

# The Characteristics of Academic Plagiarism in Four Universities in the City of Arequipa: A Comparative Study Conducted on Male and Female Students

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The objective of this study is to characterize academic plagiarism in male and female students from four universities in the city of Arequipa, Peru. The sample consisted of 1370 students, including 717 females (52.3%) and 653 males (47.7%). A questionnaire was distributed to the students with closed questions that evaluate the behaviours and perceptions about academic plagiarism from a multidimensional point of view. A quantitative approach to cross-sectional descriptive design was proposed. The results indicate that, regarding behaviour towards academic plagiarism, there are similarities in the answers given by both females and males, who stated that “once” they had behaviours related to plagiarism in the university. Regarding the perception of this phenomenon in basic processes of citation and referencing of the sources used, there were some differences between the genders. The survey concludes that both female and male students show similar behaviours and perceptions regarding situations related to acts of academic plagiarism.

**Key words:** *Plagiarism, university, students, behavior, perception.*

## Introduction

When an author writes a text, he/she relies on a series of resources to back up his/her arguments. Often, the in-depth consultation of other works helps to structure the objective that is sought with the writing. In this sense, the acquisition of knowledge not only entails the selection, reading, and understanding of texts, but also the use of another person's ideas to build the epistemic framework. Acts such as summarising, paraphrasing, or producing exact copies are just some of the resources for reusing texts. All these acts are in themselves recurrent practices in academic life. The problem arises when the sources are not included or, if it's done at all, do not follow the established forms. If this happens, this would be classed as a case of plagiarism.

Plagiarism is understood as the act of copying the most essential components of a work in order to make it pass off as one's own. The scope of plagiarism goes beyond the academic sanction, its implications come to damage the moral rights of the plagiarized author and the economic and exploitation rights of the work. That is why countries like Peru, Colombia, and Mexico typify it as a crime punished by law.

Whether due to ignorance or not, some authors endorse the ideas of others without mentioning the source. In doing so, plagiarism is committed. The reductionist idea that "plagiarism" is "textually copying an idea without citing the source" has grown to the extent of believing that plagiarism of an idea is avoided by paraphrasing or summarizing that idea. Adapting the ideas of others in order to integrate it into our own discourse does not exempt the author from citing the source.

In recent years, thanks to the development and expansion of the internet, studies on the phenomenon of plagiarism are on the increase. Although this practice has been present in various fields such as politics or art, most studies on this phenomenon have focused on the academic field (Culwin and Lancaster, 2001; Hart and Friesner, 2004; Flint, Clegg and Macdonald, 2006; Ellery, 2008; Eret and Gokmenoglu, 2010; Bretag, 2013; Heckler and Forde, 2015; Ramos et al, 2019). Research on this phenomenon occurs in sectors such as basic or regular education and at the undergraduate and graduate levels in colleges and universities (Park, 2003; Szabo and Underwood, 2004). Despite not being a recent problem, plagiarism has aroused the interest of various specialists and institutions, especially for the ease and convenience of users, academic or not, of extracting information from the network.

Universities see plagiarism as a threat that endangers the quality of higher education. This practice not only focuses on the student population, but also reaches teachers and authorities. This is evidenced by researchers such as Lidell and Fong (2008) and Stephens, Young and Calabrese (2006) who analysed the incidence of this phenomenon in the classrooms of

universities in the United States; as well as the studies by Agud (2014), Comas-Forgas, Sureda-Negre and Oliver-Trobat (2011) and Egaña (2012) on the incidence of this phenomenon in Spanish universities. An interesting aspect to highlight is that much of the research on plagiarism focuses on explaining the phenomenon from the level of beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge of those involved. In this regard, the studies by Bokosmaty, Ehrich, Eady and Bell (2017) on the gender attitudes of Canadian university students towards plagiarism is significant. Vargas (2019) contributes a study on appropriation and academic plagiarism. Reyes et al. (2014) focuses their study of plagiarism from the students' perspective, and Ramos et al. (2019) provides research on attitudes towards plagiarism in Peruvian university students, among others.

