

WHY DO STUDENTS PLAGIARIZE? THE CASE OF MULTICULTURAL STUDENTS IN AN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Ajrina Hysaj, Abeer Elkhoully

Abstract: The increase in plagiarism cases among university students is a great concern for educators and policy makers within the federal and private universities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Furthermore, the presence of a very diverse student body leaves space for validation of the hypothesis, that concepts of plagiarism or academic integrity are seen differently in different cultures; nevertheless, very little research has been carried out to empirically validate such hypotheses. Moreover, current research in this area has usually been conducted in western universities, in western countries and has been focused in a comparison between international and domestic students or native and non-native speakers of English language. As yet, no studies have directly analysed culturally diverse students' attitudes toward plagiarism in their first year of study in a western university in the UAE. This study aimed to measure the students' level of understanding to what plagiarism is. One survey and one quiz were given to 67 students, the data from the surveys was tested against several hypothesis and some descriptive analysis was conducted. The results reveal that students understand the main concepts beyond plagiarism but confuse its application.

Key words: Plagiarism, Academic Integrity, Academic Writing Skills, Multicultural Students

1 Introduction

Academic dishonesty has been the focus of researchers, educators and curriculum designers for decades (Bowers, 1964; Wells 1993; Scanlon 2003; Zhang et al., 2014). The issue has become even more pressing with the extensive use of the Internet and technology, the prevalence of ghost-writing, and 'cut and paste' techniques (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). During this period, studies have progressed following the changes that have happened in societies, education systems, technology and the business world. Scholars were firstly intrigued to understand the reasons why students copy from one another and not study on their own; this later took a different direction with the introduction of online studies and online assessments.

The issue of academic dishonesty has become a worldwide concern due to globalisation of higher education (Terraschke and Wahid, 2011; Taylor, Ryan and Elphinstone, 2020; Duzhyk, 2020). Interestingly, Whitley (1998) in his review of literature established that some of the factors why students cheat were having modest expectations of success, "having cheated in the past, studying under poor conditions, holding positive attitudes toward cheating, perceiving that social norms support cheating, and anticipating a large reward for success" (p. 235). Furthermore, according to UNESCO

(UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020) the number of international students in 2017 jumped to 5.3 million from slightly over 2 million in 2000. The trend of studying abroad does not seem to be on the decrease; therefore, it becomes crucial to understand the attitudes and needs of international students so we can provide them with the adequate tools to study and lessen the need to cheat Van Damme, 2001; Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007; Hysaj and Hamam, 2020).

Issues related to plagiarism or academic misconduct require careful consideration, as they are pivotal in the credibility and reliability of institutions of higher education. In an Australian education context, the issue of understanding foreign students is of a particular concern due to an increased number of international students who study in Australian universities in onshore and offshore campuses, like in China, India, and Malaysia and in the UAE. The University of Wollongong in Dubai, an offshore campus of the Australian University of Wollongong, in the Middle East, which is home to a student body of over 100 nationalities, is highly interested in understanding reasons why students plagiarise.

Substantial studies have analysed the spread of plagiarism in the tertiary level in the UAE (Khan & Balasubramanian 2012; Khan 2010; Khan, al-Qaimari & Samuel 2007). The lack of academic integrity in the tertiary level was seen due to a variety factors, e.g. spread of technology, ghost writing, E-cheating to name a few. Nevertheless, the focus of these studies was not to analyse the effects of academic writing skills and the correlation that it has with the plagiarism instances in the region. Therefore, the authors of this study hold the opinion that it becomes important to analyse and understand the correlation between academic writing skills and cases of plagiarism.

Curtis and Vardanega (2016) analysed the attitudes of three similar groups of students at the same university on three occasions, each separated by a time interval of five years (2004, 2009, and 2014). The assessed traits were self-reported engagement in plagiarism, awareness of academic misconduct and attitudes towards plagiarism. Unpredictably the analysed data from this study revealed positive development with regards to reduction of numerous forms of plagiarism due to increase in understanding plagiarism (Curtis & Vardanega, 2016)

Song-Turner (2008), after interviewing many foreign students, found that some of reasons why international students plagiarise include language challenges, lack of skill sets, and inability of producing a text similar to that of a native speaker. Our university as an offshore branch of an Australian university sees it constantly crucial to understand the web of perceptions of international students towards plagiarism. This becomes even more evident when valuing the importance given by the Australian government, to attract these students to both onshore and offshore Australian universities. while emphasising high levels of academic integrity.

