Chapter 57
Plagiarism in Academic Writing Among TESL Postgraduate Students: A Case Study

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Abstract This case study aimed to gain insights into plagiarism among postgraduate students. It examined the extent of plagiarism, sources of plagiarism, types of plagiarism and causes of plagiarism among four students from the Master in Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (M.Ed TESL) programme in a public university in Malaysia. The instruments were written assignments, interview and self-reflection reports. The extent of plagiarism and the sources of plagiarism were facilitated through the use of Turnitin software. Analysis of participants' writing and original sources was done to determine the types of plagiarism in the students' writing. The findings showed that plagiarism existed in the students' writing. They plagiarized mainly from Internet, publications and students' paper and the types of plagiarism found were sham, verbatim, illicit and patchwriting. Data from interviews and self-reflection reports which were qualitatively analysed indicated that personal voice, time management, language proficiency and academic writing skills caused plagiarism. The findings imply that awareness of plagiarism should be instilled at postgraduate level. Postgraduate students should also be guided by the faculty in enhancing their academic writing skills. This can increase self-efficacy to deter plagiarism in line with Bandura's self-efficacy theory highlighted in this study.

Keywords Plagiarism • Postgraduate students • Self-efficacy theory

57.1   Introduction

Academic writing skill has become a key measurement in succeeding in tertiary education (Arkoudis and Tran 2010; Pecorari 2006). The ability to summarize, paraphrase and synthesize information in producing written work which reflects the identity and originality of a student is an important characteristic of a successful

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academic writer. Moreover, producing quality academic writing also makes students to be more critical in thinking (Lee and Tajino 2008). Nevertheless, academic writing is not an easy task for many second language students including postgraduate students. There is an increasing number of students who struggle to meet the requirements for academic writing (McKnight 2006 cited in Abdullah and Muhammad 2008) and this has given rise to concerns over plagiarism. McCullough and Holmberg (2005) found that 27 % of the master's theses they examined in their research indicated plagiarism of Internet sources. Aziz et al. (2012) also reported plagiarism among postgraduate students in local universities. According to Prof. Dr. Ramasamy, a political science lecturer, "plagiarism is the biggest offence in Malaysian universities" and it tarnishes the image of Malaysian universities (2009, n. p.). Plagiarism happens in Malaysian universities even though it is an academic dishonesty that is taken seriously and there are legal stipulations on it. This reflects that despite policies on plagiarism set by universities, there is still lack of exposure to rules and regulations on plagiarism.

57.1.1   Causes of Plagiarism

Plagiarism happens when students are unfamiliar with what plagiarism is. Maxwell et al. (2008) found an increase in plagiarism when there is a low level of understanding of plagiarism in both Australian and Asian students. In a local study by Yusuf and Masrom (2011), Malaysian students were also found to have "shallow understanding on plagiarism" (p. 5) as they indicated paraphrasing material from a source without citing it was acceptable. Similarly, Aziz et al. (2012) found plagiarism among postgraduate students who lacked awareness that it was wrong to use information from unpublished thesis without citing it. However, students cannot be blamed entirely for their misunderstanding of plagiarism as not much guidelines and information regarding plagiarism are provided by universities (Angelil-Carter 2000) and there is no agreement on how plagiarism is detected and addressed by the faculty (Ryan 2000).

Besides, there are several types of plagiarism which students might not be aware of and thus, they do not realize that they are plagiarizing in their academic writing. Walker (2010) outlines three categories of plagiarism: sham plagiarism, verbatim plagiarism and purloining. Sham refers to the act of taking sentences directly from sources and incorporating it in one own's writing with clear citations but leaving out quotation marks. Verbatim on the other hand is the act of incorporating direct copy of sentences but leaving out citations. Last, purloining is the act of using the whole writing of other students and submitting it as one's own. Other categories are patchwriting and illicit paraphrasing (Zafarghandi et al. 2012). Patchwriting refers to closely paraphrased work or making minor changes to source material and citation is either presented or not. Illicit plagiarism refers to taking material from a source and paraphrasing it but citation is omitted. Walker (2010) and Aziz et al. (2011) found sham plagiarism prevalent in their students' writing. Meanwhile, Vieyra et al.

(2013) detected mainly verbatim plagiarism among their respondents. Zafarghandi et al. (2012) found that illicit plagiarism followed by sham plagiarism was prevalent among their students.

