Plagiarism Experience among Higher Education Students

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Abstract
An increase cases of plagiarism has been observed among higher education students as access to information is becoming easier and faster online. This study aimed to explore plagiarism practice among higher education students and factors that might contribute towards the practice. The study employed a qualitative case study research design and involved five undergraduate students from a few private and public higher learning institutions. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The study found that only a small number of students do not aware of plagiarism issue in higher learning while most students are aware of plagiarism issue with some of them have sufficient knowledge on various forms of plagiarism practiced in higher learning. The study discovered that students' attitude and inefficient time management are major factors that contribute toward the plagiarism practice. The students continued to engage in plagiarism because they can get away with the practice as students did not receive any reminder, warning or penalty from lecturers upon their unethical conducts. The study suggested that there is a need for higher education institutions to assist students to master academic writing skills across courses such as the ability to think critically and independently in writing, and the ability to summarise, synthesise and paraphrase ideas, and cite sources in writing. The study also recommended for any development of students' learning assessment to incorporate elements of academic writing skills across courses.
Keywords: Plagiarism, Higher Learning, Plagiarism Practise, Academic Writing, Assessment.

Introduction
Plagiarism has become a common problem for higher education students with 82.1% of them have committed plagiarism at least once throughout their study (Abusafia et al., 2018). Plagiarism refers to the act of stealing sentences or phrases that belong to other people without permission (Sakamoto and Tsuda, 2019). According to Uzun and Kilis (2020), the act

of copying or using others' work can be accidental or otherwise, while a third party is deceived about the original ownership of the work. Plagiarism can also be viewed as an illegal act and a scientific crime (Solís Sánchez et al., 2019). In the context of Malaysia, although most universities have their own policies in dealing with acts of plagiarism, Singh and Ganapathy (2018) argued that plagiarism is not given serious consideration in tertiary level education. Therefore, this study aimed to explore plagiarism practice among university students and factors that might contribute towards the practice in the context of Malaysia. The findings could help higher education institutions to establish a working framework to minimise and ultimately disengage students from the practice.

Literature Review
Various definitions of plagiarism are provided by previous studies. For example, Solís Sánchez et al (2019) defined plagiarism as an illegal act and scientific crime which could be in the form of unauthorized use or close imitation of someone else's ideas and language expression, claiming them as one's own (Pizarro and Velásquez, 2017). Plagiarism is also known as the act of stealing sentences or phrases that belong to other people without permission (Sakamoto and Tsuda, 2019). Explicit in the plagiarism definitions is the element of deceiving a third party about the authorship (or ownership) of the work copied or stolen (Uzun and Kilis, 2020).

Various categories of plagiarism have been practiced in higher learning. Among other, Singh and Ganapathy (2018) identified the categories include replicating word for word the work of other people; paraphrasing or changing some words in another person's work and not acknowledging the source(s); submitting the whole or part of another person's work as one's own; and providing insufficient or misleading references of the source(s), which prevents readers to be able to check and identify the original writer (Singh and Ganapathy, 2018). Recent studies further extended the categories into self-plagiarism, unpublished work plagiarism and internet plagiarism. Known as text recycling, self-plagiarism occurs whenever authors reuse or recycle the whole or part of their previously published work and presents it as a new work without citing the earlier source (Horbach and Halffman, 2019). On the other hand, unpublished work plagiarism occurs whenever authors use privileged information or materials from peer reviews of research proposals and scientific manuscripts (Pastor, 2018), while internet plagiarism occurs whenever authors use written work, photographs, or graphics from online websites but fail to give credit or acknowledgement to the developers or owners of the sources (Hassan and Ahmad, 2018).

Previous studies also identified various factors that have interacted and reinforced each other and contributed toward plagiarism practice among higher education students. Sakamoto and Tsuda (2019); Jereb et al (2018) found that the ease-of-use of information-communication technologies have allowed students to easily browse, and copy or steal texts from writing belonged to other people anytime and anywhere which include the 'copy' and 'paste' functions available on personal devices such as computers, tablets and smart mobile phones. Sakamoto and Tsuda (2019) also argued that the simplicity of plagiarism causes feelings of guilt to decrease among students which resulted in to students' continuous engagement in plagiarism practice. Ultimately, students perceived that plagiarism was an acceptable way to complete their assignments and was not an immoral behaviour (Uzun and Kilis, 2020) and a serious offense (Hassan and Ahmad, 2018). In this regard, success in previous acts of plagiarism also have led student to have a more favourable attitude towards plagiarism and higher intention to practice plagiarism (Uzun and Kilis, 2020).

