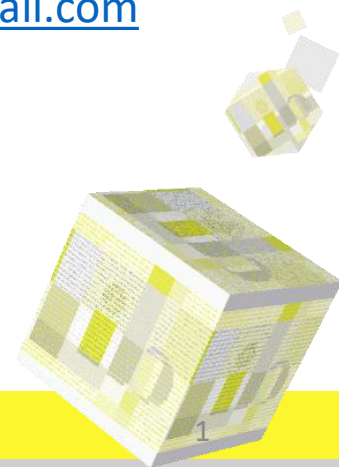


A Preliminary Investigation of Taiwanese Researchers' (Mis)understandings of Academic Ethics: Taking the Reported Cases relating to Plagiarism, Improper Citations, and Self-Plagiarism by the Ministry of Science and Technology as Examples

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Research Purpose



- This study aimed to explore local researchers' understanding regarding the concepts of plagiarism, improper citations, and self-plagiarism, including whether their knowledge was in line with MOST's definitions on these terms.
- Specifically, this study investigated the extent to which local researchers understood the concepts mentioned in MOST's academic ethics-related codes through their interpretations and judgment of real cases of academic ethics violations reported in the literature.
- Also, MOST had ever expressed their expectations that, through the publishing of the cases, local researchers would learn knowledge of academic ethics and being alert to the wrongdoings in research. In this vein, the current study would like to understand the potential of those published literature for their educational purposes.



Method and Instrument



- The survey method was adopted to fulfill the research purpose.
- To do so, we adapted the real cases of academic ethics violations between 1999 and 2010 published as official documents by the MOST and the MOST-funded research from “A List of Cases of Academic Ethics Violations Handled by the National Science Council Between 1999-2010” (88-99年國科會處理違反學術倫理案件彙整表) and “A Study on Academic Ethics Regulations” (學術倫理規範之研究) (Tang, 2005-2006).
- Specifically, we developed the survey cases by minor editing the published literature so that we could retain their tone of the narration. By doing so, we were able to understand whether the contents of the published cases were sufficient enough to let individuals interpret and make judgment consistently and reasonably.
- A total of eight (8) cases were developed. They covered the general concepts related to plagiarism, improper citations, and self-plagiarism.



Research Participants



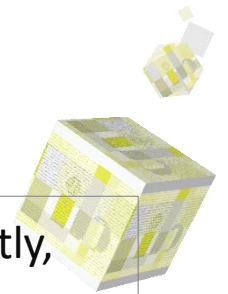
- **Academic Ethics Experts (AEEs):** A total of five (5) AEEs were invited to the participation of this study. Their professional background included law, life science, linguistics, and electrical engineering. Four of them were full professors, and the other one worked in the MOST as a senior staff and was in charge of academic ethics affairs. All of them had ever involved in the investigations of academic ethics violations.
- **MOST-funded principal investigators (PIs):** From randomly sampled 1375 PIs, a total of 232 PIs participated in this study. Their professional backgrounds were diverse across science and engineering, social science and humanities, medicine and agriculture, etc. They were ranked differently, including assistant, associate, and full professors/research fellows.



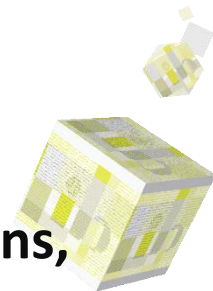
Sample of a Survey Question

Prof. Chiang was a postdoctoral fellow mentored by Prof. Chin before. Currently, Prof. Chiang is supervising master student Chang, as the role of a research mentor. They had published an article in an international scholarly journal by using Prof. Chin's research ideas. However, they neither cited the source of the ideas in the paper nor acknowledged Prof. Chin's contribution to the research in the paper.

1. Did Prof Chiang violate any academic ethics-related norms?
 Yes No
2. If so, what type of academic ethics violation occurred in this incident?
 - Prof. Chiang should properly cite Prof. Chin's contribution but failed to do so.
 - Prof. Chiang should list Prof. Chin as one of the coauthors of the paper but failed to do so.
 - Prof. Chiang plagiarized Prof. Chin's research ideas.
 - Other, please specify: _____



Key Research Findings (1)



The definitions of the terms (i.e., plagiarism, improper citations, and self-plagiarism) on the MOST side was not operationally clear enough.

- It seemed that local researchers (i.e., both participating AEEs and PIs) interpreted and judged the concepts of plagiarism, improper citations, and self-plagiarism in different ways. Also, their understanding and interpretations of the concepts were not entirely in line with MOST's definitions on these terms.
- The divergence might be attributable to the lack of operationally clear government definitions of these terms. Hence, researchers' understanding and interpretations of these concepts were misled by the vague descriptions in the existing official guidelines and policies.



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Key Research Findings (2)



The policies regarding the subsequent uses of degree theses were not clear enough.

- It seemed that local researchers (i.e., both participating AEEs and PIs) interpreted the fair practices regarding the subsequent uses of students' degree theses in different ways.
- The differences in understanding involved some considerations, including:
 - Who owns the degree theses?
 - What are the legitimate extents of degree theses for subsequent uses?
 - How to properly acknowledge a student's contributions to the subsequent research products? What are the best practices on this matter?



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Key Research Findings (3)



The published cases of academic ethics violations were too brief in describing case details, and it might lead to a barrier to meet MOST's intended educational goals.

- We developed the survey questions by minor editing the published cases in the literature. By doing so, we hoped to understand whether the contents of the published cases were sufficient enough to meet their intended goals (i.e., educate and alert people to the wrongdoings).
- However, the current results showed that the effect might not be as high as what the MOST expected initially. This could attribute to the insufficient detailed information provided in construction of the whole pictures of those cases. Therefore, local researchers were unable to “learn something” from the published instances, or to meet the intended goals of publishing for the prevention of these wrongdoings.



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Suggestions



- MOST should consider refining their definitions of the terms (i.e., plagiarism, improper citations, and self-plagiarism) and competently deliver the concepts and knowledge behind the descriptions.
- MOST should consider establishing clear guidance and/or policies regarding the subsequent uses of degree theses. The guidance and/or policies should be operationally clear enough to resolve the common considerations among researchers, such as those indicated in this study.
- MOST should consider publishing the cases of academic ethics violations by providing more details of the background information of the instances. This would enhance the potentials of the published materials to meet their educational purposes.



The End

