

Chapter 50

Academic Dishonesty Among Business Students: A Descriptive Study of Plagiarism Behavior

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Abstract The advents of technology have reshaped the way people live, work and communicate. This high-tech development is also observed in the process of teaching and learning especially in higher learning institution. Aligned with the use of technology in institutions of higher education, a growing concern of academic dishonesty issue has emerged. This paper aims to investigate the reasons students engaged in plagiarism and their level of awareness towards plagiarism activity. A total of 99 sets of questionnaires were collected from students of a degree business program in a public university in Malaysia. The findings indicate that the level of awareness among students on plagiarism is high. However, that does not stop them from engaging with plagiarism having easy access of the internet and the fact that they have a habit of doing last minute work. Different perceptions between genders on plagiarism were also investigated and discussed.

Keywords Academic dishonesty • Business students • Plagiarism

50.1 Introduction

The world today is driven by technologies that become practical for its communications, its economy and ever more its daily organization (Risquez et al. 2011). This high-tech development is also observed in the process of teaching and learning especially in higher learning institutions. The appropriate use of information and communication technology in the area of education makes teaching and learning

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more worthy, by improving the learning effectiveness as well as adding another perspective to learning that was not previously available (Hartley 2007). Aligned with the use of technology in institutions of higher education, a growing concern of academic dishonesty issue has emerged. One of the global matters related to academic dishonesty infecting many academic institutions is plagiarism.

Academic plagiarism become more intensified today than ever as the growth of the Internet has opened up opportunities for students to cheat. It has made available a much wider number of web-based sources, facilitating the purchase or “cut-and-paste” of appropriate materials which encourage plagiarism (Sterngold 2004). In addition to technological advancement that changed the face of education, changing attitudes toward what constitutes acceptable behaviour in the business world have been suggested also as contributing toward a decline in student honesty, particularly with respect to business students (Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke 2005). This is in conjunction with Collins (2000) that most studies did find that business students tend to be even less ethically sensitive and have more lenient attitude towards what contribute to cheating behaviour (Klein et al. 2007). Thus, it is crucial to find verification on plagiarism activities among undergraduates especially involving business students as these students are future business leader (Iberahim et al. 2012).

Another issue not entirely settled is the question of which student groups are prone to plagiarising university assignment (Walker 2010) and whether they are aware of such misconduct. This involves various demographic parameters for instance age, gender and levels of academic have been shown to be important variables (Bennett 2005; Bradinova 2006; Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke 2005; Park 2003; Nadelson 2007; Perry 2010). Much research has been carried out across the globe but less evidence found on plagiarism act in Asian countries especially in Malaysian context. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the level of awareness towards plagiarism activity and the reasons of engaging in the misconduct. Awareness level between genders on plagiarism were also explored and discussed.

50.2 Literature Review

50.2.1 Awareness of Plagiarism

The subject of plagiarism, that is a wrongful appropriation and stealing of another author’s language, thoughts, ideas or expressions and representation of them as one’s own original work is not something novel to academic community (Carroll 2004). Hussin and Ismail (2013) identified three types of plagiarism that include verbal plagiarism in which the speaker uses lines from a text without acknowledging the source (Park 2003), plagiarism in writing (Auer and Krupar 2001) and lastly, the internet or digital plagiarism (Scanlon and Neumann 2002). Among these three, the most common type of plagiarism is the lifting of information or ideas from a source text without acknowledging the source (Park 2003). It is easy for a student to paraphrase another author’s ideas without appropriately crediting the source, in the

pursuit of higher grades, and such activity is frequently attributable to desperation, often caused by procrastination or plain laziness (Smith et al. 2007).

