Perception of academic plagiarism among dentistry students

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Abstract

While plagiarism has existed since human beings first learnt to write, it has become an issue of greater concern since we became aware of the financial and intellectual damage it can cause. Yet despite an increased awareness of the dangers of plagiarism in academic circles and in the media, the term itself has not yet been clearly defined. The present study addresses full, conceptual and partial plagiarism, with the aim of assessing the knowledge of students enrolled in the Dentistry course of the Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia regarding plagiarism, relevant legislation, research sources and image copyright. Through the use of a questionnaire and subsequent analysis of the responses of students using SPSS software, it was found that while students use reliable sources in their research, they are not fully aware of what plagiarism is and do not respect image copyright.

Keywords: Bioethics. Copyright. Scientific misconduct. Plagiarism.

Resumo

Percepção de plágio acadêmico entre estudantes do curso de odontologia

O plágio se faz presente no mundo desde que os seres humanos desenvolveram a escrita. Porém, despertou maior interesse quando passou a trazer prejuízos financeiros e intelectuais. Mesmo surgindo cada vez mais na mídia e sendo discutido na vida acadêmica, sua definição precisa ainda não foi estabelecida. Neste estudo, foram abordados o plágio integral, o conceitual e o parcial. O objetivo foi avaliar o nível de conhecimento dos alunos matriculados no curso de odontologia da Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia a respeito do tema plágio, da legislação pertinente ao tema, das fontes de pesquisa utilizadas e de como são tratados os direitos de reprodução de imagem. Para essa avaliação, utilizou-se questionário e posterior análise das respostas por meio do programa SPSS. Apesar de utilizarem fontes confiáveis para as pesquisas, os alunos não apresentaram conhecimento pleno sobre o plágio e mostraram não respeitar os direitos autorais das imagens.

Palavras-chave: Bioética. Direitos autorais. Má conduta científica. Plágio.

Resumen

Percepción de plagio académico entre estudiantes de un curso de odontología

El plagio se hace presente en el mundo desde que los seres humanos desarrollaron la escritura. No obstante, despertó un mayor interés cuando trajo perjuicios financieros y intelectuales. Aún surgiendo cada vez más en los medios y siendo discutido en la vida académica, su definición precisa no es clara. En este estudio fueron abordados el plagio integral, el conceptual y el parcial. El objetivo fue evaluar el nivel de conocimiento de los alumnos matriculados en el curso de Odontología de la Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia sobre el tema plagio, la legislación pertinente al tema, las fuentes de investigación utilizadas y de cómo son tratados los derechos de las imágenes. Para esta evaluación, se utilizó un cuestionario y posterior análisis de las respuestas por medio del programa SPSS. A pesar de utilizar fuentes confiables para las investigaciones, los alumnos no presentaron conocimiento pleno sobre el plagio y mostraron no respetar los derechos de las imágenes.

Palabras-clave: Bioética. Derechos de autor. Mala conducta científica. Plagio.

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Declaram não haver conflito de interesse.

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Plagiarism exists since the development of writing. Its concept, however, as we understand today, is recent. In ancient Rome, the practice of plagiarism was condemned, not as theft of texts, but as crime involving slaves [1]. With a more present-day sense, the word "plagiarism" was used for the first time by the Latin poet Martial. To date its concept is not very precise, but it is always present in the literature [1].

Students, teachers, researchers, authors, revisers, editors, all of these worry about plagiarism to some extent. Teachers of any area of knowledge aspire that young researchers naturalize to academic ethics, learn to be honest which implies not deceiving readers, not to lie forging false authorship, in the sense that *plagiarism confounds the reader, as it disturbs the confidence in science* [2].

Discussions on the losses caused by plagiarism only arose when the appropriation of someone else's authorship had effect on financial issues. Large-scale publication of books, magazines and scientific articles and the trade of intellectual production evidenced the need to curb plagiarism [3].

Similar to plagiarism, bioethics did not start with a *big bang* [4]. Many events contributed to the emergence of bioethics and its discussions, technological advances and social changes lead to moral pluralism, calling for the bioethical debate [5]. Not surprisingly, the creators of one of the most influential bioethical current, principlism, included, from the 6th North American edition of the book "Principles of biomedical ethics", a chapter specially dedicated to common morality, understood as universal morality, which would include general rules as not to lie, not to steal other people's property, to keep one's promises, to respect the rights of others and not to kill or harm others [6].

