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**Using Oral Presentations as Part of the Writing Process to  
Reduce Instances of Plagiarism in Composition Courses**

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**Using Oral Presentations as Part of the Writing Process to Reduce Instances of Plagiarism in Composition Courses**

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**Abstract**

Although the major efforts in preventing plagiarism in Albania have been focused on dissertations and articles in academia, a fundamental issue remains plagiarizing at the undergraduate level. With the gradual increase of the tuition fees in higher education (not only in private but also public institutions), students often see themselves as customers who while purchasing a college education, tread the murky waters of merit and authorship in a society where likes, shares, and anonymity are becoming pervasive. In the context of a composition course in a medium that uses English as the language of instruction, designed and expected to serve as a gatekeeper for all other academic writing in college, plagiarism is not only a moral issue; it's a learning impediment issue. Research unanimously shows the need for a multi-faceted approach to address it. This paper reports on using oral presentations as a formative part of the writing process in an attempt to prevent plagiarism. The preliminary results of text analysis show that using oral presentations as a formative tool may reduce suspected whole-text and direct plagiarism. Data collected through a questionnaire reveal that presentations increased student motivation and facilitated the writing process. No conclusive results have been obtained with regard to other forms of plagiarism.

**Keywords:** oral presentation, plagiarism, composition, EFL.

## Introduction

In the last couple of years, as a writing instructor, I have faced many instances of plagiarism; some were obvious (thanks to turnitin software), some turned me into a detective (searching for sentences/phrases on the internet), while others made me scratch my head and question my comprehending abilities (rogeting: Harris, 2014)). The saddest category has been the essays with which I could not detect serious plagiarism despite being convinced they were not the work of the respective authors.

Enhanced by today's culture of likes, shares, abundant and easily accessible information, plagiarism is here to stay. McCabe's (2005) large study in the United States and Canada with over 80,000 student participants indicated that 36 % of the students copy sentences from internet without proper citation. He explained this irresistible impulse due to the internet being "simply too vast, too convenient, and in some sense, too anonymous to ignore"( cited in Sutherland Smith, 2008, p. 102). Although he believes that the presence of internet facilitates plagiarism among those who already plagiarize from printed sources (Sutherland-Smith, 2008), the temptation of a "quick fix" will always be there. The dichotomy of student versus customer and the blurred lines of ownership versus authorship complicate the situation even further (Ritter, 2005). As Ritter (2005) puts it "authorship is an intellectual activity". However, too much emphasis on college as an economic and practical enterprise, and the definition of authorship in economic terms have diminished its value and justified the idea of paying for assignments. This trend came up in class discussions in the current study where students justified the right of authorship with the right of ownership. To provide support for their arguments, they gave examples of ghostwriting and public speeches (usually given by politicians). While discussing the famous historian Doris Kearns Goodwin's case of plagiarism in Lynne McTaggart's (2002) *Fame can't excuse a plagiarist*, students pointed out that a money settlement without intellectual consequences was an easy way out and that students themselves should be held to the same standards as the famous and popular authors are. News and media reports of real-world examples of plagiarism that go unpunished or receive light punishments support this rhetoric.

### *Challenges of Composition Courses in an EFL setting*

Composition courses in particular take the heat in this issue: in the context of a first-year composition course, designed and expected to serve as a gatekeeper for all other courses and academic writing in college, plagiarism is not only a moral issue; it is a learning impediment issue. Written assignments are the core assessment of composition courses globally. The fulfillment of the learning outcomes is mostly evaluated through process-based writing assignments where students do most of the work from the comfort of their homes/dorms. First year students pose additional challenges. Oftentimes university professors complain about the bad practices students have been exposed to in high school. Sutherland-Smith (2008) reports on a study with 186 international students in South Coast

University in Australia. Interview responses of 30 of them indicated that students were instructed “not to copy” by their high school teachers; however, no strategies on how to accomplish it were ever given. Since most of these students came from Asian countries with traditional teaching methods, a parallelism can be drawn between them and the context of the current study. Anecdotal evidence in class discussions in the current study suggested that high school teachers were careless and unresponsive to blatant cases of plagiarism. One student explained that although 16 students in class had submitted the same assignment, the teacher had taken no action. Instructors need to be sensitive to this specific group of learners who may be unaware of the severity of their actions due to previous practices (Walker, 2010) in order to avoid unintended consequences (Colvin, 2007). Park (2004) advocates for scaled penalties to accommodate inexperienced writers, such as first-year and international students. The new approaches to plagiarism have focused on support rather than punishment for L2 writers (Pecorari & Petric, 2014)