Plagiarism also highlights that a major problem ESL postgraduate students face in doing their written assignment is the target language. Writing is a struggle for postgraduate students who have low proficiency, limited vocabulary and inadequate knowledge of grammar in the target language (Al-Zubaidi and Richards 2010; Mousavi and Kashefian-Naeeini 2011). Riasati and Rahimi (2013) found that postgraduate students with low English proficiency also had difficulties in understanding journals after repeated reading and plagiarised as an easy way out in completing their assignments. Meanwhile, Abasi and Akbari (2008) found that students who had anxieties in writing due to their low proficiency in English language resorted to patchwriting.

ESL postgraduate students who lack academic writing skills also commit plagiarism either intentionally or unintentionally. These skills which are quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing (Bailey and Pieterick 2008) and avoidance of sentence redundancy are a challenge for students as many of them have existing problems in the target language. They also have problem in referencing sources as they either do not know how to do citations or are simply ignorant about it (Ting 2013; Ting et al. 2014). Breen and Maassen (2005, in Vieyra et al. 2013) found that although students were aware of plagiarism, their problems with paraphrasing and citing information led to plagiarism.

Another challenge faced by postgraduate students in academic writing is differences in educational practices. Differences in writing requirements and pedagogical practices cause difficulties for students to adapt to their current learning environment (Abasi and Akbari 2008). Carroll (2002) highlighted that change in assessment from examination for undergraduates to coursework or project-based assessments for postgraduates caused them constant pressure to maintain their good results. Assessments for postgraduates are often more critical and require more time for reading related journals and books to utilize the information in their work. Difficult and challenging individual tasks at postgraduate level (Riasati and Rahimi 2013), similar dates of submission for different assessments and poor time management (Williams 2005; Kakh and Wan Mansor 2012) also result in a tendency to plagiarize among postgraduate students because it is the quickest way to finish their work.

57.2   Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986) postulates the connection between human behavior and motivation in a person's self-belief. There are four primary sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and psychological state of self-efficacy. Mastery experience refers to one's interpretation of the outcomes of past performances. Vicarious experience refers to observation of other's performance, verbal persuasion refers to how one anticipates positive and negative

appraisals and psychological state relates to psychological and affective arousal. Bandura (1995) highlights that "self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of actions required to manage prospective situation" (p. 2). He believes that self-efficacy influences how people make use of their knowledge and skills and their motivation which affect the completion of certain tasks. The results of these tasks depend on the level of one's self-efficacy. If one holds a high level of self-efficacy, one will believe in one's capabilities to overcome challenges in achieving one's goals. This theory also views that self-efficacy is a "critical determinant of the self-regulatory practices in which individuals engage as they go about the important task of self-correcting their actions and cognitions" (Pajares 2009, n. p.). Past research have indicated that students performed poorly in their academic writing when they were insecure of their writing ability (Pajares and Valente 1997; Pajares 2003). Such low academic self-efficacy belief is a significant causality of misconduct among university students (Marsden et al. 2005 cited in Ogilvie and Stewart 2010).

57.3 Focus of the Study

This study aimed to contribute to research in plagiarism in academic writing in higher education in view of the following factors. First, more studies are needed to address the gap in empirical data in investigating the level of plagiarism in academic writing in higher learning institutions (Walker 2010). This is because literature on plagiarism indicates that research in this area leaned more to perceptions and not on what has been done by students themselves. Second, the limited studies on plagiarism in Malaysia involved international students in Malaysia instead of local students as respondents (Aziz et al. 2011; Kakh and Wan Mansor 2012). Thus, this study which used local TESL postgraduate students is hoped to address this gap and add to the existing knowledge of plagiarism among postgraduates in Malaysia. Hence, it aimed to look into the degree of plagiarism and to identify the types of plagiarism in TESL postgraduate students' academic writing. In addition, this study aimed to recognize the types of sources which were plagiarized and factors contributing to plagiarism in TESL postgraduate students' academic writing.

57.4 Methodology

The four participants (Students A, B, C and D) involved in this study were Master in Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (M.Ed TESL) postgraduate students from a public university in Selangor. The instruments were Chaps. 1 and 2 of the participants' research proposal assignment, self-reflection reports and

interviews. The individual interview was conducted online. The written assignments were analyzed quantitatively. The analysis was facilitated by the plagiarism detection tool, Turnitin which gave a similarity index in percentage. Next, the similarities between the matched documents, i.e. the participants' writing and online text in Turnitin database were checked (links provided by Turnitin were used to locate the original source material) (Vieyra et al. 2013). After evaluating the documents, any similarity that was not indicated as plagiarism (i.e. legitimate quotations, references, etc.) was discarded (Walker 2010). The evaluation of plagiarism was done at sentence level in line with Vieyra et al.'s (2013) arguments that when a same source is used in a paragraph, certain sentences are copied while others are paraphrased, certain sentences are cited while others have citations omitted and some sentences are combined while others are isolated with information from different sources. The researcher and an experienced TESL teacher evaluated these matches to ensure reliability. The data from self-reflection reports and interview scripts were analysed qualitatively.