Correlations between plagiarism and bioethics can also be observed in the most recent versions of the codes of professional ethics of biomedical area. In Brazil, the Dentistry Code of Ethics, for example, in Chapter XVI, Section II, Article 49, items II and IV, states that it constitute an ethical infraction: *II) to present as one's own, in whole or in part, educational materials or scientific work of others, even if not published; (...) IV) to make use, without reference to the author or without the author's permission, of data, information or opinions collected from published or unpublished parts of the author's work* [7].

According to Diniz and Guilhem, the "Encyclopedia of bioethics" defines bioethics as *the systematic study of the moral dimensions—including moral vision, decisions, conduct, and policies—of the life sciences and health care, employing a variety of ethical methodologies in an interdisciplinary setting* [8]. If "not lying" and "not deceiving" are moral principles, not to incur plagiarism, *i.e.* not to lead to some form of deception, also includes the definition of the scope of bioethics, especially when related to the production in the fields of life sciences and health.

The internet has proved an important source of knowledge and a facilitator of research for students and researchers. The amount of available information is immeasurable and the ease of getting it, too. Barbastefano and Souza [9] alert about the ease of plagiarizing, as well as of detecting cases of plagiarism. The cases reported in the media researchers who lose their titles, achieved through illegal practices are becoming increasingly frequent.

Even being a common phenomenon in academic life, it is not easy to establish the precise definition of plagiarism [10]. For the scope of the present study, plagiarism is understood as the use, in whole or in part, of someone else's work acting as if it were by one's own authorship. There are three types of plagiarism: integral, which is full-text transcription without quoting the source; partial which comprises copying some sentences or paragraphs from several sources; and conceptual, in which there is the appropriation of one or several concepts, or of a theory, that one presents as produced by oneself [11].

This is the point it which there seems to be lack of knowledge on the matter. Integral plagiarism, the exact copy, is of easy identification and understanding by most people. However, not only this is considered plagiarism. The use of the idea without the correct identification of the author is also plagiarism, although debatable, and this perception will be verified in the study. Even unknowing the rules of paraphrase ends up classifying the work as plagiarism. And it is this lack of knowledge that has led a whole generation of students to systematically practice plagiarism as a habit [3].

A study published in Australia showed that academic integrity and, more specifically, the notion of the importance of curbing plagiarism has been neglected in professional training [12]. This important aspect of academic life should be both the student's and the supervisor's responsibility, who must share the integrity of its intellectual production. The general idea is that dentistry students and teachers (or from any other health AREA) must be ethical, honest and responsible.

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However, it so happens that plagiarism does not get to be considered an issue in the academia since the training aims at the clinical practice, emphasizing only the technical aspects of the profession. This directive is subject to interpretations according to which academic institutions admit unethical behavior, especially when dealing with undervalued aspects of professional life, for example, the written production a highly technical area. The acceptance of a possible plagiarism and the "blind eye" by teachers in relation to this type of fraud can enhance these behaviors and contribute to their extension beyond graduation, having a negative impact on the perception of the integrity of professions [12].

So, some questions may be raised. Besides the ethical aspect, what would be the knowledge of dentistry undergraduate students about copyrights? To what point are they aware of the violations that they may be committing? In the attempt to answer these questions, the present study intended to evaluate the level of knowledge of all students enrolled in the undergraduate course of dentistry of the Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia – UESB ("State University of Southwest Bahia") on academic plagiarism and the legislation relative to plagiarism, identification of the sources used in research and, moreover, analyze how the participants proceed on the use images in their academic works.

It is expected that the present study be a starting point to minimize such a common problem in the academic environment these days. Based on the results presented, strategies may be designed to diffuse the information necessary both to students and teachers, in order to avoid new cases of plagiarism.

Methods

Type of study

This research was descriptive and censual. Data were collected, analyzed and correlated without any type of manipulation.

Study site

Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB), Jequié campus, which also includes the Dentistry Module of the UESB.

Population studied

The population studied comprised 199 students regularly enrolled in the course of Dentistry of the UESB, in the period between the months of July and October 2013. It was possible to apply the questionnaire to 186 out of the 199 students, representing 93.5% of the focal population. The remaining 13 students were either not found or refused to answer the questionnaire.