In discussing the issue of plagiarism, the critical point to take into account is that the idea of the matter varies across countries and differs according to academic levels (Rezanejad and Rezaei 2013), let alone the cause of doing it. Not even aware of the act of plagiarism is another issue. In a study of 2,600 third level students, McCabe et al. (2008) found that just over 40 % of respondents believed that cutting and pasting from the internet is either trivial plagiaristic behaviour or not plagiaristic at all. Similarly, it was found that students also engaged in 'patch-writing', where several pieces of borrowed material is patched together as a result of lack of understanding of the content (Howard 1995). Howard (1995) suggests that patch-writing may be perceived as an attempt to re-synthesize difficult material and, in terms of learning, may actually assist understanding ability. Thus, in this context, students view that as a legitimate study strategy whereas academics see patch-writing as plagiarism (Wilkinson 2009).

When students do not fully understand what constitutes plagiarism, or what the penalties for its detection are, they may not see it as a problem (Smith et al. 2007). Although most students tend to understand that academic misconduct is wrong, if they perceive that as tolerable is different from the faculty or university, their understanding of the wrongness of academic misconduct doesn't help much (Kwong et al. 2010).

50.2.2 Reasons of Plagiarism

The reasons why students resorted to plagiarism differ. First-year university students arrive at university from diverse educational, geographic and cultural backgrounds and perceive referencing primarily as an issue of compliance for it has often not been taught explicitly, or within a discipline context prior to tertiary education (Perry 2010). Hayes and Inrona (2005) note that the education system in most countries is based on learning and assessment that typically focus on the content of a text book. Thus, it does not seem to be easy for students to be critical or to raise their own opinions, leading to copying ideas from books and other sources instead especially if they are new to the English language (Handa and Power 2005; Zimmerman 2012).

Dawson (2004) analysed the relationship between the type and difficulty of the task set and the likelihood of committing plagiarism. Other research found that most of the students plagiarize to get the right answers of their questions, ultimately to achieve high grades in their studies instead of getting expertise in their subjects of study (Ramzan et al. 2012). Apart from that, peer pressures also have a strong effect on students' perception of the act of plagiarism (Ellahi et al. 2013). Deckert (1993) suggested one of the possible reasons for students in Hong Kong to plagiarise is that students had little familiarity with the Western notion of plagiarism and poor ability to recognize it. Similarly, students understand they should not copy words without

referencing, but fail to grasp the rationale as the reasons are not explicit and often cloaked in unfamiliar academic language (Stagg et al. 2013).

50.2.3 Awareness of Plagiarism Between Genders

Gender awareness on plagiarism is reported vastly in the literature. In the early 1990s, the literature in the area of academic dishonesty largely focuses on the influence of 'individual' factors such as genders and age group upon such dishonesty where earlier studies suggested that cheating was more prevalent among males, more recent studies suggest female cheating is increasing, possibly due to a convergence of role requirements among males and females in the academic environment (Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke 2005).

In contradiction, Becker and Ulstad (2007) explained that females may try to avoid the negative consequences of cheating and tend toward ethical action. Unlike males, focusing more on perceived benefits of cheating and less on the consequences of being caught and therefore more prone to plagiarising in particular (Park 2003). Whitley (2001) found out that there was no significant difference between genders whereas Bradinova (2006) explained that in examining the possible effects of gender on students' understanding of the meaning of plagiarism, the analysis of the sample does not show any significant differences between male and female students' views about what constitutes plagiarism but female students express slightly higher opinions on plagiarism.

50.3 Methodology

A quantitative survey was undertaken to serve the purpose of this study. Questionnaires with 23 items were distributed to a total of 99 students from a business degree program in one of a public universities in Malaysia ranging from semester 1 to semester 5. The questionnaires were divided into three parts. The first part of the survey required respondents to rate the importance of seven items to measure the level of awareness whereas the second section contained 16 potential reasons related to academic plagiarism. Respondent rated the given statements using 5-point likert scale with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree. The instruments were adapted from various literatures (Comas-Forgas and Sureda-Negre 2010; Ramzan et al. 2012) which have been proven to be reliable and valid. Given the sensitive nature of the questions, all responses provided by the respondents were guaranteed of anonymity. The last part of the questionnaires involved collecting demographic information of the respondents. All data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

50.4 Results

50.4.1 Demographic Profiles

The profile of respondent focuses on gender, age, semester and previous education. Among 99 respondents, male constitutes of 23.2 % and female constitutes of 76.8 % involving students from semester 1 until semester 4. Since the semester 1 students are the first batch in the course, hence there is no student for semester 2. Details of the demographic profiles are as per Table 50.1.