57.5　Findings and Discussion

57.5.1　Level of Plagiarism in TESL Postgraduate Students' Academic Writing

The Turnitin similarity index showed that the highest similarity index was 16 % for student A writing. Student C and D both had the same percentage of 15 %. The lowest similarity index, 11 % was found for student B writing. Next, based on the comparison made between the participants' writing text and original sources, the percentages for discarded sentences and actual plagiarized sentences were obtained. The discarded sentences in Student A writing was 3.3 % and plagiarized sentences was 12.7 %. Student B had the highest number of discarded sentences (4.2 %) and the lowest level of plagiarized sentences (6.8 %). This contradicted with Student C who had the lowest number of discarded sentences (0.3 %) and the highest plagiarized sentences (14.7 %). Meanwhile for Student D, discarded sentences were 2.1 % and 12.9 % of plagiarized sentences was detected in his writing. The findings show that there was some plagiarism in the postgraduate students' writing. The highest percentage of plagiarism was 12.9 % and the lowest was 6.8 %. The level of plagiarism in the participants' writing was below the level of 30 %, the permissible level of similarity by the institution that the postgraduate students' were enrolled in. It should be noted that such determinant of plagiarism varies for different institutions. Walker (2010) in his research on plagiarism among students in New Zealand higher institutions describes 20 % or less plagiarism in assignments as at a moderate level whereas if 20 % or more of an assignment was plagiarized, it was viewed as extensive.

57.5.2 Sources of Plagiarized Text

The participants plagiarized mainly from Internet sources (43 %), followed by student papers (23 %) and publications (20 %). For student A, 11 % of his writing was similar with Internet sources, 6 % was similar to publications and 7 % was similar to student papers. Next, for Student B, similarity to Internet sources was 9 %, followed by 4 % similarity with publications and 8 % similarity with student papers. Meanwhile, for student C, similarities with Internet sources, student papers and publications were 11 %, 8 % and 4 % respectively. Last, student D had the highest percentage for Internet sources (12 %), followed by student papers (10 %) and publications (6 %). The high rate of plagiarism from Internet sources occurred due to the easy accessibility of Internet to the participants. Walker (2010) believes that "the temptation to plagiarize is too hard to resist" (p. 18) due to the wider network and availability provided by a university and students' engagement with IT. Studies on digital era (McCarthy and Rogerson 2009; Shafie and Nayan 2012) have concurred that plagiarism is likely to occur due to the easy access to the net by students. In the case of the postgraduate students in this study, they get wireless Internet in their university, faculty and library. Going back to Walker's (2010) view that it is hard to resist plagiarism, a further explanation for the postgraduates' plagiarism is that their level of self-efficacy may be negative, leading to poor self-regulatory behaviour as indicated by Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy. As for student papers, which is next highly plagiarized, this could also be due to its availability online. The participants may also find them easier to comprehend and in referring to them could have plagiarized them. With regard to publications, the lowest percentage of plagiarized source, this may be due to policies on access upon purchase of some publications particularly journal articles.

57.5.3 Types of Plagiarism in ESL Postgraduate Students' Academic Writing

The main type of plagiarism found in the participants' writing was sham plagiarism (17.2 %), followed by verbatim plagiarism (16.9 %), patchwriting (11.1 %) and illicit plagiarism (1.9 %). Examples of these types of plagiarism are as follows. Figure 57.1 shows an example of sham plagiarism by Student A who did not put quotation marks for the information copied directly from the source although the source was cited.

Figure 57.2 shows an account of verbatim plagiarism. Student A copied part of a text directly from a report by Lewis et al. (1999) in his work and failed to cite the source.

Figure 57.3 shows an example of patchwriting. Student A cut and pasted information from the original source (Hudson and Hudson 2006, p. 15) in his work. He partially paraphrased and partially copied from the source but quotation marks and reference were omitted.