Instrument of data collection

A questionnaire was applied to produce a profile of the volunteers and to assess their knowledge on academic plagiarism. It included a set of ordered questions (13 multiple-choice questions and 3 discursive questions), which ere answered in writing, in the presence of the researcher. This questionnaire is an adaptation of the one used by Barbastefano and Souza [9] to evaluate cases of academic plagiarism among Production Engineering students in 2007.

Before the application of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with students of the third semester of the undergraduate Biology course of the same university, in order to check the performance of the questionnaire to be applied. The results of the pilot study showed the need for changes in the questionnaire to adapt it to the focal group. The question on plagiarism and legislation was altered and two questions were added, asking if the volunteer agreed with the legislation and if the volunteer knew what is a retracted article. Data collection was performed by the first author of this study with cooperation of the supervising researcher.

Data analysis

Firstly, using Microsoft Excel 2013®, a database was designed and filled with the questionnaires obtained. Secondly, using SPSS for Windows 16.0 (2007), the descriptive analysis of the frequencies of the answers was performed.

Ethical aspects

Considering ethical aspects, this project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee o the UESB ("Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia" - CEP UESB), through the Plataforma Brasil, for analysis and approval

prior to data collection. The researchers strictly followed the Norms and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Beings ("Normas e Diretrizes para Pesquisa Envolvendo Seres Humanos") - Resolution CNS 466/2012, respecting the process of obtaining the free and informed consent from participants.

Results and discussion

As mentioned, the population in focus comprised 199 students enrolled in all periods of the undergraduate Dentistry course at UESB, in the period between July and October 2013, being that 93,5% answered the questionnaire. From these 35.5% are males and 64.5% are females, with ages from 18 and 39 years, the average being 23 years.

Two questions checked if the students had knowledge about the definition of plagiarism according to Brazilian legislation. All of them stated that it constitutes a crime and stated that they agreed with the current legislation. The penalty for plagiarism is determined in article 184 of the Brazilian Penal Code, which determines between the penalty of *three months to one year of detention, or a fine,* for violation of copyrights [13]. Moreover, plagiarism qualifies under Law 9.610 / 98, which considers the unauthorized reproduction of a work protected by copyright as counterfeiting [14,15]. Diniz and Munhoz [10], in turn, disagree that plagiarism must be considered crime as such. They understand that plagiarism, when it does not involve copyrights would be an ethical infraction and should be confronted in the field of bioethics.

The following question still deals with legislation, as it focus on situations in which the partial reproduction of an intellectual work is permitted. From the total participants, 56% answered correctly: "*When the owner of the copyrights authorizes the reproduction*" and "*When the author is duly referenced*". Similar results were obtained by Barbastefano and Souza [9], Fachini and Domingues [3] and Silva and Domingues [16], although these studies considered as correct the options: *When the owner of the copyrights authorizes the reproduction* and *When the work is in public domain*. However, in both cases, if the author is not correctly referenced, the work is in disagreement with authorship identity and in-

tellectual honesty, and the two options cannot be considered correct when isolated.

In order to analyze the three discursive questions referring to the concepts of *plagiarism*, *public domain* and *paraphrase,* categories were created from the mos frequent answers. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Knowledge of dentistry students of the concepts of *plagiarism*, *public domain* and *paraphrase.* UESB, Jequié, BA, Brazil 2013

What do you understand by plagiarism?	
It is undue/illegal copy of some work	43,6%
It is when there is total or partial copy of a work	6,5%
Exact copy of a work without the author's authorization	24,2%
Copy without the necessary reference	19,9%
Does not know or did no answer	5,9%
What do you understand by public domain?	
The work may be used by all / not registered	58,6%
Something that grows in proportion, getting known by all	5,4%
Place where things are free to all	2,2%
Work that, after some time, belongs to all	2,7%
Does not know or did no answer	31,2%
What do you understand by paraphrase?	
A way of rewriting what someone said, using one's own words	36,6%
Transcription of the words or sentences of other authors	16,7%
It is when one reads a text and extracts the main idea	9,1%
It is to use fragments of text written other authors	3,2%
Does not know or did no answer	34,4%

When asked about the concept of plagiarism, many were able to show that they knew it is a crime or something wrong but few approached the three most common types of plagiarism mentioned in the present study, as is shown in Table 1. Another question presented three situations illustrating each of the three types of plagiarism and people who did not choose one of them were counted as not knowing the situation described was plagiarism. The results can be seen in Figure 1.2.

