

Understanding the reasons behind plagiarism in EFL undergraduate academic writing

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Abstract

Plagiarism is using others' ideas or words without citing appropriately and as novice authors, undergraduate students have been under the risk of being accused of plagiarism more than the others. Following the implementation of a plagiarism detector for several years, the researcher of the present study revealed a decline in the number of plagiarism incidents. However, there were several plagiarism incidents despite the implementation of a plagiarism detector. A number of 194 student-papers in Advanced Reading and Writing Skills course of 2013-2014 academic year spring semester were considered. A careful investigation of originality reports retrieved from a plagiarism detector revealed the incidents of plagiarism in 28 assignments. Accused students were interviewed individually by the lecturer, and also the researcher of this study, to reveal their reasons of plagiarism. In spite of the existence of several reasons for plagiarism, they mainly complained about their weaknesses in paraphrasing skills. During the interview, they were also instructed on benefiting from similarity reports of plagiarism detectors. Following the interview session, they revised their papers and resubmitted within two weeks. Seventeen of these 28 students managed to submit plagiarism-free assignments. Although the contribution of plagiarism detectors on declining the number of plagiarism incidents cannot be declined, the results of the study highlight that a plagiarism detector may not be sufficient in preventing plagiarism. Therefore, understanding the reasons for plagiarism will assist academics to develop more appropriate curriculums for their courses and policies against plagiarism.

Keywords: *academic writing; digital feedback; plagiarism; plagiarism detectors*

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Understanding the reasons behind plagiarism in EFL undergraduate academic writing

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Outline

- ◆ Plagiarism
- ◆ Detecting plagiarism
- ◆ Plagiarism types
- ◆ The study
 - ◆ Methodology
 - ◆ Findings and discussion
 - ◆ Conclusion and implications



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Plagiarism

- ◆ "[T]he practice of claiming credit for the words, ideas, and concepts of others" (APA, 2010, p. 171).
- ◆ "Although plagiarism may occur incidentally, it is often the outcome of a conscious process" (Barron-Corden et al, 2013).
- ◆ Estimations of plagiarized content in student papers:
 - ◆ Around 30% (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2008)
 - ◆ More than 40% (Comas et al. 2010).

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Types of Plagiarism (Standler, 2012)

- ◆ **Two basic types:**
 - ◆ **Minor plagiarism:** quoting a sentence or two without quotation marks and without a citation.
 - ◆ **Major plagiarism:** almost the entire work written by someone else.

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Types of Plagiarism (Martin, 2004)

- ◆ **Plagiarism of ideas:** ideas, knowledge, or theories from another person are claimed without proper citation.
- ◆ **Plagiarism of references & Plagiarism of authorship:** citations and entire documents are included without any mention of their authors.
- ◆ **Plagiarism word by word (copy-paste or verbatim copy):** consists of the exact copy of a text (fragment) from a source into the plagiarized document.
- ◆ **Paraphrase plagiarism:** in order to conceal the plagiarism act, a different form expressing the same content is often used.

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Web Plagiarism

- ◆ **Directly copying from the net and pasting.**
- ◆ **Internet:** the most probable source of plagiarism:
 - ◆ Sentleng and King (2012)
 - ◆ Austin and Brown (1999)
 - ◆ Culwin and Lancaster (2000)
 - ◆ Lathrop and Foss (2000)

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Detecting Plagiarism

- Why to use a plagiarism detector?
 - To check student papers against plagiarism.
 - To provide more effective feedback.
- Advantages:
 - Instructors: Saves time.
 - Students: Provides rich feedback.

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Plagiarism Detectors

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iParadigms Turnitin & iThenticate EduTie Ephorus Urkund Plagtracker Wcopyfind CopyTracker PlagiServe MOSS WORDCheck Tranker Tetlow | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SHERLOCK Saxon MyDropBox JPlag Jones Gossip Ferret EVE2 DetectaCopius CopyFind CopyCatch Big Brother |
|--|---|

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How do plagiarism detectors work?

- Introna and Hayes explain (2011):
 - Make a digital fingerprint of a document.
 - The fingerprint is a small and compact numerical representation of the content of the document.
 - Use this to compare documents against each other.

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Problems with detectors

- Shortcoming of detectors:
 - Students are aware of them.
 - They plagiarize more carefully (Brown et al., 2007).
- Experiments on Turnitin (Hayes & Introna, 2005):
 - Replace a single word systematically at the right place:
 - e.g. often every 7th and 14th word.
 - Turnitin may not detect plagiarism despite similarity in the text.