The present survey, by describing and quantifying plagiaristic practices and attitudes, presents comparative data between behaviours and perception of plagiarism and gender. In Peru, few studies like this have been made, therefore it is necessary to do some work in this direction. The results obtained will allow us to show an interesting panorama about whether plagiarism is a phenomenon typical of a sector or, failing that, it is a general problem whose roots are not gender-originated aspects, but are the consequence of institutionalized practices rife at different academic levels.

## **Method**

### ***Design***

The present investigation has a quantitative approach with a non-experimental design and a cross-sectional descriptive level with a single sample cut.

### ***Sample***

The initial sample was formed by 1405 university students. When applying the complete questionnaire control procedure, according to gender and age, 35 subjects were excluded. This left a total and definitive sample of 1370. Regarding gender, 717 are women who represent 52.3% of the total and 653 are men who make up the remaining 47.7%. The average age of the sample is 18.48 years. The standard deviation of 2.64 years and the mode is 17 years. Most students enter university classrooms when they are between 16 to 20 year old. The individuals picked up for the sample are first and second term students. One public and three private universities were chosen, all of them from the city of Arequipa. The distribution of the sample by age groups and by gender is shown in Table 1. It can be seen that this distribution is fairly balanced.

**Table 1:** Gender and age groups of students

		fi	%
Gender	Female	717	52,3
	Male	653	47,7
Age group	Younger than 17	150	10,9
	17	474	34,6
	18	283	20,7
	19	150	10,9
	20	110	8,0
	Older than 20	203	14,8

It can be said that the sample is representative for the following conditions: a) it covers students of the stated age bracket, b) the subjects study at different public and private universities, and c) the subjects belong to different geographical populations. This guarantees a representation of the different types of education (state-sponsored and private) and of the different social classes.

### *Process*

Participation in research was promoted by professors who teach courses in the first and second term of the selected universities. Prior to this activity, the corresponding permits were requested and personalized training was carried out in order to guarantee the correct collection of data. Students took part in the survey without any academic or monetary inducement.

### *Instrument*

Schlosser's scale (2014) was used as an instrument to evaluate behaviour and the perception of academic plagiarism in students. It allows the researchers to measure the different behaviours and perceptions of individual plagiarism from a multidimensional point of view. It consists of 10 items distributed in two subscales that measure behaviour and perception. The response format for behaviour is Likert type with four response options (Always, Quite a few times, Sometimes and Never) in a scale from 1 to 4, where the higher the score, the greater the presence of the measured construct. In the case of perception, the scale varies to "certainly it is not plagiarism", "It's almost not plagiarism", "It's almost plagiarism" and "Certainly it's plagiarism", within a scale ranging from 1 to 4. The most prominent feature of this instrument is that it has an open question to analyze the perception of the definition of plagiarism by students.

### ***Data Processing***

The SPSS v 24.0 statistical package was used to process the data, obtaining frequency tables for the analysis of each question. The gender comparison was carried out by means of the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test applied to two independent samples as the distribution of the same was not normal. A significance level of 0.05 was accepted to rule out a null hypothesis.

### **Results**

Table 2 shows the results of the variable “academic plagiarism behaviour by gender”, observing that, in the four aspects questioned, there is similarity in the answers given by females and males. The response of “sometimes” prevails as the one most selected by the surveyed male and female students. It can therefore be said that both groups admit that “sometimes” they have carried out some of the behaviours related to academic plagiarism indicated in the instrument.

It should be noted that the behaviour “I have copied information from the work of a partner” is the one with the highest percentage of selection of the response “never”. This trend was homogeneous in both genders. However, in the rest of the indicated behaviours, the alternative “sometimes” stands out as the most selected response.

Regarding the application of the non-parametric test of the Mann-Whitney U applied to two independent samples. since the distribution of the same is not normal, there is a difference between female and male in the statement “I have copied information from the work of some partner”. In the remaining statements there are no major differences.