Student A writing	Source: AllaBakshMohdAyub Khan in The Star Online (January 15, 2010)
AllaBakshMohdAyub Khan from UniversitiSains Malaysia in Star Online (2010) stated that <u>the ability of young Malaysian English teachers in teaching the English language as effectively as senior teachers has long been argued and debated.</u>	<u>The ability of young Malaysian English teachers in teaching the English language as effectively as senior teachers has long been argued and debated.</u>

Fig. 57.1 Example of sham plagiarism in Student A writing

Student A writing	Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics by Laurie Lewis, BasmatParsad, Nancy Carey, Nicole Bartfai, Elizabeth Farris and Becky Smerdon, 1999, p. 49
Evidently, beginning teachers are rarely fully prepared for real teaching. They are <u>less likely than more experienced teachers to report being very well prepared to maintain order and discipline in the classroom.</u>	Teachers with 3 or fewer years of teaching experience were <u>less likely than more experienced teachers to report being very well prepared to maintain order and discipline in the classroom.</u>

Fig. 57.2 Example of verbatim plagiarism in Student A writing

Student A writing	Source: Hudson and Hudson, 2006, p.15
The study reveals that *trainee teachers feel that there should be more time spent at schools and* <u>with a more practical approach, allowing for</u> *better connection* <u>between theory and practice to provide a more meaningful</u> *learning for teachers in training*.	This study supports Ferry et al.'s (2004) research; that is, *pre-service teachers feel the need for more time in schools with a* <u>more practical approach, allowing</u> *greater links* <u>between theory and practice to provide a more meaningful</u> *teacher education course*(p.15)

Fig. 57.3 Example of patchwriting in Student A writing

Student B writing	Source: El Fattah, 2010, p. 587
It consists of two types of motivation, which are entering motivation and task motivation. <u>Entering motivation</u> *evolves around establishing commitment and intention to act towards achieving the goals.*	Motivation includes entering motivation and task motivation. <u>Entering motivation</u> *establishes commitment to a particular goal and the intent to act.*

Fig. 57.4 Example of illicit plagiarism in Student B writing

Figure 57.4 shows an example of illicit paraphrasing. Student B paraphrased the material taken from El Fattah (2010, p. 587) as indicated by the italicised information in her work but she did not cite the information.

Going back to the findings, the main type of plagiarism detected in the participants' writing was sham plagiarism. The participants copied directly from sources

and failed to paraphrase although they provided citation. This finding concurs with Walker's (2010) and Aziz et al.'s (2011) findings that sham plagiarism is one of the highest rates of plagiarism among their respondents. The second type of plagiarism that was mostly detected was verbatim (16.9 %). All of the participants were found to do verbatim plagiarism by copying materials directly from sources and did not provide any citations similar to Walker's (2010) findings. The third type of plagiarism detected was patchwriting. Aziz et al. (2011) also found a high level of patchwriting in their respondents' writing who used it in adapting to the target language. This is parallel with conclusions made by Pecorari (2003) and Abasi and Akbari (2008) whereby patchwriting is viewed as an approach for students to be familiarized with the language used in academic discourse. Similarly, the participants in this study could have resorted to patchwriting as they had difficulties with language. The least type of plagiarism detected was illicit plagiarism. This could be a reflection of the postgraduate students' lack of paraphrasing skill and thus, lower occurrence of this type of plagiarism. It could also reflect lack of awareness of the proper conventions of academic writing as they omitted sources for paraphrased information.

57.5.4 Factors That Cause Plagiarism in TESL Postgraduate Students' Academic Writing

Based on the triangulation of data from self-reflection reports and interviews, the factors that caused plagiarism in the participants' writings were personal voice, time management, language proficiency and academic writing skills.

57.5.5 Personal Voice

The findings show that trying to achieve a sense of personal voice in their writing caused the participants to plagiarize. One of the participants, Student A worried about losing his "voice" in his writing. He stated, "It becomes a problem when deciding between using my 'voice' in the paper or merely collecting and paraphrasing others' quotes" (Interview with Student A). He added that he had problems in citing sources which he used as he was confused on the issue of "voice". Student A also stated that he viewed his writing as a compilation of others' work and not his. He struggled with this sense of confusion and loss and could have omitted citing source materials due to his predicament. According to Hyland (2002), representation of identity is also important in producing academic writing aside from presenting disciplinary content. Although it is important to present authorial voice in academic writing, it is a challenge for second language learners as they also need to integrate others' research in their writing. Besides, while coping with the complicated process of writing, a student's self-efficacy might be reduced due to his negative psychological state caused by confusion and loss. Students' past experiences on

writing i.e. mastery (Bandura 1977) can also affect their belief to integrate their own "voice" in their writing. Chances of plagiarism may be high in this situation as writers are coping with a complicated process.