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Interpreting similarity reports

- Detectors cannot solve the problem on their own (Carroll, 2009).
- Detecting genuine academic plagiarism requires a systematic approach (Meuschke & Gipp, 2013).
- Reliability of similarity reports (Brown, Fallon, Lott, Matthews & Mintie, 2007).
- Variations in interpreting similarity reports
 - Strict legalistic interpretations vs. More contextual interpretations (Hayes & Introna, 2005)
- Discriminate students who accidentally plagiarise from the ones who intentionally do so.
- The final responsibility for detecting plagiarism belongs to the lecturer, not to a plagiarism detector (Ellis, 2012).

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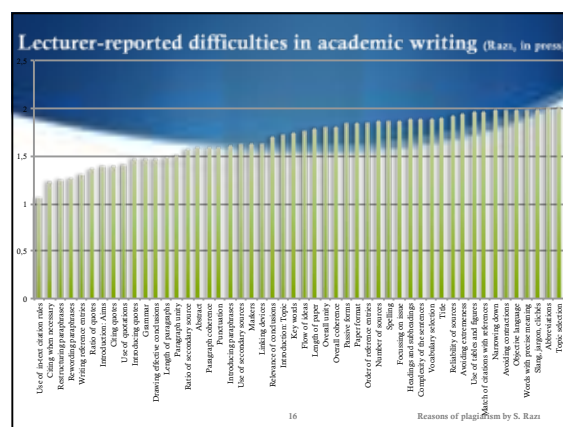
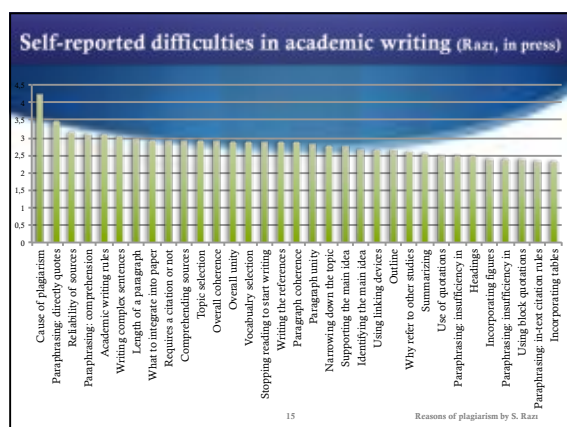
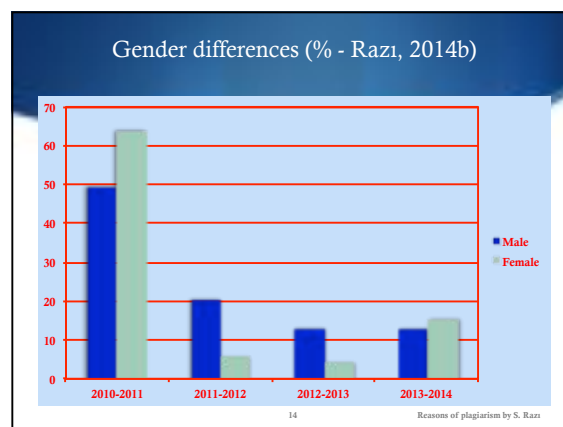
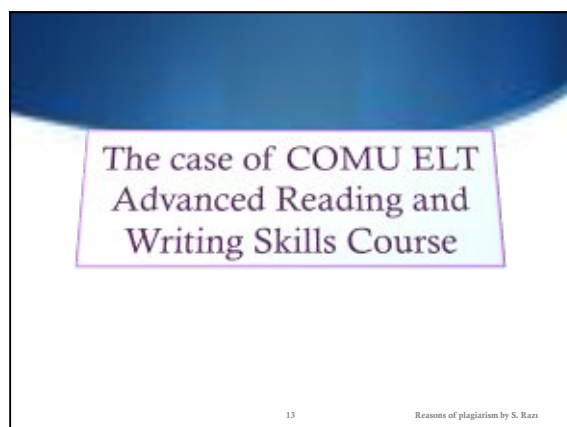
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Who plagiarize more?

- Inconsistent results.
- No gender differences (Walker, 2010).
- Male students plagiarise more (Rakovski & Levy, 2007; Razi, 2015b).
 - Consider their poor performance (Severiens & ten Dam, 2012).
- First-year undergraduates inexperience (e.g., Park, 2003; Razi, 2015; Yeo & Chien, 2007).