Textual studies have found that students show lack of techniques and skills when synthesizing and incorporating information from sources into their own work. This is more pronounced in an EFL setting where apart from proper synthesis and citation skills students may not possess the linguistic ability to do so. Many of them may not only lack the confidence to write for an academic audience but also the necessary grammar and vocabulary for the task. Walker (2010) found that international students were more likely to have both extensive plagiarism (over 20%) and direct plagiarism (text lifted without citation) compared to their domestic peers. On the other hand, the idea that first year and EFL students don’t know the concept of plagiarism is too simplistic. Three fourth of the international students in Walker’s study were aware of plagiarism and did not engage in such activities. Anecdotally, he reports that some international students were more sensitive to plagiarism than their domestic counterparts.

Misconceptions due to cultural differences may add to the mix. 60 EFL students in a yearlong study by Galoway and Sevier (2003, cited in Sutherland-Smith, 2008) saw memorizing and reusing texts as academic activities. Sutherland-Smith (2005) in her study with ESL students in Australia found that students believed the information on the internet may be used without citation as it belongs to no specific author. Students also confused public domain and common knowledge, thinking that if the website allowed it, the information can be recycled without credit.

### *Prevention Pedagogy*

When it comes remedies for plagiarism “students don’t trust the faculty, faculty don’t trust the students, and neither party trusts that the institution is equipped to remedy the problem” (Evans-Tokaryk, 2014, p.2). An extensive body of literature argues that instead of seeing plagiarism as an epidemic and students as experts in cheating who are unprepared to undertake college-level writing, let’s approach it as a collection of good practices that will help curb it (Hartwig, 2015). Prevention methods have been multi-faceted but they mostly fall under three

categories: regulatory policies, teaching strategies and student awareness (Adam et.al, 2016, Hartwig, 2015). Regarding the latter, Walker (2010) found that “plagiarism did not decrease as awareness about it became more widespread”. Explicit instruction about plagiarism alone is not effective. Class discussions are a great tools to inform students about instances and penalties of plagiarism, but if they are not accompanied by extensive exercises in paraphrasing and source incorporation, they won’t have measurable effects (Pecorari & Petric, 2015.) Wette (2010) reported on a drastic decrease of direct copying from other sources after an eight hour module that targeted citation practices; however, problems with more advanced source use were persistent.

It has been widely reported that one way to curb plagiarism is to focus on the writing process and on cumulative tasks that will lead to the main project. Although oral presentations have not directly been listed as one of the obvious tools to prevent plagiarism, they are a commonly used tool of assessment in higher education. In an L2 context, they contribute to the improvement of communication and language skills useful for real life tasks. Presentations can add a new meaning to audience which occupies an important place in writing assignments. With presentations, students have a greater interest in their papers not only in terms of grades but also of intellectual contribution in front of their peers (Watts, 2006). Watts also reported that despite some professors being reluctant about including presentations in course work and assessment due to time concerns, they are valuable tools that result in deeper, more invested learning and positive feedback from students.

Hutchenson (2009) investigated the impact of using oral presentations to reduce the incidence of plagiarism in business courses. She observed that although students were informed about plagiarism, they still engaged in it, thus confirming an important finding in literature. According to her, the strategy of using oral presentations to curb plagiarism has three goals: raising awareness about plagiarism, increasing students’ vested interest in their assignments, and providing feedback about plagiarism and other writing related issues. Results revealed that only 34 % of the essays were plagiarism free. Moderate plagiarism in the form of sentences without proper attribution and citation, was found in 60 % of the cases. 8 % of 138 essays contained significant plagiarism with extensive parts of the essays copied directly from other sources. Hutchenson, stated that while at first the results indicated more plagiarism than she had expected, given the ongoing training and emphasis on avoiding it throughout the semester, the instructors of the participating students thought there was “a noticeable reduction [of plagiarism] accompanied by an improvement in the general standard of writing”

Snowden (2005) recommends oral presentations as an appropriate tool in the field of EAP. The need to talk about complex texts will push students to use their own words, thus making paraphrasing more tangible and plagiarism less tempting. He suggests presentations as a temporary remedy until students seem confident to be assessed only through written work. According to this approach, composition courses would be an appropriate platform to use oral presentations to address plagiarism concerns.

