

UNDERSTANDING REASONS STUDENTS MAY PLAGIARIZE IN ONLINE ASSESSMENTS

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Understanding of issues related to academic integrity has been the focus of researchers and educators worldwide for many decades (Bowers, 1964; Yu et al, 2017; Khan, Hill, Foltynnek, 2020; Hysaj and Elkhoully, 2020). According to Jussila and Majoral (2018), the globalization of the education system and the spread of federal and private universities worldwide has created conditions for people to study everywhere in the world irrespective of their financial status. For instance, it is a known fact that parents and family members, in Asian or African nations, may facilitate the funding of young people to go to university (Scully et al. 2019); however, in many western nations, the young people take charge of their education and secure loans to ensure the payment of university fees. In many cases, students take a lifetime to pay these loans back and in some instances, generations may need to get involved and pay accumulated debt (Velez, Cominole and Bentz, 2019). Reasons why people complete university studies relate to the career prospects as well as family and societal expectations. In many countries (Jones et al. 2017) these expectations are associated with a higher social status and people who earn a degree are seen as intellectuals and subsequently more favored by the societies where they belong (Merolla, 2018; Curry, Mooi-Reci and Wooden, 2019).

The issue of academic dishonesty is increasingly becoming more pressing following the uncertainty that has gripped the world due to the never-ending spread of COVID 19 and the foreseeable extensive spread of remote learning in the near future. The continuous use of technology in education has created the necessity of understanding the reasons why students opt to use technology to indulge in illegal acts of academic dishonesty (Khan, 2017; Peytcheva-Forsyth, Aleksieva and Yovkova, 2018). The prevalence of the cut and paste phenomenon is creating an unpleasant and dangerous situation in

higher education and beyond (Remez, Huang and Brown, 2018). The lockdown year of 2020 created the conditions for extensive research to take place and researchers from all the corners of the world tried to understand and analyse issues related to academic dishonesty and ways of curbing it. As a worldwide phenomenon one would think that a solution found in one part of the world would be of benefit to other parts of the world. Nevertheless, as everything in research, academic integrity requires adequate considerations in view of all the variables connected with it (Bretag, 2019). Studies have advanced and have started to take into consideration changes that have occurred in societies, education systems, business world (Aelterman, Vansteenkiste and Haerens, 2019) and most importantly the technological adaptations that all education systems had to embrace as a result of the spread of COVID 19 (Reedy et al. 2021) and will continue to embrace at least in the near future.

According to the study by Ifeagwazi et al (2019), one of the reasons why students plagiarise is connected with the peer pressure and the desire to outperform other students who are considered to be less intelligent than the ones who plagiarise. Although the correlation between reasons why students plagiarise and the subsequent action of plagiarism is seen as a highly corrupted one, yet students are caught plagiarizing or considering to plagiarise (Remez, Huang and Brown, 2018). Another reason pointed out in the study by Long et al. (2020), is the inability to connect with the matter when studying online (Cleophas et al. 2021). Connection with the discussed matter is important when studying face-to face and online, yet the skills that are required by students and teachers when studying online are different from those used when studying face-to face. Therefore, teachers and students are required to employ these sets of skills, especially if the online assessing was here to stay.

For this study, researchers conducted qualitative research as part of student feedback; information about reasons why students plagiarize was collected, classified and then analysed. The researchers were cautious to not include any personal data of the students. Students who participated in the study were undergraduate students of different majors. Majority of them were first year students but the study included a minority of students from other levels as well. 40 students participated in the study and students were from different cultures and were studying different majors. Students discussed in groups about reasons why students plagiarize. The rationale of working in separate groups was chosen to increase the possibilities of students to express their opinions and to improve the diversification of thought.

Majority of students, over 80 percent, confirmed to be aware of other students who plagiarize and the reason for it was the undue pressure imposed by the online platform. Another 50 percent of students confirmed that online learning is too impersonal and they do not feel connected with the lecturers or

with the matter that is being analyzed. More than 65% of students were of the opinion that online learning was not allowing them to receive instant feedback from the teachers unlike in face-to-face classes. Therefore, students felt that there is a need to plagiarize, although over 85% of them confirmed that plagiarizing is absolutely wrong and if classes were face-to-face the approach towards plagiarism would be substantially different.

Seeing the uncertain circumstances imposed by COVID-19 it seems that online teaching and assessing is here to stay, at least until countries decide to go back in face to face teaching and learning. Nations and governments worldwide are considering the aspect of safety prior to deciding to go back to face to face classes. Therefore, it seems urgent to research ways of curbing plagiarism in the online platform. All the aspects of teaching and learning need to be considered carefully and appropriate decisions need to be taken keeping in mind the necessity of high levels of integrity amongst teachers and students.

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