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A study performed in Peru to assess the frequency of plagiarism in academic papers revealed literal plagiarism as the most frequent, in accordance with the results found in the present study that showed this is the best known type of plagiarism by students. This indicates that, despite knowing the problem, they keep doing this kind of fraud [17]. In health courses – where such issues of responsibility and ethics in clinical conduct are so encouraged, as they do not involve only the development of knowledge but other people's lives –, acting ethically and transparently is fundamental [18].

The concept of public domain that was expected as an answer from the students is defined as the economic rights of every scientific, literary or artistic work for which the term of legal protection is expired belong to no one. In Brazil, this term expires 70 years after the author's death. However, the moral rights of any work are eternal and, thus, when using any of these works, they must be properly referenced so as not to configure plagiarism [3]. As can be seen in Table 1, most volunteers showed lack of knowledge of the concept of public domain and mistook it with public access to information and works. Only 2.7% answered correctly. A similar result was obtained in the study by Silva and Domingues [16].
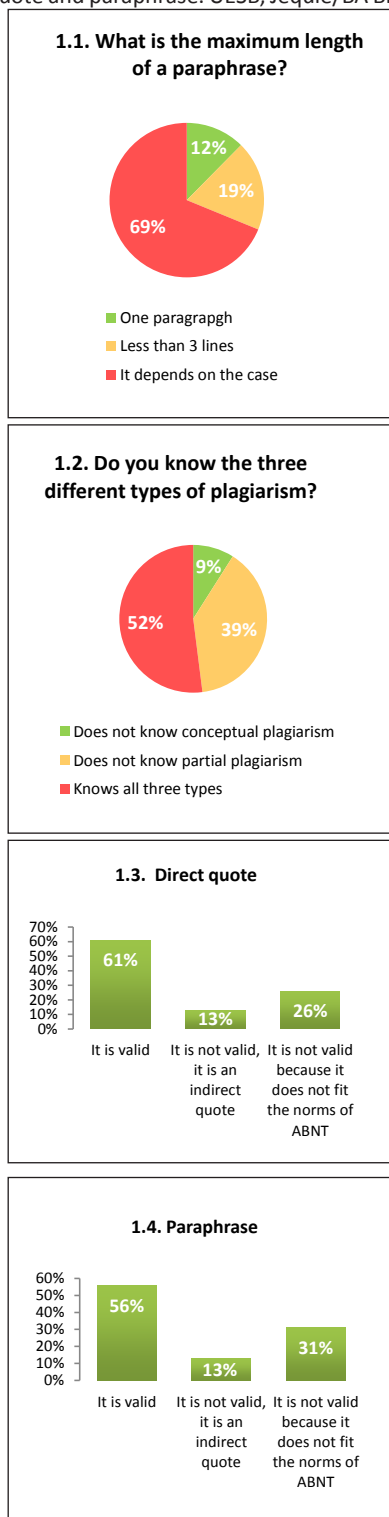
Paraphrase, conceptually, refers to the reproduction of the idea or thought of an author (source) transcribed in one's own words. However, authors must be referenced (all participants or at least the three first ones + *et al.*, according to the ABNT, or the six first one as specified by Vancouver); otherwise, partial plagiarism or pastiche [3,9]. From the total of participants, 36.6% answered partially right. Nobody mentioned the need to reference authors of the paraphrased text.

There is no rule of the length a paraphrase may have. Each case must be analyzed individually and what counts is the good sense of the author, 68.8% of the participants answered correctly to this question. In the study by Fachini and Domingues [3], the number of correct answers was much inferior 38%. In the research by Barbastefano and Souza [9] the result was similar to ours, 71%.

For the two following questions, a passage of the book "Oral and maxillofacial pathology", by Neville *et al.* [19] was used and, in the sequence, one example of direct quote and one of paraphrase were presented. The volunteers had to evaluate and judge if the examples were valid or not. The example of direct quote was incorrect because, although it consisted in an exact copy of the fragment and cited authors, it did not fit the ABNT norms (it

lacked quotation marks and the number of pages of the original cited). As can be seen in Figure 1.3, only 26% of the participants answered correctly.

Figure 1. Knowledge of dentistry students about the length of paraphrase, types of plagiarism and norms of direct quote and paraphrase. UESB, Jequié/BA Brazil, 2013

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As to the paraphrase example, it was also not valid because, there was no reference to the authors of the paraphrased text at the end of the fragment written with different words. Figure 1.4 shows that only 31% judged the case of paraphrase correctly. This result shows little knowledge of the norms for the use of quotes in their text production.

