly recognised this scenario as a case of plagiarism (41% of Total 27, 39% of Group 9), but many were not sure how to categorise it (29% of Total 27, 35% of Group 9). Interestingly, 20% of participants from Germany decided this is “not a case of plagiarism”. On the other hand, 35% of participants from Eire recognised it as a “serious plagiarism”.

Figure below shows graphical representation of the results.

On the subject of penalty, opinions were mixed with the majority of respondents in Cyprus (64%), Eire (70%), Finland (62%), Germany (56%), Sweden (57%) and the UK (62%) opting for awarding a penalty and those from France (55%), Poland (62%) and Romania (62%) opting against it.

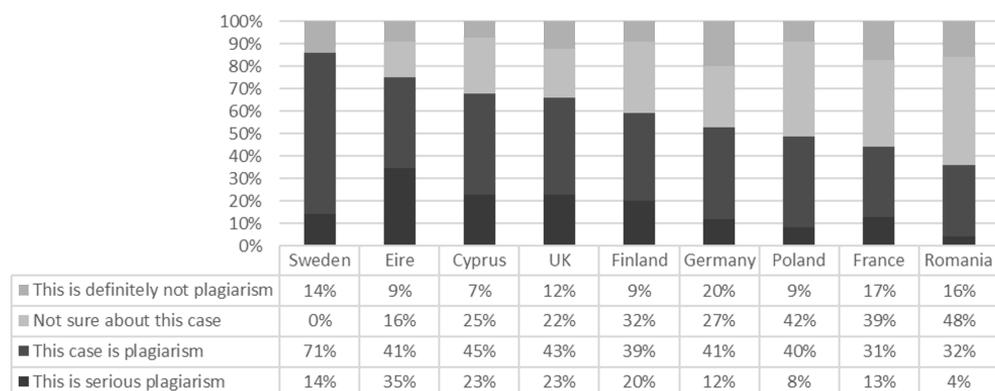


Figure 14. Question 15.d—results

Question 15.e

Question:	Answers:
Assuming that 40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied into the student's work with some words changed, with no quotations, has correct references, but no in text citations, indicate your judgement on plagiarism (<i>by ticking one of the boxes</i>) and answer as to whether a penalty should be applied in each case (<i>by ticking YES or NO</i>)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is serious plagiarism 2. This case is plagiarism 3. Not sure about this case 4. This is definitely not plagiarism 5. Penalty applied? YES 6. Penalty applied? NO

For this scenario, large percentage of students were not sure how to judge this case (45% of Total 27, 48% of Group 9), but there was still a group of students that recognised it as an example of plagiarism (32% for Total 27, 30% for Group 9). Most of the participants would not apply any penalty.

Slightly stronger opinion was presented by the participants from Eire—46% decided that “this is plagiarism” and 53% would apply the penalty.

A significant proportion of participants from France (29%), Germany (22%) and Poland (21%) chose the option “this is definitely not plagiarism”.

Figure below shows graphical representation of the results.