**Table 2:** Academic plagiarism behaviors by gender

		Female		Male		p valor
		Fi	%	fi	%	
I've given my notes or class notes for a classmate to copy	Always	34	2,5	37	2,7	0,323
	Many times	95	7,0	97	7,2	
	Sometimes	492	36,4	382	28,3	
	Never	92	6,8	123	9,1	
I have used notes or class notes from a classmate to complete my work	Always	10	0,7	22	1,6	0,142
	Many times	59	4,4	78	5,8	
	Sometimes	456	33,7	367	27,1	
	Never	188	13,9	172	12,7	
I've copied information from a classmate's work.	Always	5	0,4	18	1,3	0,003
	Many times	26	1,9	56	4,2	
	Sometimes	342	25,4	292	21,7	
	Never	337	25,0	272	20,2	
I copied information directly from the web without quoting the author.	Always	23	1,7	37	2,7	0,061
	Many times	197	14,6	155	11,5	
	Sometimes	371	27,4	316	23,4	
	Never	122	9,0	131	9,7	

Table 3 summarizes plagiarism behaviours of the 1370 students surveyed. It highlights the fact that in both genders the choice of “sometimes” is the most recurrent. This suggests that the students of the four universities admit to having performed, at some time of their academic activities, acts related to academic plagiarism.

With respect to the Man Whitney U, the p-value found shows that there are no major differences between females and males with respect to plagiarism behaviours.

**Table 3:** Summary of plagiarism behaviors by gender

		Female		Male		p-valor
		fi	%	fi	%	
Behaviors	Always	2	0,1	5	0,4	0,953
	Many times	40	3,0	65	4,8	
	Sometimes	503	37,2	391	28,9	
	Never	168	12,4	178	13,2	

Table 4 shows the results of the variable of “Perception of academic plagiarism by gender”. The data shows that in the five aspects asked in the instrument, there are some differences in the answers given by female and male students.



Most of the students of both genders chose the answer “It’s almost plagiarism”. The presence of this answer is recurring in the following statements: “If the source of information is mentioned in literal quotations and this quote is not placed in quotation marks” and “When only the bibliography is placed at the end of the work”. This result can be translated into the fact that students of both genders perceive that the aforementioned actions involve acts of plagiarism. In the case of the statement “When Internet sources are used but not cited”, a large percentage of students of both genders choose “Certainly it’s plagiarism” which, according to the theory, is correct.

The percentage obtained by the answer “Certainly it’s not plagiarism” in response to the statement “When we write using and / or changing some ideas from a written source and the source of this information does not appear in the reference list” is noteworthy. Additionally, so was the answer “Certainly it’s not plagiarism” for the statement “When we quote literally and the source of information is not mentioned” as the most selected response, both cases being obvious plagiarism.

Regarding the application of the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test applied to two independent samples, since the distribution of the same is not normal, there is a difference between males and females in the statement “When only the bibliography is placed at the end of the work”. In the rest of the statements there are no differences between both genders.

**Table 4:** Perception of academic plagiarism by gender

		Female		Male		p-valor
		fi	%	fi	%	
If the source of information is mentioned in literal quotations and this quote is not placed in quotation marks	Certainly it's plagiarism	128	9,6	93	7,0	0,124
	It's almost plagiarism	199	14,9	183	13,7	
	It's almost not plagiarism	196	14,7	159	11,9	
	Certainly it's not plagiarism	188	14,1	191	14,3	
When we write using and / or changing some ideas from a written source and the source of this information does not appear in the reference list	Certainly it's plagiarism	47	3,5	47	3,5	0,061
	It's almost plagiarism	150	11,3	162	12,2	
	It's almost not plagiarism	284	21,3	235	17,6	
	Certainly it's not plagiarism	225	16,9	182	13,7	
When only the bibliography is placed at the end of the work	Certainly it's plagiarism	237	17,9	173	13,0	0,042
	It's almost plagiarism	256	19,3	234	17,6	
	It's almost not plagiarism	145	10,9	154	11,6	
	Certainly it's not plagiarism	69	5,2	59	4,4	
When we quote literally and the source of information is not mentioned	Certainly it's plagiarism	56	4,2	68	5,1	0,331
	It's almost plagiarism	157	11,8	124	9,3	
	It's almost not plagiarism	230	17,3	215	16,1	
	Certainly it's not plagiarism	264	19,8	218	16,4	
When Internet sources are used but not cited	Certainly it's plagiarism	48	3,6	69	5,2	0,085
	It's almost plagiarism	114	8,5	101	7,5	
	It's almost not plagiarism	218	16,3	183	13,7	
	Certainly it's not plagiarism	331	24,7	275	20,5	