Conversely, Song-Turner (2008) recorded that lack of understanding of foreign students resulted in many cases of plagiarism in two major Australian universities in the year 2005. Moreover, the same study found that almost 3500 students have been caught plagiarising or cheating across eight Australian universities since 2001. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that there was no evidence that overseas students were the only ones who tended to plagiarise but it does indicate that the students' influx has a fair share in the rise of plagiarism as a phenomenon.

It is worth mentioning that this trend is not only prevalent among undergraduate students and less prevalent among post-graduate students (Moten, 2014; Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). Consequently, the combination of cultural and language issues, increases the potential for plagiarism to take place (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). Findings of Heckler and Forde (2015) indicate that creating awareness about plagiarism and more importantly facilitating the process of learning can potentially bring changes to values and beliefs supporting a long-lasting improvement in the learning culture.

Therefore, the notion of plagiarism is open to a range of interpretations because of different stakeholders involved in teaching and learning in higher education, the policy makers, management, faculty and students. Understanding the university policies on plagiarism, understanding students' attitudes towards academic misconduct/academic integrity and matching the parameters of expectations of both parties can ensure a decrease in the reported cases of plagiarism.

Gullifer and Tyson (2014) reported in their study that out of the 3405 students who took part in their study, only half had read the institutional policy on plagiarism/academic integrity resulting in not being aware of what constitutes plagiarism in the first place. This clears the path for a systematic and progressive educative approach of creating awareness regarding plagiarism/academic integrity and implications of its infringement. A qualitative research by Devlin and Gray (2007) looked at principal factors behind students' inclination to plagiarise and concluded that students' lack of understanding plagiarism, poor academic skills, personality factors and external pressures were partly to be blamed. Therefore, better engagement with students is seen as an effective way toward minimising and marginalising instances of plagiarism.

The rationale behind reasons why students plagiarise, encompasses the ways students think and behave under certain circumstances that could be due to cultural, psychological or any other individual related factors (Park, 2003; Bamford & Sergiou 2005; Batane, 2010; Alghamdi, Hussain & Al-Hattami, 2018). Moreover, as Devlin and Gray (2007) rightly mentioned, although, academic misconduct is present in most universities, a strategy of non-tolerance is not applied because students are quite often viewed as customers. Therefore, the most efficient and productive way is to ensure that our students understand plagiarism, implications of its infringement and avoid opting for it by empowering themselves with the appropriate sets of language and writing skills (Curtis & Vardanega, 2016; Lea & Street, 1998).

The issues of inclusiveness should be taken into consideration when outlining curriculum material and assessment tasks (Lea & Street, 1998; Hysaj & Hamam, 2020). In other words, definitions of appropriate classroom material and assessment tasks should be based on the students' needs and be inclusive of their cultural backgrounds as much as the institutional culture of the universities. For instance, Etter et al. (2006) and Bretag et al. (2014) proposed the need to provide students with academic integrity training in the form of 'hands-on activities, engaging activities, repeated and reconfigured in various media and forums throughout the student programme', which potentially can provide an environment of a strong culture integrity in the institutions.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Factors

Previous studies conducted by Batane (2010), Petrić (2012), Ison (2018), and Foltýnek and Dlabolová (2020) have analysed issues related to plagiarism and academic integrity in certain countries or cultures. However, a study analysing the attitudes of culturally diverse students in an offshore western university in the UAE has yet to be conducted.