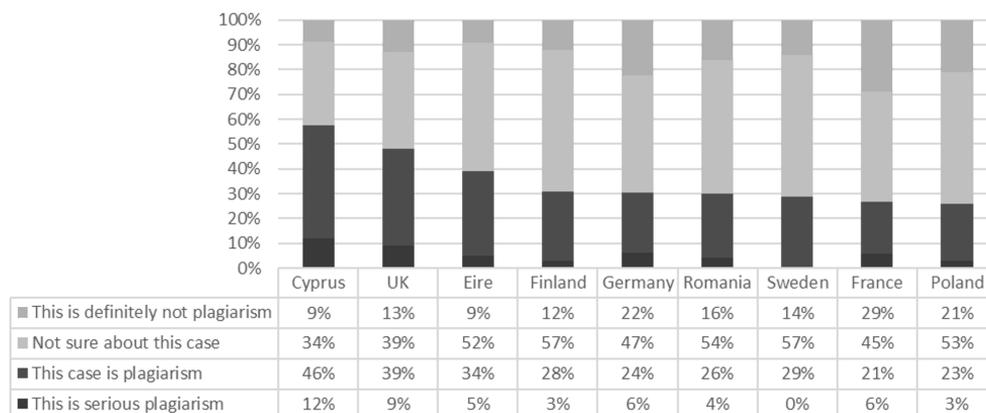


Figure 15. Question 15.e—results

Question 15.f

Question:	Answers:
Assuming that 40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied into the student's work with some words changed, with no quotations, but has correct references and in text citations, indicate your judgement on plagiarism (<i>by ticking one of the boxes</i>) and answer as to whether a penalty should be applied in each case (<i>by ticking YES or NO</i>)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is serious plagiarism 2. This case is plagiarism 3. Not sure about this case 4. This is definitely not plagiarism 5. Penalty applied? YES 6. Penalty applied? NO

Although this scenario also represents a case of poor academic practice, large group of participants (49% of Total 27, 41% of Group 9) did not consider this a case of plagiarism. Many students were unsure about the judgement (33% of Total 27, 38% of Group 9). Almost all the participants would not apply any penalty (90% of Total 27, 87% of Group 9).

Figure below shows graphical representation of the results.

To summarise, all scenarios described in questions 15.a to 15.f presented cases of plagiarism (more and less serious). Analysis showed that some instances of plagiarism were not recognised and acknowledged by the participants, which suggests that some students might commit academic misconduct without realising its inappropriateness.

4 Discussion

In order to understand students' perception of plagiarism, it is important to start with examining the concept of unintentional plagiarism which takes place when a student accidentally, through carelessness or lack of skill, uses another person's words without

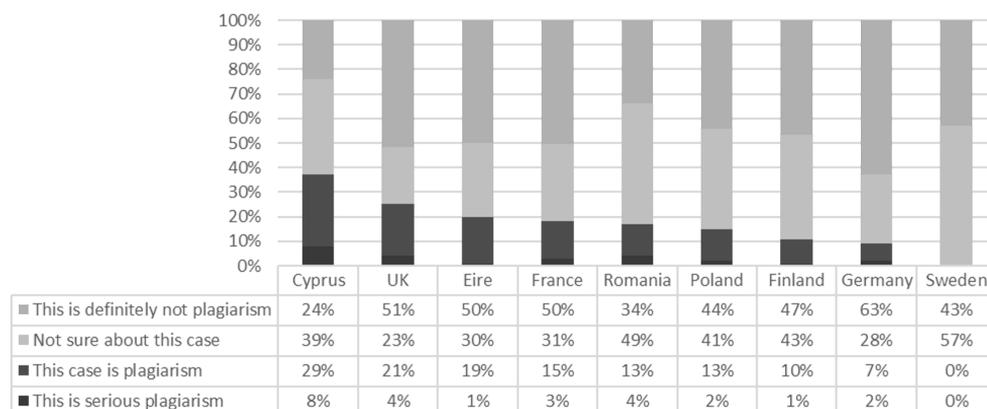


Figure 16. Question 15.f—results

acknowledging it (Gillet 2001). This may happen for many reasons starting from forgetting to include references, through difficulties with expressing another person's ideas in student's own words, to unawareness of the term plagiarism.

Analysing Survey Question 1, in 1971 out of 2103 cases (94%), it was possible to interpret definitions stated by the students as demonstrating understanding and presenting appropriate meaning of plagiarism. The words used the most often to describe plagiarism were categorised under the following themes: "ideas / thoughts / information / work" (54%), "copying" (43%), "using / taking" (29%), "as my own / under my name" (25%), "words / text" (25%), as well as "theft / stealing / usurpation / appropriation" (17%).

Although 94% of responses showed awareness and understanding of the term "plagiarism", it was important to analyse students "real" understanding of the concept, as suggested by Yusof (2009) the meanings of the term are often debatable. Questions 15.a to 15.f described six scenarios of poor academic practice and asked respondents to judge whether these are the cases of plagiarism or not. Interestingly, all the scenarios described cases of plagiarism (more and less serious), but students had difficulties with identifying them correctly.