Table 5 summarizes the perceptions about plagiarism of the 1370 students surveyed, highlighting in both genders the selection of the alternative “It’s almost plagiarism”. This means that the students of the four universities “almost always” recognize situations in which acts of academic plagiarism are committed.

Regarding the Man Whitney U, the p-value found, being higher than 0.05, shows that there are no major differences between female and male students regarding the perception of plagiarism.

**Table 5:** Summary of perception of plagiarism by gender

		Female		Male		p-valor
		Fi	%	fi	%	
Perception	Certainly it's not plagiarism	12	0,9	17	1,3	0,998
	It's almost not plagiarism	210	15,7	183	13,7	
	It's almost plagiarism	436	32,5	372	27,8	
	Certainly it's plagiarism	54	4,0	56	4,2	

Regarding the behaviours and perception of plagiarism, students of both genders respond, with few exceptions, in a similar way to the statements shown and admit to having carried out plagiarism behaviours even though they perceive them as such.

## Discussion

The results of the present study demonstrate that plagiarism is a widespread phenomenon among university students. Considering that the sample was extracted from first and second term students from four universities in the city of Arequipa (first-year students), it is clear that this behaviour is carried away from basic education (primary and secondary), at which stage plagiarism is something completely 'normal' and to some extent considered as a 'legitimate' and valid practice. This fact is corroborated by Moreno (2001), who affirms that plagiarism is the main type of non-violent antisocial school behaviour, since the school is the first environment of fraud and corruption practices.

Although accepting the practice of dishonest behaviours in academia is complex, it is clear, according to the results, that for students plagiarism is not a crime (as typified by Peruvian law), also ignoring the serious damage caused to the author and publication owner. Ochoa and Cueva (2016) point out, regarding the severity of plagiarism, that the students' response is not uniform since for some it is a serious fact, for others (the majority) it is a little serious, and for some nothing serious. It should be added that, among the factors that favour the performance of dishonest behaviours in the university, those related to personal problems stand out (Díaz et al., 2010), which affect the performance and behaviour of students.

When talking about behaviours related to academic plagiarism, the present study shows that students of both genders stated that they "sometimes" committed plagiarism. This result coincides with findings by Mejía and Ordóñez (2004) who found, in a sample of 1,194

students at the Universidad de los Andes (Colombia), 49% of respondents had lent some of their (academic) work to a colleague (or partner) to copy it. 48% used ideas from an author without citing the source. 46% copied or paraphrased parts of other works without making the corresponding reference and 30% admitted that they had “cut and pasted” whole texts from the Internet without citing the source. Likewise, Bennett (2005), whose study aimed to establish an explanatory model of the incidence of plagiarism with the responses of 249 Business Administration students at a university in the United Kingdom, found that eight out of ten students surveyed admitted that they had copied a couple of sentences, 71% several sentences, and 46% a paragraph in their written works without indicating the source. Austin, Simpson and Reynen (2005) in their study conducted at a Pharmacy school in Canada, found that of 78 students surveyed, 36% had cut and pasted information from an Internet site without properly citing, but included the reference in the bibliography. The same percentage copied information without using or properly citing the reference, and 83% had invented laboratory data. Finally, Lin and Wen (2007) found that, on average, 66% of 2,068 students in Taiwan’s public and private universities had committed, at least once, some kind of plagiarism. Also noteworthy are the studies by Comas-Forgas and Sureda-Negre (2016) who, in regards to the data related to the commission of academic plagiarism, show that this practice is widely used in university classrooms. This figure is very similar to that obtained in research focused on university students (Comas-Forgas, 2009) and also among students of compulsory secondary education and high school (Sureda-Negre; Comas-Forgas; Oliver-Trobat, 2015).