Ison (2018) analysed in a quantitative study; the ways academic integrity is dealt with in different cultures and its subsequent occurrence cases. His research focused on the possible differences among cultures and the ways in which cultures view plagiarism or academic misconduct. Interestingly, the findings of this study aligned with those of Rawwas et al. (2004), Heckler and Forde (2015) and Ehrich et al. (2016) identified “poor language and academic skills” as the main reason for a higher percentage of cases of plagiarism among cultures whose first language is not English; concluding that the lack of English language proficiency coupled with the desperation to complete assignments contributes in the tendency to plagiarise.

Research on student motivation and student engagement has offered substantial evidence for the necessity to explore ways of motivating students in the learning process which can serve as a key to a successful and inclusive learning experience. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) analyse the self-efficacy by focusing on its potential to facilitate behavioural, cognitive and motivational engagement in the classroom subsequently resulting in life-long learning experiences (Rueda et al., 2007).

Furthermore, students’ perceptions of the dominant culture of the higher education institutions need to be understood so issues about academic misconduct do not arise due to unawareness of institutional values and beliefs even if this requires negation of individual cultural values often used as justifications for plagiarizing (Heckler and Forde, 2015). A recent study by Ehrich et al. (2016), analysing Australian and Chinese students in their native countries, highlights that undergraduate students in both countries lack understanding of plagiarism and plagiaristic behaviours. The same study suggests the need for unambiguous instruction about academic skills; facilitating development of critical and analytical understanding of undergraduate students so they can engage in the research process without improperly using others’ ideas.

Academic dishonesty is a major challenge in the Arabian Gulf, similar to that of educational institutions worldwide (Thomas et al., 2014; Razek, 2014; McCabe et al., 2008). All three studies point out the distinguished rationale for presence of academic dishonesty in the Middle East, which is strongly influenced by the norms of the collectivist society. As mentioned in the study by Singelis and Brown (1995), examination of the behaviour of an individual needs to consider the culture they belong to and, (Thomas et al., 2014) ways that different cultures expect to be assessed needs to be taken into consideration when designing assessments. For instance, the use of oral assessment provided as an alternative to a written assessment, in an experiment in a university in the United Arab Emirates, provided enough evidence for validation of the originality of student work, while contributing to assessment in an approach that

resonates with the region's own educational traditions and collectivist cultural norms (Thomas et al., 2014).

A study by Jian, Marion and Wang (2019) found that academic and cultural backgrounds of Chinese international students, substantially influenced by the Confucian philosophy, aim for prevalence of collectivism and social order even when studying abroad. These sets of values create cultural differences when students study abroad and may result in the tendency of engaging in academic misconduct. Understandably, these students will need to navigate their way between the high integrity expectations present in the institutions in host countries and their individual cultural beliefs and lack of knowledge and skills. This study is of a particular relevance for the UAE private universities, which have seen a considerable increase in the number of Chinese students studying in the country.

The native population of the UAE is predominantly Muslim and so is the majority of foreign students studying in the private universities in the country. Therefore, it becomes valuable to analyse previous research conducted in other Muslim countries. A study by Moten (2014) asserts that from an Islamic perspective, academic dishonesty is a form of cheating and it is morally and ethically unacceptable and yet there is very little research done to analyse the issue of plagiarism in regards to students and faculty attitudes in relation to plagiarism in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world. According to Moten (2014) institutions in Malaysia consider plagiarism as immoral and against the law and focus on development of writing and research skills.

Furthermore, a study conducted to compare the Ukrainian and American educational systems found that the ethical systems implemented in schools have to do with the approaches taken by faculty and students. Nevertheless, the attitude towards honesty, unilateral cheating, collective cheating, falsification, gaining favouritism, and performing extra work to receive better grades are more relevant to a cross-cultural study rather than an educational system' study (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014, p. 29). Hence, the differences noticed in Ukrainian and American educational systems have to do with differences between both cultures much more than they have to do with differences between their respective education systems (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014).

2.1.1 Development of English Writing Skills – More than a daunting task or a fun activity

Non-native speakers of English language must be applauded for taking up the challenge of learning English language skills, then progressing to master Academic English language skills, which are challenging even for native speakers of English language. Moreover, they move forward to mastering critical and analytical thinking in the English language, gaining awareness of paraphrasing and summarizing in English language and finally producing a piece of writing with all the necessary qualities and, yet more, which is marked against marking criteria that have been designed for native speakers of English language.