The following question asked which sources the volunteers used the most to make their scientific researches, and they could choose as many options as they found necessary. The most frequent answers were: internet, through search sites (2,5%) and University library (1,5%). Other results were 0.5% for the Scientific Library on Line (SciELO), 1% used the Capes Journal Portal (Portal de periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Capes), 1% at the Virtual Library on Health ("*Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde - BVS*") and 0.5% for Google Scholar. These results were corroborated by Barbastefano and Souza [9] and Silva and Domingues [17].

The study by Fachini and Domingues [3], however, indicates that the University library is the most used source and the internet is the third most used. But such results may vary inf function of the quality of the University library and the availability of internet access to students.

Seeking to systematize the answers of participants who marked more than one alternative, about approximately 53% of the volunteers, the answers of those who only use reliable sources (congress proceedings; SciELO; journals assessed by Capes; BVS; Google scholar and the university library) were separated in a group. Another category was that of students who use both reliable and unreliable sources (considering so any search site on the internet and the Wikipedia), 32% of the participants were in this group. A much smaller group was the one of students who only use unreliable sources, representing only 2%.

It is a notorious fact that increasingly more cases of plagiarism are detected in the academic environment, soon reaching the media that publishes them. In this point, a question that remains unanswered may be raised: does the expansion in the use of the internet cause and increase in the numbers of cases of plagiarism or has it just caused an increase in their detection? What can be concluded is that so far there is no consensus on this matter among authors. Diniz and Terra [2] infer that there are still no studies showing that the popularization of the internet has actually increased the number of cases of plagiarism, but they may be detected more readily in the present days, even with the use of online tools and programs.

Biondi [20] also discusses this divergence among several. Among these, Mr. Lopes dos Santos, coordinator of Humanities at the Fundação de Ampara a Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (Fapesp - State of São Paulo Research Foundation), who states there is no data indicating that the problem is increasing in gravity or not, despite recognizing that the concern in relation to the theme has grown. In the same report, Biondi quotes Erney de Camargo, full professor at the Biomedical Sciences Institute of USP (State University of São Paulo) and former president of CNPq (National Research Council), according to whom, 50 years ago one could hear say about plagiarism and theft of ideas and data at USP. However, right after this, the professor say he does not know if it is the number of occurrences of plagiarism that is increasing or if it is our ability to discover them. Other authors mentioned in the same news report will attribute this alleged increase in the number of cases of plagiarism to the requirement of high individual productivity in academic publications. There is much divergence on the plagiarism *versus* productivity relationship among the authors cited in the present study.

Images are widely used resources in scientific production and are also protected by copyright law. Thus, there is the need to encourage students to create their own images or, when it is necessary to use images by others, to correctly refer to them in order not to commit the crime of copyright violation. When asked about the way they use these images, 78% declared they do not respect image copyrights and that they use images found on the internet without discrimination. This conduct should be avoided, even though it is difficult to prove authorship of an image. To produce their own images or ask for authorization to use other people's images would be the best options to avoid problems.

Finally, when asked if they had received orientation on academic plagiarism during their undergraduate course, 69.4% of the participants of the study declared they had been oriented by some teacher. This result contrasts in comparison with those of the studies by Fachini and Domingues [3], Barbastefano and Souza [9], and Silva and Domingues [16], in which 48.2%, 19%, and 28.7%, respectively, declared having received orientation on plagiarism.

Although the present study did not focus the issue of self-plagiarism, as the research was made with undergraduate students who are being inserted in the universe of academic research and will have to write their final projects, it is worth mentioning this new category of plagiarism. Self-plagiarism may be identified

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in situations in which authors copy and change the wording of their own published works, republishing the same ideas presented in the original studies in "new" allegedly original articles. New editorial criteria along with the pressure to publish studies mainly required by graduate programs seem to be creating this ethical issues in scientific communication [21,22].

Final considerations

The results obtained in this research allow the conclusion that undergraduate dentistry students do not have full knowledge of what plagiarism is. Even this being a recurrent issue in the media and discussed in academic life, most students did not know how to respond clearly to the questions asked. It can be noted that the basic content of the law on the topic, that plagiarism is a crime and may result in penalties is understood by the majority o students. However, they could not identify clearly the specific cases of plagiarism, as conceptual or partial plagiarism, nor was it clear for them that the incorrect use of indirect citations may be considered plagiarism.

