

INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND – A CHALLENGE FOR INTEGRITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING AT MASTER’S LEVEL

Erja Moore¹

¹*Independent Researcher, Finland*

Abstract

All higher education students write a Master’s thesis before graduating with a Master’s degree (EQF level 7 out of 8) from a university. A Master’s thesis presents the knowledge, skills and competences of the graduate. During studies, higher education students are familiarised with the concepts of academic integrity and academic writing, both as readers of scientific texts and producers of their own text. While studying and after graduating from a university with a Master’s degree, the graduate is expected to follow academic integrity: “being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change” (Cambridge Dictionary 2021), and comply “with ethical and professional principles, standards, practices and consistent system of values” (Tauginienė et al. 2018, 7). In Finland, universities supply academic integrity and writing manuals that guide students to write original text about their own subject area and to cite and quote sources in order to incorporate own text with existing knowledge. Accurate referencing is essential in academic writing, references give credit to original authors, and detailed publication information is one aspect of credibility for any Master’s thesis.

Internationalisation of higher education has expanded in the 21st century. Among other countries, also Finland offers higher education to international degree-seeking students, and follows the principles of internationalisation at home by offering study programs in English.

There have been concerns about the quality of higher education and the unquestioned use of English language (Weimer et al. 2019).

My presentation focuses on integrity of academic writing and use of references specifically in the methodology chapters of Master’s theses that have been written in the context of internationalisation of Finnish higher education. The data consist of a purposive sample of 28 English language Master’s theses that have been accepted in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences in 2020 and published in Theseus. The accuracy and consistency of referencing in the same data have been analysed for a presentation in the previous plagiarism conference (Moore 2021). In this presentation, the analysis covers, besides the accuracy of referencing, also the use and quality of references in methodology chapters.

There are two theses in the data that do not have a complete chapter on methodology. The research question is stated but there is no data nor analysis. In one thesis, the methodology is spread in different parts of the thesis. The methodology chapters in the remaining 25 theses were 2-17 pages long, on average 4-5 pages. The number of methodology sources varies from zero to 17 cited sources. The content of the methodology chapters varies from general text with no references at all to profound and detailed reflections of the methodology with references to appropriate

sources. Analysis was started by taking notes on the use of methodology sources, making comparisons between the reference lists and in-text references, and followed by thematising the findings.

Referencing in methodology chapters was found to be accurate or having only minor inaccuracies in 13 theses. In eight theses, plagiarism is present, with either minor or major parts of the methodology having been copied with references from previous publications. Another five theses have severe inaccuracies in references to methodology sources, or the text had been copied and modified from popular webpages.

Patterns of referencing inaccuracies in methodology chapters are diverse. They are overlapping, and in a thesis, there can be one or more of the following features. First, international plagiarism, identified in the earlier analysis of the data (Moore 2021) refers to text that has been copied with references from texts published before anywhere in the world, or text has been copied and translated. Second, the methodology chapters had unprofessional or

incorrect translations from Finnish to English. Third, there is misquoting where the referred source is wrong or the source cannot be found and verified. Finally, in some theses the methodology is written based on inappropriate sources, such as commercial websites or student materials, creating a “www-methodology” in which all references are made to non-scientific websites.

The Master’s theses accepted in the context of internationalisation of higher education in Finland do not always follow the academic integrity standards and conventions of academic writing. Some of the poor quality of English theses can be due to situations in which neither the teacher nor the student is using their first language. The results of this study demonstrate the need for external evaluation of the outcomes of Finnish higher education programs that are offered to degree-seeking international students and as internationalisation at home. International cooperation in external evaluation and in plagiarism research is required in order to guarantee that all Master’s degrees in Finland reach the expected EQF level 7.

References

- Cambridge Dictionary 2022. Integrity. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/integrity>
- EQF 2017. European Qualifications Framework. <https://europa.eu/europass/en/european-qualifications-framework-eqf> Accessed 28.2.2022.
- Moore, E. 2021. Accuracy of referencing in Master’s theses reflecting integrity in academic writing. Presentation in *European Conference on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism 2021*. https://www.sai.ucg.ac.me/dokumentacija/book_of_abstracts2021.pdf, pp 172-173.
- Tauginienė, L, Gaižauskaitė, I, Glendinning, I, Kravjar, J, Ojsteršek, M, Ribeiro, L, Odiņeca, T, Marino, F, Cosentino, M, Sivasubramaniam, S. 2018. *Glossary for Academic Integrity (Revised version)*. ENAI Report. https://www.academia.edu/37794788/Glossary_for_Academic_Integrity_revised_version
- Weimer, L., Hoffman, D. & Silvonen, A. 2019. *Internationalisation at Home in Finnish Higher Education Institutions and Research Institutes*. Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2019:21 https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161606/OKM_2019_21_Internationalisation_at_Home.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y Accessed 28.2.2022.