Among ways that have been identified to reduce plagiarism among higher education students are the use of plagiarism detection programs on students' works such as the use of Turnitin program or and other online programs (Sakamoto and Tsuda, 2019; Pizarro and Velásquez, 2017). Additionally, lecturers must be educated on plagiarism detection programs and plagiarism penalty in order for them to deal with suspected plagiarism cases (Singh and Ganapathy, 2018).

Most of previous studies argued that there is a need for learning institution to identify factors that have contributed toward students' plagiarism, and raise plagiarism knowledge and awareness among students by exposing students to the definitions and forms of plagiarism (Jereb et al., 2018; Hassan and Ahmad, 2018). Learning institutions were also recommended to change students' attitudes towards plagiarism through the other educational interventions such as campaigns, conferences and seminars (Uzun and Kilis, 2020). Lastly there is a need for learning institutions to formally help students to acquire and apply academic writing skills across courses to prevent the students from copying or stealing other people works and claiming them as their own. Among academic writing skills suggested by Hassan and Ahmad (2018) are the ability to think critically and independently; to summarise, paraphrase, synthesize and present ideas coherently, and cite sources using systematic styles in their writing.

Methodology

Research Design
This study was a qualitative study that employed a case study research design. Unit analysis of the study a research was conducted in the form of a case study. Heale and Twycross (2018) described a case study as an intensive and systematic study about an individual, a group, a community, or some other unit. In this study undergraduate students from local universities were considered as a unit of analysis of the study. Case study design was employed because the design allows the study to collect rich and comprehensive data on plagiarism as perceived and experienced by undergraduate students in the context of university learning.

Research Participants
Following Merriam (2009) who advocated the use of maximum variation in selecting participants, the study used purposive sampling technique to identify and later select five undergraduate students from two public universities, a private university and a private college located in Klang valley as research participants. The students came from various academic programs and were in their first and second year of study.

Data Collection Method
The study collected data using semi-structured interviews because the interviews could help the study to identify, acknowledge and incorporate aspects of plagiarism that were unique to participants' experience and context. The interviews were conducted virtually through messaging applications, namely WhatsApp and Instagram. The study developed an interview protocol i.e., a list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the interview (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). While the list was used to guide the interview sessions, semi-structured interviews allowed the study to explore unique experiences, thoughts, and views shared by interviewees during the sessions that would help the study to understand the phenomenon of plagiarism as perceived and experienced by higher education students.

Data Analysis Method
Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method used to analyse qualitative data such as a set of texts from interview transcripts (Caulfield, 2019). Using this method, the data is examined to identify common themes (topics, ideas and patterns of meaning) that emerged repeatedly. The data was examined and analysed to identify patterns and similarities within them. Similar sets of data were then grouped together and labelled with suitable or appropriate themes.

Findings and Discussion
This section explains findings of the study and discusses the findings in the light of findings from previous studies. The findings and discussion are divided into students' awareness and of knowledge of plagiarism, students' experience of plagiarism, and factors contributing toward students' plagiarism.

Students' awareness and knowledge of plagiarism
Interviews with the respondents show that all respondents have basic knowledge and awareness on plagiarism. All the respondents understand that plagiarism is the act of using work belonging to other people, and subsequently not crediting the original creator(s) while claiming the work as our own. This is supported by previous research. Sakamoto and Tsuda (2019) stated that plagiarism is the act of stealing sentences or phrases that belong to other people without permission. Pizarro and Velásquez (2017) added that plagiarism also involves claiming stolen work as one's own.

Some respondents have also shown that they have more extensive knowledge on plagiarism. Two of the respondents are aware that plagiarism not only takes place in academic settings such as in university assignments and research papers, but also in other areas such as art, stories, and speeches. One gave an example of plagiarism in non-academic settings. In the respondent's example, she described a situation in which someone copies another artist's idea or concept of art, using it in a slightly different way while not giving credit to the original artist. She also went on to say that intellectual crime is committed when a person steals someone else's work and does not credit the original creators. This statement indicated that the respondent was aware that plagiarism is an illegal act and a scientific crime which also has been highlighted by (Sánchez et al., 2019). However, none of the respondents mentioned that the act of plagiarism can be done either accidentally or otherwise, as mentioned by (Uzun and Kilis, 2020).