The results proved that many students were often "unsure" what constitutes plagiarism or claimed that some scenarios are "definitely not cases of plagiarism". The biggest concerns were raised in the last question 15.f which presented situation where some referencing has been included in the copied work.

Questions 15.a to 15.f also asked if for each of the presented scenarios the penalty should be applied. Because all the scenarios described cases of plagiarism the correct answer would be the one which agrees with the penalty application. Once more participating students did not recognise the cases correctly and presented mixed opinions regarding appropriateness of penalties. Interestingly many participants did not feel inappropriate to copy 40% of the work from external sources and would not penalise such behaviour.

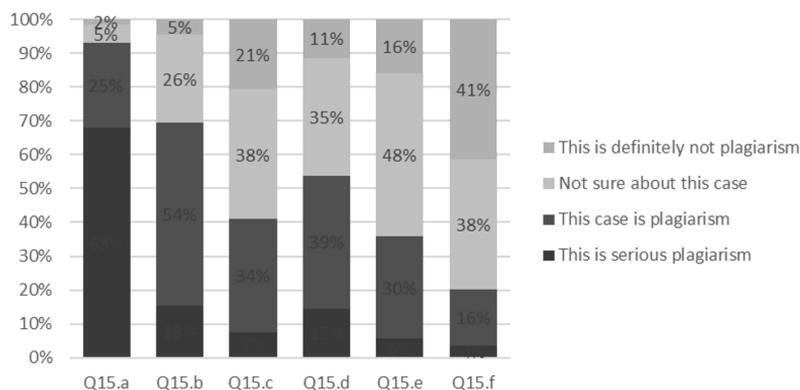


Figure 17. Comparison of Questions 15.a–15.f

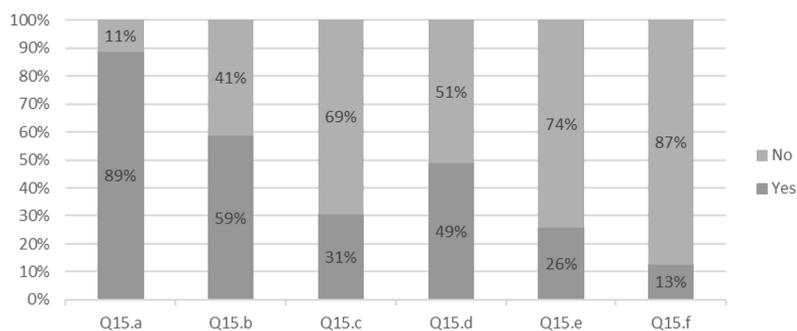


Figure 18. Comparison of Questions 15.a–15.f—Should the penalty be applied?

Differences between the nine analysed countries

Analysing countries individually the author observed substantial disparities in understanding plagiarism by different nationalities.

The country with the strictest sense of what constitutes plagiarism was Eire (Ireland), followed by Cyprus, the United Kingdom, Poland, Sweden and Finland. The countries where students struggled the most with appropriate identification of plagiarism cases were Romania, Germany and France (Note: this analysis was made based on the arithmetic mean of the responses calculated for each country and scenario).

When looking at the penalties, the most “strict” countries appeared to be Cyprus, Germany, the United Kingdom and Eire, followed by Romania, Finland and Sweden. Participants who were the least convinced about the penalty application were Poland and France (Note: these results were calculated basing on the total amount of positive answers to the penalty questions).

