

Exploring the Factors That Influence Plagiarism in Higher Education: A Study among School of Information Science Students in Sarawak

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Abstract: *Plagiarism, a form of academic misconduct and dishonesty, is prevalent in higher education. This problem has become more pronounced with the rise of technology, which has made it simplified for students to find, use, and misuse information. A study was conducted at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Samarahan Campus in Sarawak, using a quantitative approach. The study focused on students enrolled in the School of Information Science, College of Computing, Informatics, and Mathematics, involving 108 participants who completed questionnaires. This study aimed to understand the factors contributing to plagiarism in higher education. The findings revealed that students were aware of various forms of plagiarism, including copying and pasting from online sources and presenting the work as their own. The research identified that the main reason for plagiarism was the students' inability to conduct proper research. The study recommended further research to delve deeper into the factors influencing plagiarism and to develop strategies for preventing it in the future. This research is a valuable resource for combating academic dishonesty and plagiarism among university students. It emphasizes proper referencing and citation skills through study and writing courses. By doing so, universities can effectively discourage plagiarism while enhancing the quality and credibility of students' research efforts.*

Keywords: Plagiarism, undergraduate students, influence, academic, higher education

1. Introduction

Over the years, addressing student plagiarism has consistently posed a challenging issue affecting numerous academic disciplines. As Anqi et al. (2019) stated, plagiarism involves using content from external sources without proper attribution, and it is considered a form of misconduct. The widespread occurrence of plagiarism is a significant concern for both publishers and researchers. Some students unintentionally commit plagiarism in the academic realm, while others do so knowingly, emphasizing the importance of preventive measures. Academic circles take plagiarism very seriously (Koirala et al., 2022).

1.1 Define Plagiarism

Academic institutions have a considerable challenge in the form of plagiarism, which is the practice of taking another person's words or ideas without credit (Eisa, 2022). Plagiarism encompasses using another individual's works or concepts without proper attribution,

constituting a substantial academic concern. It is a form of academic dishonesty that students engage in at all levels (Fadlalmola et al., 2022).

1.2 Factors Influencing Plagiarism

A study in Kuwait revealed that students plagiarized in their writing to secure good grades and pass their courses, primarily relying on the Internet as their source. However, Kuwaiti students had mixed reactions regarding journal writing with free topic choice (Ehrich et al., 2015). According to Valdivia et al. (2020), students engaged in academic dishonesty when they faced time constraints in completing tasks or experienced uncertainty regarding the established guidelines. Many participants from Asian countries lacked knowledge of citation rules and had challenges with writing skills. Ultimately, the main reason for student plagiarism was their need for more awareness of the rules, often leading to confusion (Farahian et al., 2022).

2. Plagiarism in the Context of Higher Education in Malaysia.

Yusof and Masrom (2011) found that in Malaysia, students in higher education often encounter plagiarism but need a clearer understanding of it. This lack of awareness about plagiarism and its various forms significantly contributes to student plagiarism. As a result, students frequently struggle to recognize their actions as plagiarism because they need clarification about the different types.

In Malaysia, plagiarism is considered an academic misconduct rather than a criminal or civil offense. The Ministry of Higher Education oversees tertiary education institutions, including public universities, private higher educational institutions, polytechnics, and community colleges. They have enacted legislation such as the Universities & University Colleges Act 1971 (Act 30), the Private Higher Learning Educational Institutions Act 1996 (Act 555), and the Educational Institution (Discipline) Act 1976 (Act 174), which apply to educational institutions in Malaysia (Mohamed et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2012; Mohd Zain et al., 2021).

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) is committed to tackling academic misconduct among its students and staff. They have an advantage in addressing student plagiarism due to the clear regulations in Rule 8A of the Educational Institutions (Discipline of Students) Rules 1976. UiTM also maintains high research standards through the Research Ethics Committee (REC) and aligns its "UiTM Plagiarism Policy and Its Implementation" with the Educational Institution (Discipline) Act 1976 (Act 174) to uphold research integrity.

However, there is a need for additional regulations to address plagiarism among both students and staff. The existing legal frameworks about educational institutions in Malaysia are often perceived as insufficient, necessitating further initiatives by the government to strengthen legislation pertaining to academic plagiarism.

3. Literature Review

Today, most students have strong Internet skills, allowing them to access online resources easily for their coursework, which can promote increased engagement in their studies. However, this accessibility also exposes them to potential sources of plagiarism. It is important to note that plagiarism, although considered academic misconduct, does not have legal consequences as a criminal or civil offense in Malaysia.

Plagiarism can be defined in various ways influenced by cultural contexts, and definitions may vary between countries and academic disciplines (Harvey, 2020; Aziz et al., 2020). Memon and Mavrinac (2020) found that a lack of time was the primary reason for plagiarism (16.1%), and many people believed there were negative consequences for those who plagiarized. Using plagiarism detection methods is crucial in increasing public awareness and understanding of plagiarism.