57.5.6   Time Management

The participants also claimed that they had limited time in doing their proposal as they were also occupied with assignments for other subjects, This caused them to have difficulty in paraphrasing materials from sources. To illustrate, Student B noted, "… a lot of journals to be read, understood, synthesized and critically examined. At certain point, I found myself did not have time to paraphrase the important points, so I just directly quote from the author…" (Student B self-reflection report). Some of them omitted citations when they quoted. The participants in this study might have faced anxiety and stress in finishing their work due to limited time and similar deadlines. In line with Bandura's self efficacy theory, these may have affected their psychological state whereby these emotions may lower their self-efficacy and motivation in writing in an appropriate manner. The findings here are supported by past research (Abasi and Akbari 2008; Williams 2005) that poor time management and similar date of submission or early deadlines cause students to plagiarize in their writing.

57.5.7   Language Proficiency

The participants had problems in analyzing journal article due to their language ability. They highlighted that some of the articles had to be read carefully and understood properly before they could incorporate pertinent information in their writing. Student A said "…most of the difficult-to-understand articles are written by the native speakers…" (Interview with Student A). It was also was a challenge for the participants to write using the targeted language and this caused plagiarism. For example, Student B used words from her sources because "… we don't know the appropriate words that we should use in writing academically" (Interview with Student B). The findings showed that the participants found academic writing in the targeted language a challenge. This is similar with previous findings on lack of language proficiency that caused plagiarism among ESL students (Kakh and Wan Mansor 2012; Riasati and Rahimi 2013; Abasi and Akbari 2008; Aziz et al. 2011). These past research concur that plagiarism has become a choice for students due to their low level of language proficiency. This factor can be related with mastery, a source of self-efficacy in Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. In this study, the participants' poor language and writing might have lowered their level of mastery and self-efficacy. They could have questioned their capabilities of producing good writing in the targeted language which demotivated them and caused them to plagiarise.

57.5.8   *Academic Writing Skills*

The participants were also found to be lacking in academic writing skills. These skills included writing formally, paraphrasing, summarising, synthesizing, conveying ideas and referencing. Student B had problem in writing formally and academically. He stated, "I have a problem to write in objective manner and in formal way. But I do not mean to do it…" (Interview with Student B). Paraphrasing was also a difficult process for the participants especially when the source material contained "technical terms". Besides, Student C claimed that she had problems in summarising ideas. She said, "I feel that every word in the sentence is important and I want to include everything. I don't know what to leave out" (Interview with Student C). Another area of difficulty in writing was in conveying ideas obtained from source materials. To illustrate, Student D had problems in analyzing and using the information he sourced. He elaborated, "I have difficulty to analyze the articles critically.... supporting my details using scholar's findings and claims…" (Interview with Student D). The participants also faced problems with referencing as seen with Student A who noted, "....it is difficult to differentiate information that needs to be cited and information that is not necessary to be cited…" (Interview with Student A). The findings support past findings on lack of writing skills such as quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing (Bailey and Pieterick 2008), and in-text referencing (Osman and Abu Bakar 2009; Giridharan and Robson 2011) among ESL postgraduate students. This reflects that lack of academic writing skills might be rooted since undergraduate years (Ting 2013; Ting et al. 2014) and persists at postgraduate level, leading to cases of plagiarism. This lack of mastery in writing can lead to poor self-efficacy and lack of motivation to self-regulate behaviour (Pajares 2009).

57.6   Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate some level of plagiarism in postgraduates' academic writing, Internet sources are mainly plagiarized, and sham followed by verbatim, patchwriting and illicit plagiarism occur. Challenges such as personal voice, time management, inadequate language skills and academic writing skills are found to cause plagiarism. These findings have implications on the importance of improving students' self-efficacy in academic writing by giving them support. The faculty should help postgraduate students to be aware of the different types of plagiarism and to have a better understanding on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it in their writing. Postgraduate students should also be given guidance in academic writing skills to motivate them to master skills in writing and become more persistent in producing writing that meets the requirements needed in their academic community. Pajares (2009) notes that mastery leads to positive self-efficacy and academic self-efficacy which influences cognitive strategy use and self-regulation through the use of meta-cognitive strategies…" (n.p.). In line with this, with the

support given by the faculty, students' sense of positive self-efficacy can be nurtured to prevent misconduct, i.e. plagiarism in their writing.

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