Rogerson and McCarthy (2017) suggest using oral presentations where the students have to present their main arguments as a tool to prevent the use of online paraphrasing tools and ensure the fulfillment of the learning outcomes in written assignments despite integrity issues while preparing for them. They also claim that “there is a fine line between the use of paraphrasing tools and the use of tools to plagiarize” (p.12) and that putting others’ ideas in one’s own words is a skill that needs to be developed both in written form and orally.

## **Research Questions**

How do oral presentations affect the type and extent of plagiarism in a written assignment?

What are students’ perceptions on using oral presentations as formative assessment in the writing process?

## **Method**

The study was designed and conducted as an action study over the course of a semester (15 instruction weeks) in a first-year composition course in a private university in Albania. The total student enrollment in the course taught by the author was 52, divided in two sections. Only 50 students could participate in the study since two of them did not submit the first assignment. Students take two semesters of composition as part of their general education requirements. Most of them were freshmen in their second semester at the university, and had already taken a lower level composition course.

Students were responsible for writing two major assignments, one position paper (assignment 1) and one researched term paper (assignment 2) with similar lengths (1200 words for the first one and 1500 for the second one). The first assignment was worth 15 % of their overall grade and included only a first (5%) and a final draft (10 %). The second assignment was more extensive. It was worth 30 % of their overall grade with process tasks accounting for half of it. Oral presentations, worth 5 %, were scheduled to take place after the completion of all pre-writing tasks and the first draft.

A discussion about what constitutes plagiarism and its implications both morally and in the context of the course took place as students read articles published in the US media about various instances of plagiarism. Some students even chose to write their first assignments on whether or not plagiarism should be tolerated at the university level.

Turnitin was the software provided by the university for plagiarism checking purposes. However, in the context of this course and this study, it was used as a tool for assignment submission and feedback delivery as well as a formative tool in the writing process where students could see the similarity reports of their first drafts and make necessary changes before final submission. For each final draft the originality report was scrutinized to see not only the extent of matching

material but also its type. The 15 % threshold in categorizing the extent of plagiarism was chosen due to a pre-determined course policy that final drafts showing more than 20 % similarity in turnitin shall receive a zero if left unrevised. The cases when no plagiarism was detected by turnitin, were still scrutinized for inappropriate source usage and instances of plagiarism. This was only natural since the author needed to grade each essay in the context of the course. Students were warned that extensive plagiarism may result in a zero for the final draft.

The types of plagiarism to be identified in the final drafts were initially adapted from Walker’s 2010 study. However, based on the limitations stated there, and the author’s previous experience with plagiarism in similar assignments, the categories were expanded. Turnitin is unable to detect instances of online paraphrasing tools ((Rogerson & McCarthy, 2017), “material from invisible web sources such as password-protected databases” or customized papers by online paper mills (McKeever, 2006 cited in Walker, 2010). Previous experience has also shown that even short and impromptu conferences with students may reveal the authorship of submitted assignments. The categories determined for this study are listed below.

*Direct Plagiarism:* appropriating material by copying from a source without any type of citation (Walker, 2010)

*Direct with source:* presenting the material as paraphrased with proper citation when in fact it is a direct quote from the source (Walker, 2010)

*Paraphrasing Tools:* online paraphrasing tools have been used to alter original material and present it as one’s own (Rogerson & McCarthy, 2017). The author was alerted by nonsense text, inappropriate and archaic vocabulary words, and irregular capitalization in the middle of the sentence.

*Whole text plagiarism:* student copies most of the text from another paper

**Table 1.** *The Variables in the Study*

Variables	Options	Description
Plagiarism type	Direct	Copying material verbatim without citing the source
	Direct with source	Citing a source for the material but presenting it as own paraphrase when it is copied verbatim.
	Paraphrasing Tools	Paraphrasing original text by using online paraphrasing tools
	Whole text	Copying most of the text from another paper
Plagiarism extent	Moderate	Less than 15% of assignment plagiarized
	Extensive	15% or more plagiarized



**Results**

Table 2 presents the frequency of the different plagiarism categories in both assignment 1 & 2. Some type of plagiarism was observed in one third of 100 scripts. There is no difference in the overall plagiarism between assignment 1 and assignment 2. However, the different categories of plagiarism show meaningful differences. While direct plagiarism without source acknowledgement dropped from 26 % in the first assignment to 14 % in the second, direct plagiarism with source citation went from non-existent to 16 % in the second assignment. Paired t-tests confirmed that the differences are significant ( $p=.018$  and  $p=.004$ ). Despite not being common occurrences, scripts that used online paraphrasing tools without editing and whole-text plagiarism also saw a decrease from assignment 1 to assignment 2. It is worth noting that the one instance of whole text-plagiarism was not present in the second assignment.