50.4.2 Level of Awareness

The following findings indicate the level of awareness among business students pertaining to plagiarism. The result shows that most students aware that plagiarism is wrong with the highest value of mean, $\mu=4.33$ ($SD=0.67$). In general, students have a clear understanding on the meaning of plagiarism and that the act of copying from materials without crediting the sources constitute plagiarism since the mean value are both high ($\mu=4.18$, $SD=0.84$ and $\mu=4.05$, $SD=0.8$ respectively). Similarly, they realized that they will be caught ($\mu=3.91$, $SD=0.74$) and face serious consequences if they violated the plagiarism policy ($\mu=3.72$, $SD=0.82$). Nevertheless, they rated moderately on the effectiveness of the university and the faculty in catching those who engaged in plagiarism (Table 50.2).

Table 50.1 Demographic profiles of respondents

Variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	23	23.2
Female	76	76.8
Age		
<20 years	9	9.1
>20 years	90	90.9
Semester		
Semester 1	9	9.1
Semester 3	30	30.3
Semester 4	29	29.3
Semester 5	31	31.3

Table 50.2 Level of awareness among students

Awareness	Mean	Std. deviation
I understand plagiarism to be wrong	4.33	.670
I understand the meaning of plagiarism	4.18	.837
Copying from a book without crediting the source constitutes plagiarism	4.05	.800
If a student violates the plagiarism policy he/she will be caught	3.91	.744
If a student violates the plagiarism policy he/she face serious consequences	3.72	.821
University is effective at catching students who plagiarize	3.28	.869
Our faculty is effective at catching students who plagiarize	3.26	.910

50.4.3 Reasons for Plagiarism

Concerning with the reasons of plagiarism, the findings indicate that the ease of access offered by the Internet to find information is the main reason for students resorted to plagiarism ($\mu=4.23$, $SD=0.69$) followed by the habit of doing things last minute work ($\mu=4.12$, $SD=0.78$) and the assignment to be done is very complicated ($\mu=3.90$, $SD=0.78$). Based on the result below, students moderately agreed that they plagiarize due to the feeling that they did not learn anything from the assignment ($\mu=4.23$, $SD=0.69$). At the second lowest rank of reason leading to plagiarism is the feeling that lecturers to whom the assignment is to be submitted do not thoroughly read the assignments ($\mu=4.23$, $SD=0.69$) and the least is that it would be hard for the lecturer to find out they had copied ($\mu=4.23$, $SD=0.69$) (Table 50.3).

50.4.4 Level of Awareness Between Genders

In assessing the level of awareness between genders, the analysis of the sample stipulated in Table 50.4 shows that both female and male understand that plagiarism is wrong with both values of mean are high ($\mu=4.34$, $SD=0.66$ and $\mu=4.30$, $SD=0.70$ respectively). An examination of gender influences on crediting sources showed that females were more likely to proper cite the authors ($\mu=4.12$, $SD=0.75$), whereas males were more likely not to have the citation of sources ($\mu=3.83$, $SD=0.94$). For other variables, it was observed that there was no significant difference between male and female. However, from the result, females express slightly higher opinion on all variables than males indicating that the tendency for males to plagiarize is higher.

