

PLAGIARISM AWARENESS AMONG UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES: A STUDY ON FINAL YEAR STUDENTS

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Abstract

Plagiarism is an act of dishonesty that occurs in higher education for over decades. Some people are still unaware of plagiarism and the factors that can contribute to it due to lack of plagiarism exposure, especially among higher education undergraduates. Therefore, this study investigates the awareness of plagiarism among final year TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) undergraduates and determines the factors influencing TESL undergraduates to plagiarise. A total of 33 respondents participated in this quantitative survey. Twenty-three adapted questions were randomly distributed to the TESL undergraduates using Google Form divided into two sections. Based on the findings, the respondents indicated that they are highly aware of plagiarism. The highest factor that influenced the TESL undergraduates to plagiarise was due to short deadlines of assessments. Therefore, this suggests that the institution imparts knowledge on plagiarism to TESL undergraduates by setting up plagiarism workshops. This study is hoped to provide insight into the current awareness of plagiarism in the local context.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Awareness, Integrity, Ethical, Undergraduates

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism is considered an act that could tarnish a university's reputation. The value of the degrees they are offering has become a global concern, especially in higher-learning

institutions. According to Starovoytova and Namango (2016), cases of students committing plagiarism in higher-level institutions have increased steadily. They also claimed that intentional plagiarism cases have also increased due to easy access to information through the Internet. In the 1990s, students' sources to plagiarise were minimal, such as books, journal articles, newspapers, and other printed sources. Even so, it was not easily accessible, unlike today.

Before the 1990s, plagiarism occurred when one copy the text by hand from those sources that eventually made it very wearisome. However, today, the Internet's help has opened up the door for massive plagiarism of information. Subsequently, numerous studies focus on the awareness and perceptions of plagiarism among students, such as undergraduates and postgraduates; hence, these communities use many sources for their works and assignments. According to Bretag (2013 as cited in Starovoytova & Namango, 2016), plagiarism is not a straightforward concept as it can be interpreted from many perspectives. Plagiarism is a controversial topic in tertiary education, considered by many to be increasing and widespread among university students, as cited by Flint et al. (2006 as cited in Idiegbeyan-ose et al., 2016).

Plagiarism can be inadvertent or intentional. It can be identified based on a few reasons such as poor paraphrasing and referencing skills (Newton et al., 2014), self-plagiarism and insufficient knowledge (Halupa & Bolliger, 2015), and ambiguity (Bennett et al., 2011). TESL undergraduates are bound to experience working by using much research and referencing in their works. As they would contact plagiarism-related issues, this study provides a fundamental understanding of the undergraduates' awareness and acknowledges the current situation, especially in academia.

According to Jereb et al. (2018), a study was conducted on factors that influence plagiarism in higher education and emerging technology. It was found that the Web does have a substantial and significant impact on plagiarism, while gender and socialisation factors do not play a significant role in this particular context. Furthermore, Sariffuddin et al. (2017) researched plagiarism, found that students' awareness of plagiarism was not equally distributed. Moreover, the ignorance of plagiarism by students is the main factor in plagiarism to happen. As they do not know about plagiarism, they never feel guilty in doing so (Sariffuddin et al., 2017). Besides, students have also revealed that they plagiarised due to limited time or period with numerous assignments due.

Carnero (2017) surveyed several students about their estimates of the regularity of plagiarism at their schools. Their research indicates that students conclude that students are more likely to commit each form of plagiarism than they are and understand that some forms of plagiarism are more extreme than others which is crucial for this research. In other words, students concluded that plagiarising is the fault of individuals that they do not recognise. Furthermore, “they are more likely to choose to cheat when students believe others have cheated” (Fish & Hura, 2013, p.42).

This study aims to determine the level of awareness of plagiarism from an undergraduate TESL students’ perspective. In particular, to find out how aware are the respondents towards the entire concept of plagiarism, such as the factors, how they would perceive it, the penalty or actions that need to be taken towards them, and how they would justify plagiarism.