Most of the volunteers declared they used reliable sources for their researches. However, par-

ticipants showed no concern relative to the use of third party images in academic papers or with the sources from which these images are obtained or even with the possibility that they may involve copy rights. A small portion declared that they take correct precautions, using free access images, asking for permission to use protected images, or producing their own images.

The discipline of Research Methodology is offered from the second semester of this course. It is expected that, from then on, students will build a more solid concept of plagiarism and its importance in the academic medium. However, this was not shown in this study. Titles and even financial gains may be obtained through this illegal practice. It is clear, then, the need to combat plagiarism in undergraduate courses or even before, in elementary school.

Due to the relevance of the theme, the need to enhance this research to the other courses of this and of other universities is registered here, in a way to obtain a survey of how this subject is being approached in the undergraduate courses. Besides, the importance is stated of designing a booklet to disseminate information and combat plagiarism.

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Participation of the authors

Diego Oliveira Guedes participated in the conception of the research project, bibliographic research, data collection, analysis and writing the article. Douglas Leonardo Gomes Filho participated in the supervison, review of the project, data collection, analysis, formatting, and review of the text.

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Annex
Questionnaire

1. Gender: ( ) Male ( ) Female

2. Age: ( ) Years

3. Semester you are taking: ( ) Semester

4. According to your knowledge about Brazilian Law, plagiarism is:
( ) A crime.
( ) Not a crime.
( ) Does not know.

5. In case you answered "A crime" in the previous question, you:
( ) Agree with the law.
( ) Do not agree with the law.

6. Still according to your knowledge on the law, in which situation(s) is it permitted to reproduce intellectual work?
(   ) When the owner of the copyrights authorizes the reproduction.
( ) When the author is duly referenced.
( ) When the work is in public domain.
( ) When the reproduction is done by an undergraduate student.
( ) When the reproduction is for nonprofit purposes.
( ) When the reproduction serves to benefit the author.
( ) When the reproduction has the objective of improving or commenting the work.

7. What do you understand by plagiarism?
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. What do you understand by public domain?
_____
_____
_____
_____

9. What do you understand by paraphrase?
_____
_____
_____

10. Which of the following situations do you consider plagiarism?
( ) Exact copy of a text or fragment of a text.
( ) Use of the idea contained in a text but written with different words.
( ) Text built with fragments of several different texts.

11. In your understanding, what is the maximum length of a paraphrase in a text so that there is no violation of copyright:
( ) One paragraph.
( ) Less than 3 lines.
( ) There is no maximum length, it depends on the case.

12. What follows is a passage of the book "Oral and maxillofacial pathology", by Neville *et al.*:
"The dentigerous cyst is defined as a cyst that originates by the separation of the follicle from around the crown of an unerupted tooth. This is the most common type of developmental odontogenic cyst."

Example of direct quote:
The dentigerous cyst is defined as a cyst that originates by the separation of the follicle from around the crown of an unerupted tooth. This is the most common type of developmental odontogenic cyst (Neville *et al.*, 2009).
( ) It's valid.
( ) It's not valid, it is an indirect quote.
( ) It's not valid because it is not in accordance with ABNT norms.

Example of paraphrase:
Dentigerous cyst, that originates by the separation of the follicle from around the
crown of an unerupted tooth is the most common type of developmental odontogenic cyst.
( ) It's valid.
( ) It's not valid, it is a direct quote.
( ) It's not valid because it is not in accordance with ABNT norms.

13. What sources of research do you use regularly to do your academic studies:
( ) University library
( ) City library

Artigos de pesquisa

( ) Personal library
( ) Google Scholar
( ) Health Virtual Library (Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde)
( ) Capes Journal Portal (Portal de Periódicos Capes)
( ) Wikipedia
( ) Internet, through search engines
( ) SciELO
( ) Congress proceedings

14. What sources of images do you use in your research?
(   ) Any open site, because their images are open and I use them with no problem.
( ) Any site that allows the use.
( ) I try to reproduce the images with my own resources.

(   ) I ask for authorization from the authors to use images found on the internet.

15. During your literature research, in case you find a retracted article, what is your conduct?
( ) Includes in the list of references, because it went through a review process.
( ) Disregard its use because it is fraud.
( ) Use it with confidence because it has doubles statistical treatment.

16. Have you got information from any college teacher about academic plagiarism?
( ) Yes
( ) No