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Frequency of plagiarism (Razi, 2014b)

Year	Gender	Status	Group	Plagiarism	Submission	No Accepted	Total	Total	
2010-2011	male	regular	day	20	4	4	32	172	
		repeat	evening	9	7	3	19		
		repeat	day	0	3	1	7		
	female	regular	day	39	4	11	54		
		repeat	evening	26	4	16	46		
		repeat	day	2	1	4	7		
2011-2012	male	regular	day	8	11	4	23	272	
		repeat	evening	3	13	14	30		
		repeat	day	6	9	17	32		
	female	regular	day	2	13	23	38		
		repeat	evening	2	16	32	50		
		repeat	day	0	12	35	47		
2012-2013	male	regular	day	5	18	17	40	243	
		repeat	evening	3	4	7	14		
		repeat	day	3	19	6	28		
	female	regular	day	0	16	6	25		
		repeat	evening	1	10	41	51		
		repeat	day	2	15	9	26		
2013-2014	male	regular	day	3	12	14	29	194	
		repeat	evening	5	9	6	20		
		repeat	day	0	0	0	0		
	female	regular	day	3	23	13	39		
		repeat	evening	15	8	61	84		
		repeat	day	13	11	37	61		
Total					2	17	6	25	
					2	7	14	23	

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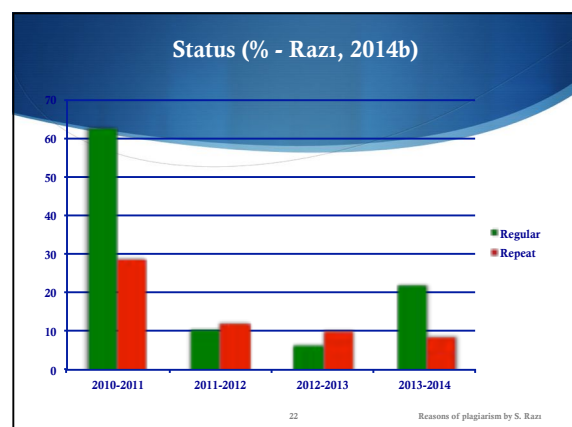
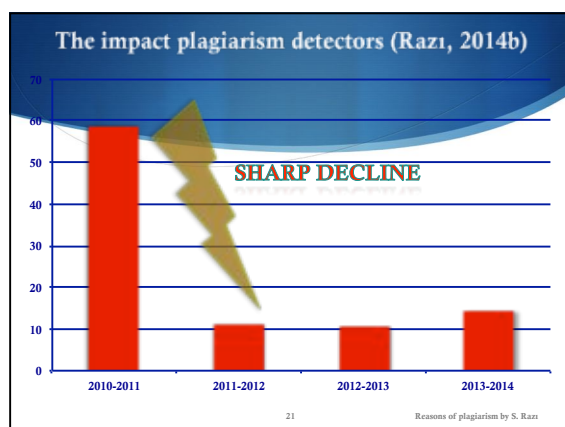
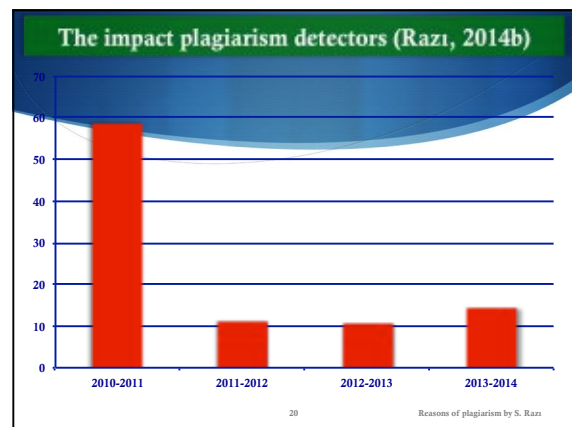
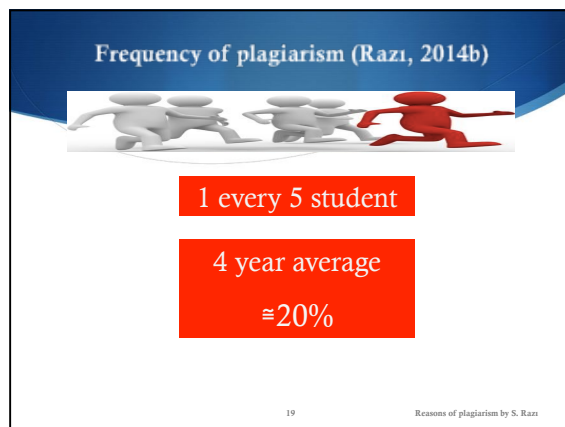
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		repeat	day	9	19
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	female	regular	day	39	54
		repeat	evening	26	46
		repeat	day	2	4
2011-2012	male	regular	evening	8	23
		repeat	day	3	30
		repeat	evening	6	32
	female	regular	day	2	38
		repeat	evening	2	50
		repeat	day	0	47
2012-2013	male	regular	day	5	40
		repeat	evening	3	14
		repeat	day	3	28
	female	regular	day	0	25
		repeat	evening	1	51
		repeat	day	2	26
2013-2014	male	regular	day	5	20
		repeat	evening	0	0
		repeat	day	3	39
	female	regular	day	3	26
		repeat	evening	13	61
		repeat	day	0	0
Total	female	repeat	evening	2	25
		repeat	day	7	32