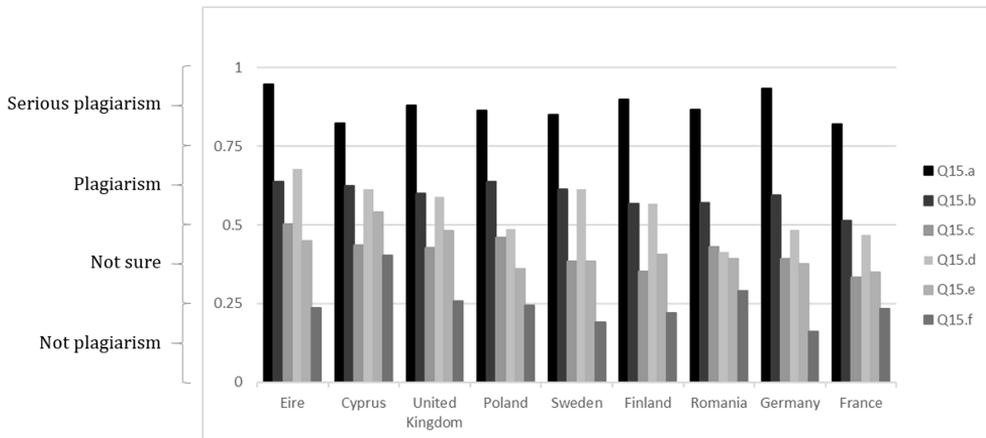


Figure 19. Country by country analysis of Questions 15.a–15.f

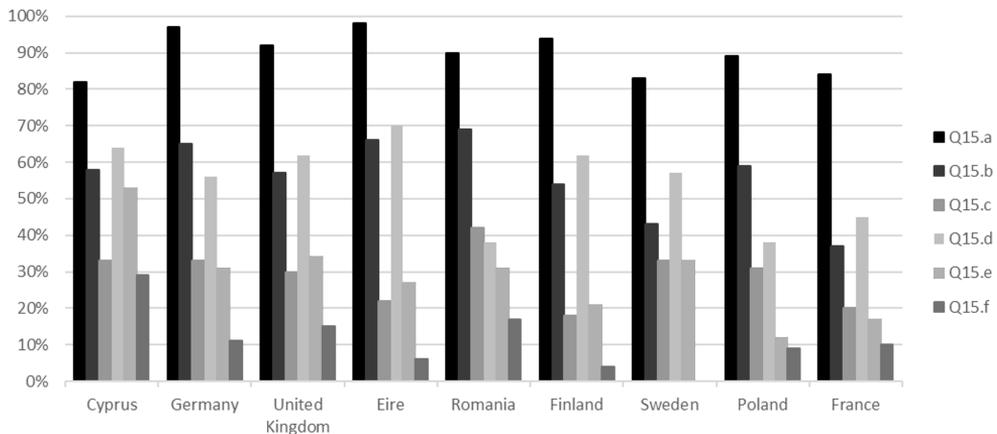


Figure 20. Country by country analysis of Questions 15.a–15.f—Should the penalty be applied?

5 Conclusions

This research exposed that plagiarism is a complex concept with unclear boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Results also showed that there are some cases of plagiarism which are not considered to be misconduct or, according to students, should not be penalised, therefore some students may treat them as perfectly acceptable. This confirms some reasons for “accidental” plagiarism (Gillet 2001) due to lack of understanding of rules and referencing standards.

Researchers suggest that the first step in tackling the problem should be to define the concept of plagiarism and to make sure that students are aware of its meaning. On the other hand, having a definition included in the university policy or checking

if students are familiar with the expression does not guarantee full understanding of the rules and recognising differences between acceptable and unacceptable practice. Carroll and Zetterling (2009: 15) believe that “telling students the rules is a useful first step, however is not sufficient to be able to assume they understand what is needed”.

What is more, plagiarism is not an easy to define concept and the existence of many, sometimes diverse definitions confuses academics as well as the students. Therefore, the biggest challenge is to make sure that students fully understand of what constitutes plagiarism which can then become a stepping stone towards learning how to avoid it. This means that universities need to start investing time and effort in educating students by offering them more training in academic writing, appropriate citation and referencing techniques, as well as avoidance of plagiarism. The concept of academic dishonesty should also be discussed in every module, assignment brief and anti-plagiarism campaigns. This should then increase students’ awareness and understanding and thus reduce incidents of accidental plagiarism.

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