**Table 2.** *Types of Plagiarism for Assignment 1 & 2*

Type	Assignment 1		Assignment 2	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No Plagiarism	32	64.0	33	66.0
Direct Plagiarism	13	26.0	7	14.0
Direct Plagiarism with citation	0	0	8	16.0
Paraphrasing Tools	4	8.0	2	4.0
Whole-text Plagiarism	1	2.0	0	0
Total	50	100.0	50	100.0

Table 3 shows the extent of plagiarism for assignment 1 & 2. Instances of extensive plagiarism (14 %) seem to exceed those of moderate plagiarism (22%) in the first assignment while the numbers are reversed in the second assignment. Only 12 % of the scripts contained extensive plagiarism whereas 22 % of them showed less than 15 % (moderate) plagiarism. Of all cases of plagiarism in assignment 1, 38 % were instances of moderate plagiarism and 62 % were extensive plagiarism. In assignment 2, 65 % of the instances were considered as moderate plagiarism and 35 % showed extensive plagiarism.

**Table 3.** *Extent of Plagiarism for Assignments 1 & 2*

Extent	Assignment 1		Assignment 2	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No Plagiarism	32	64.0	33	66.0
Moderate Plagiarism	7	14.0	11	22.0
Extensive Plagiarism	11	22.0	6	12.0
Total	50	100.0	50	100.0

As for the second research question, a simple questionnaire of three items was distributed at the end of the semester via Google forms. The number of questions was kept small on purpose in order to encourage all students to respond. Table 4 shows the results on student satisfaction about presenting their paper. Students perceived presentations as a useful tool to increase their motivation (M=3.93) and somewhat helpful with their final paper (M=3.49). However they did not pick a side when it came to its contribution to better understanding and preventing plagiarism. Students were also asked to write reflection papers for the course as part of their grade scheme. The reflection papers were not anonymous, however, students were encouraged to give their honest opinions about course assignments and feedback. They were assured that no negative consequences would arise from negative comments. Some of their opinions about the presentations and their impact to their research papers are presented in the discussion section.

**Table 4.** *Student Perceptions on Oral Presentations*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The presentation helped me with my final paper	47	3.4894	.90583
The presentation increased my motivation to work with the paper	47	3.9362	.76341
The presentation helped me understand and prevent plagiarism	47	3.2340	.78610

## Discussion

Despite many mitigating measures, one third of the scripts contain some sort of plagiarism. There was no significant difference in the overall percentage of plagiarism between assignment 1, which required no oral presentations, and assignment 2 which required oral presentations. This falls in line with McGabe's statement that the ease and availability of internet affects those who are likely to plagiarize from other sources and its presence does not increase other student's chance of plagiarizing. However, Walker (2010) found a statistically significant difference in plagiarized material in subsequent assignments which dropped from 31 % to 21 % in 1098 scripts. This finding of the current study may be due to factors related to student dedication and interest in instruction and classroom activities. Many discussions about types and ways to avoid plagiarism were conducted at the beginning of the semester and those who paid attention were successful in avoiding plagiarism. It should be said that very few instances of plagiarism in the second assignment were observed among students who did not engage in obvious plagiarism activities in the first one. Another important

implication for the first research question is that no overall reduction of plagiarism can be attributed to oral presentations. However, in their oral presentations, the students were required to include the process of incorporating two of the sources they had used in their papers. The decrease of extensive and direct plagiarism without source citation could be partially explained with the stress given to source incorporation as one of the presentation requirements and the extensive feedback given by the instructor and peers after it in this regard.