Regarding the perception of academic plagiarism by gender, the answer “It’s almost plagiarism” in the statements “If the source of information is mentioned in literal quotations and this quote is not placed in quotation marks” and “When only the bibliography is placed at the end of the work”. This means that they perceive that these actions are plagiarism. In the case of the statement “When Internet sources are used but not cited”, students of both genders point out the alternative “Certainly it’s plagiarism” which is correct. However, they perceive as “It’s almost not plagiarism”, a homogeneous tendency in both genders. The statements “When we write using and / or changing some ideas from a written source and the source of this information does not appear in the reference list” Most of the students chose “Certainly it’s not plagiarism” as the response to “When we quote literally and the source of information is not mentioned”. These last two cases of plagiarism are referred to as “raw or direct plagiarism” and “biased or ambiguous plagiarism” (Medina & Verdejo, 2011).

Ambiguous plagiarism, which is not a dishonest act, is related to the act of paraphrasing and its practice is related to ignorance or confusion about acceptable practices. This includes rules and guidelines established by the styles of bibliographic referencing. Paraphrasing a text or an idea without citing sources is a common practice among university students, as evidenced by the study by McCabe (2005) who found that 38% of undergraduate students

committed plagiarism by paraphrasing or copying without referencing a written source. However, according to the results of Olivera and Gómez (2015), only 36.6% of the students knew what a paraphrase was. Despite these data, it is the so-called “raw plagiarism” or also known as “literal plagiarism” the most widespread and easy to detect.

Authors such as Medina and Verdejo (2005; 2008) found that for 791 undergraduate students of the University of Puerto Rico, the most frequently perceived wrong behaviours were to copy material from a source without indicating in a footnote or other place regarding the respective authorship, and make a bibliography with sources that were not consulted. On the other hand, it has been found that students fully know what they are doing when copying (Ashworth, Bannister, Thorne & Studentes on the Qualitative Research Methods Course Unit, 1997), which suggests that they do it intentionally. Because of this awareness, failure to properly cite is high in the ranking of infringements.

Comas-Forgas and Sureda-Negre (2016) and Pérez et al. (2016), state that men have more means of perpetration than women, although no statistically significant relationship is found to support this claim. Along the same lines are the studies by Athanasou and Olasehinde (2002), Straw (2002), Lin and Wen (2007), Comas-Forgas (2009) and Brunell, Staats, Barden and Hub (2011) who agree that the highest prevalence in commission of plagiarism occurs more in male university students than in women’s college and university students. This does not coincide with the findings of the present study since no significant differences were found between men and women regarding the commission of plagiarism. This data shows that the act of plagiarism is not exclusive to a certain gender, its practice responds to social factors such as the need to be part of a group, or personal such as the desire to achieve success with least effort. The knowledge and ignorance of certain practices do not occur or happen just because students are students -- the truth is that the background from school training and upbringing are to blame.

Finally, Schlosser (2014) states that students do know that there are actions that constitute academic plagiarism; however, they do not know all the ways in which it can occur. A similar situation happened in the ongoing investigation. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the perceptions and behaviours that originate plagiarism, which should clearly be considered a crime, will remain entrenched in the university population regardless of gender. This will occur as long as there is no systematic training and awareness work that let those concerned know that plagiarism is not a legal and academically and socially permitted action.

In order to prevent the occurrence of plagiarism, it is also advisable to use the commercial software and tools available to detect coincidences or similarities in academic works. In addition, teachers should be trained in the use of teaching-learning techniques to make sure that the student will analyse the information, and not just copy it. In this sense, the present



investigation breaks ground for future works that investigate the commission of plagiarism in the final terms of the universities. This can be achieved by comparing the entrance and pregraduation terms of the students, analysing their behaviours and relative perceptions on academic plagiarism and assessing whether the university rooted out these bad habits or simply let them go on.



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