In the process of becoming near native speakers of English language, international students are challenged with extensive diversity issues related to considerable differences of experience in linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds (Markham &

Gordon 2007). Very often undergraduate and post-graduate students find themselves lacking the adequate academic writing skills and are confused about the concepts and usage of in-text citations, reference lists and furthermore the different referencing systems. This gets even more complicated when students need to use different referencing systems in academic study skills classes and a different system in their discipline-related subjects. Hence, the writing tasks become even more daunting and students may lose interest all together. It is crucial that we as educators try to find different ways of helping students master their academic writing skills without compromising on quality, integrity or institutional culture.

A case study by Prescott (2016) suggests collaborative work as a possible approach towards better academic writing skills. The ongoing research on second language (L2) acquisition, as well as in its writing and applied linguistic perspectives, goes back to the mid 1980's (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). In the field of L2, a myriad of topics that has emerged through the decades, differences in concepts of understanding plagiarism between faculty and students, development of writing skills in L2 students, ways that disciplines differ in perceptions of plagiarism, and the roles of culture and electronic media (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014, p. 73), require further analysis to be understood by the educators. Liu (2005) holds the opinion that the lack of language and writing skills of L2 students provide a platform for unintentional plagiarism and development of those applied skills have the potential to reduce the occurrence of academic misconduct. Resorting to plagiarism seems to be more a case of desperation rather than a willingly taken decision. Exploring ways to facilitate the development of writing skills has direct pedagogical implications on students' learning (Liu, 2005).

Gallant (2008, p. 112) argues that new teaching and learning approaches are needed, aiming learning at avoidance of plagiarism rather than curbing cheating. She debates that this could be achieved through "fostering a learning-oriented environment, improving instruction, enhancing institutional support for teaching and learning and reducing institutional constraints to teaching and learning" (Gallant, 2008, p. 89). Facilitating the atmosphere for teaching and learning can be attained by improving instruction and fostering learning orientations (Gallant, 2017).

West (2012) emphasised that academic writing is not an innate skill and hence, it needs to be developed. Students across all disciplines seem to be resilient to the prerequisite of developing writing skills alongside their discipline related knowledge acquisition. A way of tackling such issue could be 'writing across the curriculum' (WAC) by addressing issues of adequately teaching academic writing skills while emphasising 'writing in the disciplines' (WID) (Buzzi et al., 2012).

McDonald, Moorhead and Colburn (2015) are of the same view as their study on counselling students emphasises the need for a multi-layered approach, focusing on the development of adequate academic writing skills while applying the WID approach in teaching. Another study by Smith and Humphreys (2017) noted that developing academic writing, research skills along with awareness of academic dishonesty are very important for post-graduate students, despite effectively displaying a higher level of maturity in their studies, compared to their undergraduate counterparts. Academic writing and application of referencing skills take time to master and refine, but the process could be made simpler by giving emphasis to the development of critical and

analytical writing abilities (Hysaj et al., 2018; Hysaj et al., 2019) instead of addressing and tackling plagiarism as a phenomenon (Vardi, 2012). By doing so we encourage students to focus on their personal and academic growth rather than the opposite. As educators, we should emphasise the necessity to analyse ways and approaches to help our students develop academic writing skills. Approaches could be of a pedagogical nature, content wise and building of appropriate vocabulary and grammar skills to empower students with adequate tools that aid the avoidance of plagiarism.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Aim and Analysis

This study was conducted to measure the students' level of understanding plagiarism after been taught by different teachers. Participants were all international students from the age group of 18 to 22. The surveys were anonymous and students were informed that their confidentiality was of utmost importance. One worksheet of eight questions was given to the students; the questions had three options (yes, no or not sure). The questions were based on definition of plagiarism and application of avoidance of plagiarism in a written format. Students were asked about different situations if they constitute plagiarism. The other survey was in the form of a quiz; the quiz had 11 questions of true or false answers. The data collected from the worksheet was analysed using descriptive statistics to indicate proportion of students who were able to understand the studied concept. The quiz data results was tested to verify the hypothesized values for the average number of students who were able to get the correct answer to quiz questions.