In previous semesters, the author had observed some sort of burn out and lack of motivation as the end of the semester approached. Many students did not pay much needed attention to source synthesis and incorporation. Having to present their work may have given the students the incentive to take it more seriously especially for the ones that were late with first draft submission. As one student wrote in her reflection paper *“I honestly believe that if I had not done the presentation of my topic, I would have never managed to write my research paper. Before presenting, there were so many ideas and information in my mind that I found extremely hard to put down on paper. However, the moment I spoke about my ideas out loud, everything started making sense. It was almost like an epiphany. Therefore, I strongly believe that the presentation extremely helped me.”* The anonymity that exists in writing only for the instructor disappeared and students became more concerned with how to make a successful presentation in front of their peers. Additionally, the finding that direct plagiarism with source citation increased in the second assignment may be attributed to the lack of efforts to make the necessary changes suggested after the first drafts and presentations. It also suggests that students need continuous instruction and time to master source incorporation into their writing. Finally, two students who had used online paraphrasing tools to alter original text copied from another source did not present their papers. They might have felt underprepared to do so, and in such case the strategy of using oral presentations as a tool to prevent plagiarism might have worked. Despite being only one instance, it is important to add that there was no whole-text plagiarism in assignment two implying the increased level of accountability and awareness on the part of the student.

As for students’ perceptions about oral presentations in the context of writing their researched term paper, the findings indicate increased motivation due to audience related incentives. In composition classes, we often discuss audience and addressing its needs. When writing papers as a course requirement, the audience often vanishes in the eyes of students. Presentations gave them a chance to present their work to a wider audience: their peers enrolled in the course and some occasional friends who came to watch during presentations. As one student wrote in his reflection paper: *“the presentation of the research essay was helpful because it created an idea of giving life to what I wrote for”*. Another one stated that *“the presentation in the end was an interesting and fun task because I could be creative with power point and it made me feel better talking to a large public about my work”*.

Students did not feel that this strategy helped them understand and prevent plagiarism. This may be due to the subtle connection the two have. However, they felt that overall presentations helped them with writing their term paper as

illustrated by this quote *“The presentation was the part that I enjoyed the most from the research paper and it also was very and useful to me, because I learned how to figure out and present the key points of my research paper”*. Many students had already put ideas taken from sources into their own words, while others still struggled with reading material verbatim from the source. As one student put it: *“The presentations were in some kind of way very entertaining for me. I’m taking about students who didn’t even take two minutes to read it before reading it in front of the class”*.

Presentations offered students good models of source incorporation and other aspects of essay writing along with scenarios that needed improvement. As one student put it:

*“The paper presentation that was based on our first draft of the research paper helped me revise my work in details. While in this process, I came clear of where to use specific information I’ve compiled from different sources that until that moment I had no clue on how fit them in. Before the paper presentation, I had an unfinished thesis statement. However, as the presentation required a well-thought text analyze, I revised my thesis statement into a sentence I found to like much more than the previous one. Therefore, the paper presentation was a good way into bringing new ideas to the mind and also revising certain sentences and paragraphs of the paper.”*

There were students who found the timing of the presentation inappropriate: *“I do not think that the presentation helped with my research paper. That is because the presentations were done after the research and they were only a summary of it”* noted a student. Another one wrote *“I don’t think that the presentation really helped me with the research paper because in the time that I did the power point I had finished my research”*. This suggests that timing of the presentations might play a crucial role in motivating students and providing early feedback. Early presentations might benefit procrastinators and struggling students. Undoubtedly the availability of internet has shaped the way students approach assignments. For many of them, it has limited the opportunity to think and analyze for themselves relying instead on last minute solutions to locate information for specific purposes only. Finding information quickly and pasting it into their assignments has more value than any other academic experience and sense of authorship in the process (Chankova, 2017). Students are usually rushed through the process of writing, so timing presentations early in the process may help with allocating more time and energy to it. These comments also indicate a tendency that Albanian students have consistently shown in composition courses: their disregard for the writing process. Writing a draft leaves them with the impression that their work with the paper is done. Lack of established high school practices in this area may be one of the main reasons for these reactions.

Managing presentations is not an easy task. In the context of this study, presentations were individual, limited to 10 minutes and spread among two class sessions of three hours. As always, it was a challenge to keep students on task while listening to their peers. The author followed the advice of Watts (2006) and

asked presenters to prepare two questions related to citing practices and incorporate the answers into their presentation. The class was responsible for listening and locating the answers to the questions. This incentive undoubtedly increased interest; however, it was not completely effective. Reducing the number of presentations by grouping students with similar topics may be a suggestion for future use of this strategy. It may never be possible to eliminate plagiarism. We might not even be able to reduce the temptation. However, we can reduce instances of plagiarism by having open and honest conversations with students and designing activities that will discourage the need for a quick fix. Oral presentation with a focus on source incorporation seems to be a promising tool at our disposal.

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