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Problem Statement

PLAGIARISM STILL SURVIVES IN UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC WRITING!

WHY?

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THE STUDY

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Aim of the study

- ◆ **Revealing the reasons of plagiarism.**
- ◆ **Research question:**
 - ◆ How do plagiarizers explain their reasons to plagiarize?

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Setting

- ◆ **Turkey:**
 - ◆ Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University
 - ◆ ELT Department
- ◆ 2013-2014 academic year
- ◆ Spring semester



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Participants

- ◆ **Advanced Reading and Writing Skills Course:**
 - ◆ 194 students enrolled.
 - ◆ 28 plagiarized.
 - ◆ 11 male
 - ◆ 17 female

	regular	day	5	20
	evening	0	0	
	repeat	5	39	
male	evening	5	26	
	day	13	61	
	regular	evening	0	0
	repeat	5	25	
female	day	2	23	
	evening	2	23	
			179	881

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INSTRUMENTS

- ◆ Semi-structured individual interview questions.
- ◆ Transparent Academic Writing Rubric:
 - ◆ Valid and reliable (Razi, 2015).
- ◆ **Turnitin:**
 - ◆ Superior, compared to the other plagiarism detectors (Hill & Page, 2009).



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PROCEDURES OF DATA COLLECTION

Advanced Reading and Writing Course Contents suggested by Razi (2011).
 Accused students were interviewed.
 They mainly complained about their weaknesses in paraphrasing skills.
 Instructed on benefiting from similarity reports.
 After the interview, revised & resubmission within two weeks.
 17 of 28 students submitted plagiarism-free assignments.

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PROCESS WRITING AND TYPES OF FEEDBACK



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PRE SCREENING

- ◆ The length
- ◆ The quotation ratio
- ◆ Similarity reports
- ◆ **All the participants were unable to proceed this preliminary step.**



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Limitations

- ◆ Concerns Turnitin similarity reports:
 - ◆ Sources not exist in databases.
 - ◆ May not report actual plagiarism (McKeever, 2006; Walker, 2010).
- ◆ Generalization:
 - ◆ Data from a single university in the Turkish tertiary context.



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Findings and Discussion

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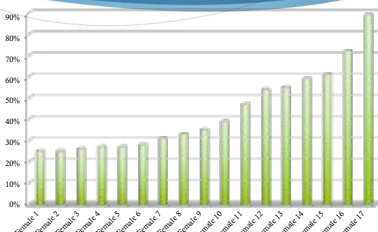
FINDINGS: MALE SIMILARITY RATIO



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FINDINGS: FEMALE SIMILARITY RATIO



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Findings: Reasons male

- ◆ M1: Did not how to paraphrase.
- ◆ M2: Forgot quotation marks.
- ◆ M3: Tried to catch deadline.
- ◆ M4: Did not how to paraphrase: Problems in restructuring.
- ◆ M5: Bored and then tried to catch deadline.
- ◆ M6: To reduce quotation ratio, cited like paraphrase.
- ◆ M7: Did not how to paraphrase.
- ◆ M8: Did not how to cite.
- ◆ M9: Insufficient number of sources. Cited a single source poorly.
- ◆ M10: Submitted a friend's assignment since she told him that she had not submitted it.
- ◆ M11: Submitted the same assignment for two courses.