Research Questions

Two research questions were formed to determine undergraduates’ awareness towards plagiarism during their study in higher education institutions as follow:

1. What is TESL undergraduates’ understanding of plagiarism?
2. What are the factors that influenced TESL undergraduates to plagiarise?

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative survey to study TESL undergraduates’ knowledge and awareness of plagiarism and what factors highly contribute to plagiarising. The respondents who participated were given a questionnaire adapted from Deshpande et al. (2020) and Louw (2017). There are 23 questions in the questionnaire, which are divided into two sections. The first section contains 14 open-ended questions pertaining to the awareness of plagiarism. In comparison, the second section contains nine questions that focus on finding the factors influencing respondents to commit plagiarism.

Google Form was used as a platform to collect the data in this study. Google Form is an easy data collector tool where data could automatically be counted with percentages. The questionnaires are divided into two sections. Section A uses Yes and No responses to acknowledge undergraduates' awareness of plagiarism. On the contrary, Section B uses the 5-Point Likert Scale ranging from 1 until 5 (1 represents 'Strongly Disagree,' 2 represents 'Disagree,' 3 represents 'Neutral,' 4 represents 'Agree,' and finally 5 represents 'Strongly Agree') questions regarding the factors influence the TESL Undergraduates to plagiarise.

Moreover, it is easy to distribute to all targeted respondents due to the current global circumstances. SPSS statistics were also used in data analysis. According to Palmer et al. (2019), using SPSS as 'frequencies' to evaluate each section's relative importance is recommended. Descriptive analysis was presented to elaborate the findings to help the readers comprehend the tables quickly. The results were displayed using tables that consist of the respondents' answers in percentages, means, and standard deviation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Awareness of Plagiarism

The questionnaires used in this study are divided into two sections. The first section of the questionnaire is to identify the awareness of plagiarism among TESL undergraduates. As seen in Table 1, for the first question, all respondents are aware that their institution does have a plagiarism policy with 100% answers of 'Yes.' 81.8% with a Mean score of 1.18 (sd=0.39) of the responses answered 'No' when asked whether they use the sentences or words from sources such as books or articles without quotation marks. More than half of the respondents answered 'Yes' when the question asked if self-plagiarism is punishable as plagiarism, with 81.8% (M=1.18; sd=0.39), equivalent to 27 respondents.

Next, all respondents agreed that copying a piece of information directly from a source without citing its references is considered plagiarism. Another 81.8% (M=1.18; sd=0.39) answered 'Yes' to a statement that if a paper has no reference list, it probably means that the paper contains plagiarism. 66.7% (M=1.33; sd=0.48) of respondents answered 'Yes' when saying that it indicates plagiarism when the paper does not have an in-text reference even though they provided a reference list. A total of 18.2% of respondents with a Mean score of

1.18 (sd=0.39) answered ‘No’ where it is about buying a paper and submit it as if it is your own or even pay someone else to do it for you.

Table 1: Awareness of plagiarism among TESL undergraduates

No.	Items	Yes	No	sd	M
1.	Does your institution have a plagiarism policy?	100	0	0	1.00
2.	Do you use words or sentences from articles or books when writing essays without using quotation marks?	81.8	18.2	0.39	1.18
3.	Self-plagiarism is punishable as plagiarism.	81.8	18.2	0.39	1.18
4.	It is plagiarism to copy information directly from a source (such as a book or from the Internet) without citing references.	100	0	0	1.00
5.	If a paper has no reference list, that paper probably contains plagiarism.	81.2	18.2	0.39	1.18
6.	If a paper has a reference list but no in-text references, it is usually an indication of plagiarism.	66.7	33.3	0.48	1.33
7.	It is plagiarism to buy a paper somewhere and submit it as if it is mine or to pay somebody to do my paper for me.	81.8	18.2	0.39	1.18
8.	It is plagiarism if two students collaborate on an assignment that is not group work and then submits the same assignment under two different names.	81.8	18.2	0.39	1.18
9.	It is plagiarism if my parents do my assignment (or parts thereof) for me.	48.5	51.5	0.51	1.51
10.	It is plagiarism to download a photo or an image from the Internet and use it in my paper without a reference.	78.8	21.2	0.42	1.21
11.	If I read information in a source and rewrite it in my own words, I do not need to cite sources because I used my own words.	24.2	75.8	0.44	1.76
12.	If I remember information from class or my textbook and therefore have it as ‘general knowledge’ in my head, I do not need to give a reference if I write it in my own words.	75.8	24.2	0.44	1.24
13.	If I copy something from the Internet or a book but replace certain words with my own synonyms, I do not need to give a reference.	90.9	9.1	0.29	1.90