Table 50.3 Reasons for plagiarism

Reasons	Mean	Std. deviation
Ease of access offered by the Internet to find information	4.23	.697
The habit of doing things at the last minute	4.12	.786
The assignment to be done is very complicated	3.90	.789
A lack of time	3.83	.809
Many assignments have to be submitted over a short period of time	3.78	.932
A belief that copying something from the Internet is not bad, because everything on the internet is public	3.70	.788
The fact that the assignment set is eminently theoretical	3.69	.649
It's easier, simpler and more comfortable than doing the work yourself	3.65	.812
Because other classmates do it	3.64	.963
The fact that the assignment has a reduced weight in the final grade of the subject	3.51	.787
Students do not know how to do academic assignments	3.44	.895
You get a higher grade than by doing the assignment yourself	3.37	.864
The knowledge or feeling that the lecturer to whom the assignment is to be submitted is not very skilled at using the internet	3.10	.920
A feeling that you do not learn anything from the assignments	3.09	.905
Due to the knowledge or feeling that the lecturer to whom the assignment is to be submitted does not thoroughly read the assignments	3.07	.786
A feeling that it would be hard for the lecturer to find out they had copied	3.03	1.035

Table 50.4 Level of awareness between genders

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation
I understand the meaning of plagiarism	Male	23	3.96	1.065
	Female	76	4.25	.751
I understand plagiarism to be wrong	Male	23	4.30	.703
	Female	76	4.34	.664
Copying from a book without crediting the source constitutes plagiarism	Male	23	3.83	.937
	Female	76	4.12	.748
If a student violates the plagiarism policy he/she will be caught	Male	23	4.04	.825
	Female	76	3.87	.718
If a student violates the plagiarism policy he/she will be caught and face serious consequences	Male	23	3.74	.964
	Female	76	3.71	.780
Our faculty is effective at catching students who plagiarize	Male	23	3.22	.902
	Female	76	3.28	.918
University is effective at catching students who plagiarize	Male	23	3.22	.902
	Female	76	3.30	.864

50.5 Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the level of awareness and reasons of plagiarism among business students. Findings reveal that majority of students understand the meaning of plagiarism and fully aware that such act is regarded as a serious misconduct. Moreover, they also realized that serious consequences will follow if they were caught for plagiarism. Despite this awareness, they engage themselves in such act because they thought that the university and even the faculty are less effective in identifying plagiarism act. Smith et al. (2007) agreed that students felt most academics did not want the aggravation of enforcing rules against cheating and plagiarising, so the great majority of students believed that the risk of being caught cheating or plagiarising was quite low. Similarly, Ramzan et al. (2012) expressed that teachers are under pressure to determine whatever they are receiving from the students in terms of assignments and research papers are free of plagiarism or not. Therefore, students prone to plagiarized as the chances of being caught are less (Ramzan et al. 2012).

There is a large literature relating to the reasons contributing to plagiarism. The study suggests that the ease of access offered by the Internet to find information is the main reason for students resorted to plagiarism followed by habit of doing assignment last minute and the complexity of the task. The result is supported by Quah et al. (2012) as they mentioned that the issue of plagiarism is increasing due to the developments in information and communication technology that make various databases, information sources and term papers available for students. At the same line, Devlin and Gray (2007) reported that a lack of time, poor time management, laziness and the ease of copying access provided by the Internet were first order factors to explain this practice.

In the course of various studies of academic honesty, there is no consensus of the influence of gender on plagiarism. The study revealed that there is no significant difference between genders awareness on the subject matter. It is noted that female students provide a slightly higher response or opinion on plagiarism compared to male. Thus, the likelihood for male to plagiarize is higher. This is in line with Straw (2002) appears that males cheat in academic situations more than female students.

To conclude, this study would be an eye opener to the community, university, as well as education sector in Malaysia. The fact that this is a preliminary study, more studies need to be conducted on academic dishonesty specifically on plagiarism issue. In fact, the plagiarism issue should not be taken lightly by the universities as it would lead to negative ethical values among students and further the future manpower of the nation. The results of this study propose further directions for extensive research in future in which robust analysis could be done to explore to what extent the incidence of plagiarism activities in Malaysia. It is also suggested that other respondents' from different program or even other universities be included in future research with a bigger sample size. Lastly, it is suggested that the approach of the study in future to be qualitative as it would also be interesting to explore the proposed actions taken by the universities and ministry in handling plagiarism issue via interview or focus group.

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