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Findings: Reasons female

- F1: To catch deadline, borrowed some expressions from a friend.
- F2: Since it was difficult to paraphrase, she avoided paraphrasing.
- F3: Thought that mentioning the author would be enough to copy the sentence.
- F4: Bored and then tried to catch deadline.
- F5: Tried to catch deadline.
- F6: Did not how to paraphrase.
- F7: Tried to catch deadline.
- F8: Bored towards the end of the paper and did not paraphrase carefully.
- F9: Bored in some parts of the paper and did not paraphrase carefully. Non-attendance to tutors resulted in weak paraphrase.
- F10: Tried to avoid submitting a short paper and integrated weak paraphrased expressions.
- F11: Tried to avoid spoiling meaning in restructuring so only changed some words.
- F12: Non-attendance to tutors because of illness and then tried to catch the deadline.
- F13: Did not how to paraphrase.
- F14: Thought that mentioning the author would be enough to copy the sentence. Tried to avoid spoiling meaning in restructuring so only changed some words.
- F15: Did not how to paraphrase.
- F16: Tried to catch deadline.
- F17: Did not accept being interviewed.

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FINDINGS

Accused students instructed on benefiting from similarity reports.
After the interview, revised & resubmission within two weeks.
17 of 28 students submitted plagiarism-free assignments.

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Conclusion

- ◆ Consider first-year undergraduates inexperience (e.g., Park, 2003; Razi, 2015; Yeo & Chien, 2007).
- ◆ Provide awareness on plagiarised expression.
- ◆ Teach how to benefit from digital feedback.
- ◆ Encourage resubmission rather than penalizing.

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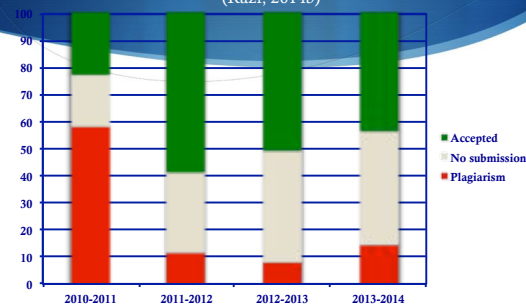
Implications: On-going research

- ◆ In 2014-2015 academic year
- ◆ Multiple submissions:
 - ◆ Consider drop in plagiarism incidents from the 1st to the 2nd assignment (Ledwith & Rsques, 2008).
- ◆ Peer review
 - ◆ Evaluating others' papers:
 - ◆ An invaluable experience both for the author and the reviewer (Aghaei & Hansson, 2013).

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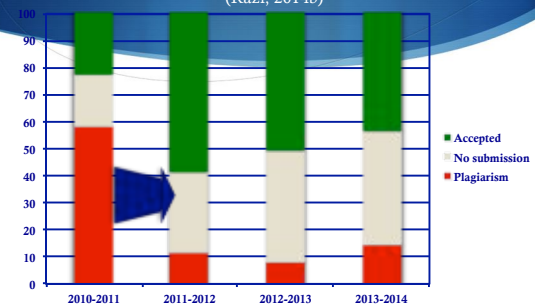
Expectation: Removing the side effect of plagiarism detectors (Razi, 2014b)



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Expectation: Removing the side effect of plagiarism detectors (Razi, 2014b)



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Implication: On-going research

- As suggested by Rollinson (2005):
 - Match students carefully.
 - Three groups according to their success.
 - Provide detailed information about peer review.
 - Familiarization with the rubric.
- Classroom-based assessment (CBA – Lam, 2013):
 - A combination of self, peer and tutor review.
 - Anonymity in peer review process (Razi, 2014a; Robinson, 2002).
 - Help students make informed decisions about:
 - How to revise their previous drafts.
 - How to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of their written skills.

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Implication: Prevention of plagiarism

- Cooperation of colleagues.
- Institutions should take precautions and encourage lecturers to follow them.
 - Use of plagiarism detectors should be encouraged by institutions.
 - Universities should develop their own campus-wide writing programme assessment as proposed by Good, Osborne, and Birchfield (2012).
 - Meeting the requirements of European Credit Transfer System (Bologna Declaration): appropriate assessment procedures.
- Factors affecting adoption of plagiarism detectors (Lee, 2011).
- Individual attempts would be fruitless.
- Teach how to benefit from digital feedback (Razi, 2014a).

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Educational implications

- Aim of the lecturer:
 - Penalizing???
 - Receiving zero on the assignment, Failing the course, Suspension, Expulsion???
 - OR** develop awareness against plagiarism.
 - Students might not feel that cheating on assignments is a serious problem (Brent & Atkinson, 2011).
 - Enable the production of plagiarism-free assignments.
- Variations in interpreting similarity reports
 - Strict legalistic interpretations vs. More contextual interpretations (Hayes & Introna, 2005)
 - Drop in plagiarism incidents from the 1st to the 2nd assignment (Ledwith & Rsques, 2008).

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