The sample consists of 67 students, 18–22 age group; male and female from different study disciplines and different study levels. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for both surveys to check the reliability of students' answers. The percentages' of students who answered the worksheet correctly were calculated. Student sample proportions from the quiz were calculated and compared to the hypothesized value in order to decide whether to reject the null hypothesis. The analysis used is z-test for the proportion at level of significance 0.05, one tail test with critical value $Z = -1.645$. The sampling distribution of proportion to be approximately normal was checked.

Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to check the reliability of students' answer; SPSS was used for the calculations.

4 Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the results of the worksheet and the reliability test result.

The students' responses were consistent for the measures in table 1, Cronbach's Alpha (0.935). The results show 94 % of the students understand that Copying or sharing assignments is considered plagiarism, 79% of the students understand that failing to cite a statistic or asking another student to write a paper for them is plagiarism. 76% of them interpreted paraphrasing the work of others they find in books, magazines, websites without documentation as plagiarism, number of students who found mixing the words of an author with your own without documentation is plagiarism 68%

Table 1

Results of the worksheet and the reliability test

Measures	Response				Cronbach's Alpha
	No	Yes	Not sure	% Correct response	
					0.935
Copying or sharing assignments	2	63	2	94.0	
Failing to cite a commonly known source	17	39	11	58.2	
Failing to cite a statistic	7	53	7	79.1	
Paraphrasing the work of others you find in books, magazines, websites without documentation	9	51	7	76.1	
Asking another student to write a paper for you	11	53	3	79.1	
Copying material from another source, citing the material in your bibliography, but leaving out an in-text citation	11	42	14	62.7	
Listing works in your bibliography that you have not used or read	29	28	10	41.8	
Mixing the words of an author with your own without documentation	11	46	10	68.7	

Correct response

while 62% considered copying material from another source, citing the material in a bibliography, but leaving out an in-text citation is plagiarism. This low response from the student means they need to understand copying ideas or concepts in their own words still need citation. In addition, also the teachers need to explain to students with examples how to cite a resource in text and in their list of references. It is evident that the students do not understand what is meant by a common source as they don't consider failing to cite a resource or statistical values, is plagiarism. The results indicate that only 58% of students consider citing a common source while 79% cite a statistical value. Students have the concept; if they increased the number of cited resources the more the value of their work even they don't use these resources. The results show that only 4% consider having a resource that is not used as plagiarism. Teachers need to emphasize to students that citing any unused references is plagiarism.

The following true or false quiz was designed to measure the depth of students' understanding of plagiarism:

1. You do not have to quote famous sayings or proverbs (example: Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise) because they are common knowledge (Q1).
2. Copying and pasting from the Internet can be done without citing the Internet page, because everything on the Internet is common knowledge and can be used without a citation (Q2).

3. If you just borrow someone's idea and not their exact words, you do not have to quote or cite anything (Q3).
4. If a writer copies and pastes words and ideas from the internet, they do not have to quote or cite anything. After all, anyone can google information on the internet and find the same facts (Q4).
5. Giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation is considered (Q5).
6. Writers cite sources because it is the only way to use other people's work without plagiarizing (Q6).
7. As long as you have the author's name, you can leave out the page number title of the work in the citation. Only one part of the source needs to be revealed in a paper in order to give proper credit (Q7).
8. If a student copies another student's homework, this is not considered plagiarism. The students are not famous people and the homework was not published, so it is not considered plagiarizing (Q8).
9. Using a few phrases from an article and mixing them in with your own words is plagiarism (Q9).
10. If you quote your friend in an interview, you do not have to cite him or her or use quotation marks (Q10).
11. Changing a few words, but copying the same sentence structure and organization of a person's piece is considered plagiarism (Q11).