14.	If I translate information on my own or with Google Translate, it is no longer the original source which means that I do not need to give a reference.	90.0	9.1	0.29	1.90
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For the eighth question in the questionnaire, 18.2% or six respondents also stated ‘No’ about plagiarism when two students collaborate on an assignment that has nothing to do with their group assignment and submit it under two different names showing a Mean of 1.18 (sd=0.39). As seen, more than half of the respondents agreed that it is not plagiarism if our parents do our assignment for us with 51.5% (M=1.51; sd=0.51). Question 10, with a Mean score of 1.21 (sd=0.42), 78.8% of respondents answered ‘Yes’ about whether downloading a photo or an image from the Internet and then use it for our assignment without referencing it. Besides, 75.8% of respondents (M=1.24; sd=0.44) agreed by answering ‘No’ that if they read a piece of information from any sources and rewrite it in their own words, they do not need to cite it does not consider plagiarism.

Furthermore, more than half of the students said that having knowledge or information from their previous class or textbook does not need to cite for a reference if they write it in their own words. Next, a remarkably high percentage of 90.9% (M=1.90; sd=0.29) agreed by saying that it is wrong to copy something from the Internet or the book and only replace some of the words with synonyms and does not cite it. Lastly, for the last question under the first part, another 90.9%, with 30 respondents (M=1.90; sd=0.29), agreed that when we are asked if someone translates the information using Google Translate, it means that we do not have to reference it.

Based on the findings, the results showed that the TESL undergraduates are highly aware of plagiarism. Since all of them agreed that they are aware that their institution has a plagiarism policy, it can be the most concrete factor that caused most respondents to answer the survey questions regarding the concept of plagiarism correctly. The findings correlate with Oyewole et al. (2018) that studied the awareness of plagiarism acts and policy by postgraduate students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. They also mentioned that most of their respondents were highly aware of plagiarism and the various acts that fall under plagiarism.

Factors Undergraduates Plagiarise

The second section of the questionnaire focuses on the factors that may influence the TESL undergraduates to plagiarise. The items that fall under this research question were also divided into the second section of the questionnaire.

Table 2: Factors that influenced TESL Undergraduates to plagiarise

No.	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	sd
1.	Sometimes, I am tempted to plagiarise because everyone else is doing it (student, researchers, etc.).	18.2	39.4	21.2	15.2	6.1	3.49	1.15
2.	Short deadlines tempt me to plagiarise a bit.	9.1	21.2	15.2	48.5	6.1	2.79	1.14
3.	Sometimes I copy a sentence or two just to get inspiration for further writing.	0	9.1	18.2	57.6	15.2	2.21	0.82
4.	I can copy my entire paper piece by piece from different sources, as long as I provide references.	21.2	36.4	18.2	21.2	3	3.52	1.15
5.	When I do not know what to write, I translate a part of a paper from a foreign language.	12.1	45.5	27.3	15.2	0	3.55	0.90
6.	It is justified to use previous descriptions of a method because the method itself remains the same.	6.1	12.1	45.5	27.3	9.1	2.81	0.95
7.	I could not write a paper without plagiarising.	24.2	51.5	15.2	3	6.1	3.85	1.03
8.	It is not so bad to plagiarise.	36.4	36.4	18.2	9.1	0	4.00	0.97
9.	I required more information and knowledge regarding	3	9.1	21.2	48.5	18.2	2.30	0.98