Park (2003) reached a conclusion, based on a comprehensive analysis of plagiarism studies, that the prevalence of this academic misconduct is pervasive within the university student population. Several factors, including easy access to digital sources, limited understanding of plagiarism, the desire for better grades or time-saving, negative attitudes toward assignments, low consequences for plagiarism, weak academic writing skills, inadequate referencing abilities, and related factors, contribute to this problem.

4. Methodology

This study used quantitative methods and involved 108 undergraduate students, 25 males, and 75 females, enrolled in the Diploma of Information Management program at the School of Information Science, College of Computing, Informatics, and Mathematics, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak Branch. The objective of the study was to investigate the factors that contribute to plagiarism among university students, using a questionnaire as the research tool.

5. Finding and Discussion

Out of the 108 participants in the survey, 81 (75%) were female, and 27 (25%) were male. Among these respondents, 47 (43.5%) were in semester 1, 28 (25.9%) in semester 5, 22 (20.4%) in semester 3, 10 (9.3%) in semester 4, and the smallest group, 1 (0.9%), was from semester 2, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic of Respondents

		No.	Percent
Gender	Male	27	25
	Female	81	75
Semester	1	47	43.5
	2	1	0.9
	3	22	20.4
	4	10	9.3
	5	28	25.9

Table 2 displays the types of plagiarism that are familiar to the students. The largest group of respondents, 44 (40.7%), recognized copying and pasting from online sources as plagiarism. Meanwhile, 22 (20.4%) were aware of the plagiarism type involving obtaining and presenting a document as their own. However, the least known type of plagiarism was making up sources, recognized by only 3 (2.8%) students. Rearranging words and copying from a friend each was recognized by 15 (13.9%) respondents as plagiarism.

Table 2: Types of Plagiarism

	No.	Percent
Never plagiarized	9	8.3
Made up sources	3	2.8
Rearranged words	15	13.9
Copied from a friend	15	13.9
Cut and paste online sources	44	40.7
Obtaining a document and using it as your own	22	20.4

Table 3 illustrates the reasons behind plagiarism. The most common reason was the inability to conduct research, cited by 37 (34.3%) respondents. Following that, 29 (26.9%) mentioned laziness as a reason, and 19 (17.6%) said they faced pressure due to assignment deadlines. Less frequently mentioned reasons included culture or trend, 1 (0.9%), and 6 (5.6%) time constraints.

Table 3: Plagiarism Reasons

	No.	Percent
Laziness	29	26.9
Pressure deadlines	19	17.6
Inability to conduct research	37	34.3
Culture/Trend	1	0.9
Time constraint	6	5.6
Lack of knowledge about plagiarism	16	14.8

This study revealed that the primary factors influencing plagiarism in higher education were students' inability to conduct research (34.3%), laziness (26.9%), pressure from deadlines (17.6%), and a lack of knowledge about plagiarism (14.8%). Several research papers have also identified factors contributing to plagiarism. For instance, Jereb et al. (2018) highlighted that easy access to information technology and the Internet is a significant reason for plagiarism, as it can lead students to become complacent and less inclined to conduct ethical research. Muluk et al. (2021) noted that students' ignorance and limited research skills often inadvertently result in plagiarism.

Additionally, laziness is a contributing factor to plagiarism. According to Muluk et al. (2021), some students engage in plagiarism because they need to work on completing assignments assigned by their instructors. Students who resort to plagiarism often do so due to the pressure of impending deadlines, highlighting the importance of teaching effective time management and stress-coping strategies (Madaan & Chakravarty, 2020). Moreover, a lack of awareness about plagiarism is another reason for plagiarism among students. Madaan and Chakravarty (2020) suggest that institutions should implement training programs to educate researchers about plagiarism, its various forms, and how to attribute both printed and internet sources correctly.

This study aimed to gain insight into students' views on plagiarism and, crucially, identify the reasons behind plagiarism. By comprehending the factors that lead to plagiarism and enhancing students' awareness, it is possible to prevent future academic misconduct through better support and supervision during their university education (Jereb et al., 2018).

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Plagiarism is often seen as an easy way to complete assignments without the associated challenges, viewed more as a rule to prevent copying than a moral obligation (Koirala et al., 2022). The awareness of plagiarism among undergraduate students is evident, with educational institutions and instructors making considerable efforts to promote this awareness. Valdivia et al. (2020) noted that students admit to cheating when facing time constraints or uncertainty about academic honesty.

An educational approach allows professors to understand students' specific situations and identify areas where intervention can strengthen academic integrity. It is advisable to conduct further research focused on comprehensive training and workshops to instill a strong sense of academic integrity in undergraduate students, educating them about the significant consequences of plagiarism.

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