Table 2

Number of students who responded correctly

Measures	Response					Z-test	Cronbach's Alpha
	True	False	% Correct response (p)	% Hypothesized values (π)			
							0.97
Q1	36	31	53.7	43	1.77		
Q2	6	61	91.0	83	1.75		
Q3	25	42	37.3	28	1.70		
Q4	11	56	83.6	74	1.79		
Q5	52	15	77.6	68	1.69		
Q6	50	17	74.6	65	1.65		
Q7	8	59	88.1	80	1.65		
Q8	5	62	92.5	85	1.73		
Q9	36	31	53.7	43	1.77		
Q10	25	42	62.7	52	1.75		
Q11	58	9	86.6	78	1.69		

Correct response

Table 2 shows the number of students in the sample who responded correctly to the quiz, the percentage of this response, the hypothesized student's proportion who would respond correctly, the corresponding Z-test values and the reliability test value.

The null hypothesis is rejected at the hypothesized population proportion. The test statistic value were calculated using the formula:

$$Z\text{-test} = \frac{p - \pi}{\sqrt{\pi(1 - \pi)}/67}$$

The hypothesized sample proportions are the maximum proportions who can get the correct answers to the quiz. The results show that; 85% of students knew that copying another student's work is plagiarism. Only 83% knew that they should cite a work that was accessed using the online search. The sample analysis shows that 80% of them can cite a journal properly and 78% knew how to paraphrase a piece of needed information and it should be cited. A low percentage 68% of students care about giving the correct information of a resource. 52% of them, consider citing the information acquired from an interview with a friend. 74% of students know that they need to cite the information from the internet and 65% cite any sources used by them. They experience a lack of knowledge as only 43% of this sample knew that they need to cite famous sayings or passages taken from a journal article. Moreover, 28% of the cohort knew that it is not necessary to cite borrowed ideas. These low responses indicate that students are unaware of the resources that are academically appropriate to be used and cited. Also, it can be explained that students do not understand the difference between borrowing ideas and copying them. The high values of reliability show high consistency in students' responses. This identifies the gaps in students' understanding of what could be defined as a plagiarism act.

These results can guide the teachers to focus on points that will help students to avoid actions that lead to plagiarism. Furthermore, teachers should find ways of explaining concepts by practice rather than by using theory.

5 Recommendations and Conclusion

It is worth mentioning that exploring ways by which students learn may contribute to reduced cases of plagiarism. Therefore, educators should put in responsible efforts to formulate out-of-the-box projects that allow students to utilize their own cognitive skill set. Devising assignments or tasks that depend on original expression, rather than based on previous or current research topics could reduce the plagiarism activities. Universities across UAE should also build strategies that ensure students' understanding of the institutions' plagiarism policies and are clear overfor various plagiarism related issues. The consequences of plagiarism could be delivered to the students through active discussions, written guidelines and practices in identifying proper and improper citation methods. There is scope forof future research could be to examine the ethical values been that are taught and maintained in high schools across UAE. Moreover, an investigation of how parental values and teachings at home affects students' mind-set towards classroom activities, would be helpful in understanding the issues that lead to plagiarism. Furthermore, a deeper insight into this area of concern;

could further allow educators to discuss and improve students' attitudes towards plagiarism. Finally, a statistical analysis across various other local and international universities within UAE pertaining to plagiarism could further complement the results presented within this paper.

To conclude, students have a lack of understanding of what could be classified as a plagiarism act. Teachers should constantly redefine for students what is considered a plagiarism act. This survey was conducted on high diverse students and based on these results we can say that regardless of the diverse student body, location, and local culture within the university, the students tend to not understand what could be classified as plagiarism. Educators are required to employ a variety of strategies to prepare students with the right graduate attributes, shape the mindset of students and equip them with the correct writing skills and practices.

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Authors

Ajrina Hysaj, University of Wollongong in Dubai, Block 14 Knowledge Park, Umm Suqueim 20183 Dubai, United Arab Emirates, e-mail: AjrinaHysaj@uowdubai.ac.ae

Abeer Elkhoully, Faculty of Engineering and Information Sciences, UOWD College Dubai, United Arab Emirates