Students' experience of plagiarism
The findings show that all research participants have either first-hand or second-hand experience in plagiarism. 4 of the participants have committed acts of plagiarism before, while the remaining participant only has experience of plagiarism through the act of someone else.

The one respondent who had second-hand experience of plagiarism explained that the act was carried out by his groupmate during a group assignment. He explained that his groupmate had plagiarized 80% of their part in the assignment without citing any sources until the respondent requested that the groupmate include references in their work. To have his work amount to 80% of plagiarism, this person had very possibly replicated word for word the work of other people while only changing some words, in addition to not acknowledging

the source(s) he had obtained the information from as suggested by (Singh and Ganapathy, 2018).

Two respondents committed plagiarism when completing assignments, by copying sentences and ideas from different sources and merging them. The respondents had cited most of the sources but did not cite sources such as blogs or .com websites. Another respondent plagiarised during his midterm's exams, by 'copying and pasting' the answers. He paraphrased the sentences a little before submitting his paper. No sources were cited. According to Hassan and Ahmad (2018), these respondents have committed Internet plagiarism, which is the use of written work from online websites and not crediting the source(s). They have also provided insufficient references of the source(s), which prevents readers to be able to check and identify the original writer (Singh and Ganapathy, 2018).

One respondent plagiarised in her art class when she was in high school. In one of her art assignments, she copied and replicated a water color painting that she found online. After submitting the assignment, she found out that the art was sold by the school to raise funds. She felt ashamed and did not inform her teacher that the art was plagiarised, therefore no credit was given to the original artist. This respondent had also committed Internet plagiarism, by using the photograph or graphic from online websites without crediting the source as indicated by (Hassan and Ahmad, 2018).

Factors contributing toward students' plagiarism
The reasons given by the respondents vary from one person to another. Overall, laziness seems to be the answer that was reported the most. Three respondents indicated that laziness contributed to their act of plagiarism. The respondents explained that plagiarizing from the Internet saved energy and time, and is highly convenient. One respondent also added that by copying off the Internet, she could get good ideas from other writing and of course copying text from the writing is so easy and convenience to do. Another respondent explained that he was lacking in time. He elaborated that it was during his exams, the answers were very long, and the time given was not enough. This prompted him to plagiarize off the internet because it saves him a lot of time and would allow him to submit his paper on time. The findings supported previous studies that indicated the ease of-use of information-communication technologies due to the rise of internet contribute toward students' plagiarism. The convenience of the internet makes it much easier for people to steal sentences and phrases that belong to other people (Sakamoto and Tsuda, 2019; Jereb et al., 2018).

Another participant explained she was unaware that she was committing plagiarism. She assumed that because she was copying from different sources, it was therefore not plagiarism. She stated that:

> *"I didn't think of it as plagiarizing. I thought of it as learning through other people's work. But what I didn't realize was, by not interpreting and putting my own spin on it, I was just going to put their information in my research and then take credit for it."*

She concluded by saying that she at that time plagiarized unknowingly. This is somewhat similar to the reason of moral obligation mentioned by (Uzun and Kilis, 2020). Students who do not think plagiarism is morally wrong tend to have more intention of plagiarizing. In this case, the respondent was not aware that what she was doing was in fact plagiarizing, therefore did not think it was wrong or immoral to do so.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore higher education students' perception and experience of plagiarism. The study found that only a small number of students do not aware of plagiarism issue in higher learning while most students are aware of plagiarism issue with some of them have sufficient knowledge on various forms of plagiarism practiced in higher learning. The study discovered that students' attitude and inefficient time management are major factors that contribute toward the plagiarism practice. The students continued to engage in plagiarism because they can get away with the practice as students did not receive any reminder, warning or penalty from lecturers upon their unethical conducts. The study suggested that there is a need for higher education institutions to assist students to master academic writing skills across courses such as the ability to think critically and independently in writing, and the ability to summarise, synthesise and paraphrase ideas, and cite sources in writing. The study also recommended any development of students' learning assessment to incorporate elements of academic writing skills across courses. Accordingly, future research could identify the effectiveness of academic writing skills against the plagiarism practice as well as focus on the development of learning assessment rubric that incorporate elements of academic writing skills across courses.

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