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# Plagiarism in the Japanese universities: Truly a cultural matter?

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## Abstract

Although plagiarism is considered among western academic circles as one of the worst “crimes” a student can commit, many scholars suggest that these attitudes do not apply to students from areas outside this sphere. They believe that in many countries, plagiarism is considered culturally acceptable. As such, ESL or EFL instructors in charge of students from these places must be sensitive to their backgrounds. Japan is often believed to be one of these countries in which plagiarism is not considered a moral transgression. In order to test this theory, a survey was conducted in the fall of 2006 among several classes of first-year students at Hokkaido University, considered a prestigious university in northern Japan. Results of this survey suggest that Japanese students do not accept plagiarism as readily as has often been suggested. Results from a pilot experiment were first published in Wheeler (2006), using data gathered from the spring of 2006. However, the manner in which this study was conducted was problematic and conclusions from the data are open to question, especially due to a lack of statistical analysis. Concerning the latter point, the author wishes to extend his deep gratitude to Professors Patricia Vermillion and Shinobu Suzuki for their invaluable assistance regarding the use and interpretation of statistical testing. Although this essay does not suggest that Japanese students never copy without citing sources, it aims to offer the conclusion that it is a lack of understanding of the

act, rather than cultural values, that is the root cause of plagiarism committed by students.

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