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Based on Table 2, for the first question ($M=3.49$; $sd=1.15$), most respondents disagree that they were not tempted to plagiarise even though other respondents would do it sometimes, with a total of 39.4%. In comparison, the second-highest percentage is neutral, with 21.2%. Moving on, a substantial number of respondents, with almost half of them, agreed that short deadlines could tempt them to plagiarise. For the third question, more than half of the respondents ($M=2.21$; $sd=0.82$) agreed that sometimes, they would copy one or two sentences to expand their ideas.

The next majority of respondents ($M=3.52$; $sd=1.15$), with 36.4% of them, lean more towards disagreeing with the statement that said it is acceptable to copy for them to copy by gathering from different resources as long as they provided the references. For Question 5, 45.5% with a Mean score of 3.55 ($sd=0.90$) of respondents disagreed that if someone does not know what to write, they will translate a research paper from a foreign language. Next, almost half of the responses picked neutral, followed by agreeing that when it comes to how it was found to use the previous descriptions of a method because the method would always remain the same.

For Question 7, 51.5% with a Mean score of 3.85 ($sd=1.03$) of respondents disagreed that they could not write a paper without plagiarising with a statement that said they could not write a paper. For Question 8, the two highest answers received the same number of percentages (36.4%) for strongly disagree and disagree, respectively ($M=4.00$; $sd=0.97$) that stated it is not wrong to plagiarise. For Question 9, almost half of the undergraduates ($M=2.30$; $sd=0.98$), with 48.5% of them, agreed that they required more knowledge and information about plagiarism.

The main factors contributing to TESL undergraduates plagiarising are short deadlines of assessments. The findings correlate to Ajzen (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour. The TESL undergraduates are aware of plagiarism but intentionally plagiarise in order to finish their assessments given. They know academic dishonesty, yet their attitudes towards plagiarism are still performed. Oyewole et al. (2018) stated that an individual might act due to pressure. For instance, TESL undergraduates are pressured by the datelines given to finish their

assessments. Therefore, if an individual shows a negative attitude towards plagiarism, they may not plagiarise. In contrast, if an individual reacted to plagiarism positively, there is a high tendency for the individual to plagiarise in their work.

CONCLUSION

The significant findings in this research indicated that despite most of the respondents stating that they do not need to plagiarise to write a paper, they still felt that they needed more information and knowledge about plagiarism. The findings correspond with the study conducted by Sariffuddin et al. (2017), stating the ignorance of plagiarism by students is the main factor in plagiarism to happen. The respondents realised that plagiarism is wrong but still need guidance on avoiding and preventing themselves from plagiarising (Sariffuddin et al., 2017). To conclude, these findings indicated a severe matter that needs to be taken action instantly. Plagiarism is an act of academic crime that may affect academic achievements in one research or assessment.

Therefore, based on the findings, the following recommendations can be proposed, and it can cause a great benefit for institutes' academic achievements to diminished plagiarism among TESL undergraduates. First and foremost, university authorities should tighten one's institutes' plagiarism policy and give a heavy penalise to students who plagiarise. Moreover, the institutes should spread the knowledge on plagiarism among TESL undergraduates by setting up a plagiarism workshop. The plagiarism workshop can include citing correctly, avoiding plagiarism, using a plagiarism detector application, paraphrasing correctly, and the list goes on. Moreover, a module can be given to the TESL undergraduates on the correct way to cite following the APA format and effects from academic dishonesty. The TESL undergraduates may realise how serious plagiarism can be.

Furthermore, a recommendation for future study, a more significant number of respondents can be better to get a better and accurate result. It can also result in better data analysis. Other than that, for further research, perhaps, the study can be taken in a broader range of place; for instance, not just for the undergraduates. This study was carried out to determine undergraduates' awareness of plagiarism and how severe academic dishonesty is at the tertiary level.

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