Understanding of Plagiarism Among UiTM Students

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is a serious issue in our educational system. The plagiarism rate is high in Malaysia, including in higher learning institutions. Lack of understanding about plagiarism is one of the contributors to plagiarism among students. This paper aims to examine the level of understanding of plagiarism among students at the UiTM Sabah branch in Kota Kinabalu. It is a quantitative study using a questionnaire survey where data was collected through the distribution of a questionnaire. The total number of respondents is 357 from different courses, both diploma and degree levels. Descriptive statistics revealed that 63.9% of the respondents had a high level of understanding of plagiarism and a moderate level of understanding of plagiarism in terms of mean (3.6675). However, a closer look revealed an incomplete understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. The findings also suggest a significant difference in understanding plagiarism among students based on courses. Therefore, it is recommended that all relevant authorities intensify their effort to address this issue.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford English Dictionary (2023) defines plagiarism as "the action or practice of taking someone else work, idea, etc., and passing it off as one's own; literary theft." Plagiarism is one of the challenges in educational institutions around the world (Jun 2022). Universities in Malaysia are not immune to the problem of plagiarism, although Rule 8A under the Educational Institutions (Discipline of Students) Rules 1997, specifically prohibits plagiarism. A study by Hunter (2021) found that 95.7 percent of students had engaged in some type of plagiarism in Malaysia, in which 96 percent had shared an assignment with other students and 90 percent had duplicated a friend's assignment. According to Ramlan et al. (2020), the level of plagiarism among students in higher education institutions in Malaysia was 25 percent in 2018 and 2019, and 24 percent in 2020. This shows that plagiarism is a critical problem in Malaysian education institutions. The widespread usage of software and applications for paraphrasing, summarizing, and citation on the internet, has made plagiarism easier (Jean & Valerie, 2005).

Previous studies showed that students may commit plagiarism unintentionally due to a lack of knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism (Selemani, Chawinga & Dube, 2018) or simply due to

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laziness, lack of understanding about citations, or unintentional copying from the internet (Cleary, 2017). Lecturers from UiTM in Shah Alam admitted that there were many cases of plagiarism among students, but believed some cases were due to students' insufficient knowledge about plagiarism. They believe that knowledge of plagiarism is crucial to prevent plagiarism (Ali, 2022).

Thus, it is important to examine university students' understanding of plagiarism. The purpose of this paper is to examine student's understanding of plagiarism at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Sabah Branch in Kota Kinabalu. Two questions are posed in this paper: 1) what is the level of understanding among UiTM students about plagiarism? 2) is there a difference in understanding level among students based on year of study, course, and level of education? The objectives of this paper are to examine the level of understanding among UiTM students about plagiarism and to determine whether there are differences in the level of understanding among students based on year of study, course, and level of education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Plagiarism is the act of using someone else's work without proper citation or attribution (Akbar, 2018). Below are the types of plagiarism, factors contributing to plagiarism, and previous studies on plagiarism.

Types of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is categorized into 7 types: 1) A complete plagiarism - when someone attempts to present a complete research paper as their own without proper acknowledgement (Malnik, 2022); 2) Direct Plagiarism - "the act of stealing particular parts of paragraphs without properly accrediting the source" (Lindsay, 2022); 3) Mosaic plagiarism - when a new author exploits the prior article material by altering, rearranging, or rephrasing the words or phrases without crediting the original author (Roka, 2017); 4) Self-Plagiarism - when an author adds research to a previously published article, book, contributed journal, or other literature and presents it as fresh without citing the original (Roka, 2017); 5) Paraphrasing Plagiarism - when a writer rewrites another's work while changing a few words or phrases without acknowledgment (Lindsay, 2022); 6) Source-based plagiarism - when it involves the use of deceptive sources (Malnik, 2022), and 7) Accidental plagiarism - when an author fails to do proper citation of their work, incorrect citation of source and or fails to use quotation marks around quoted content (Lindsay, 2022).

Factors of Plagiarism

There are several factors leading to plagiarism including academic, family, and work pressures (Malik et al., 2021; Selemani et al., 2018). Another factor is related to student's attitude. A study by Bahadori et al., (2012), found that students commit plagiarism due to student attitudes toward plagiarism, such as situational ethics, a lack of discipline, and laziness. Lack of comprehension regarding academic dishonesty is another factor that contributes to students committing plagiarism (Bahadori et al., 2012). This is supported by Malik et al., (2021), who found that the majority of students viewed plagiarism as "copy," "copying," or "copy-paste" only. This appears to demonstrate that student understanding of plagiarism is one of the key factors contributing to plagiarism among students.

Previous Studies on Plagiarism in Higher Education

Previous studies on plagiarism in higher education include students' perceptions of plagiarism (Fish and Hura, 2013; Kumar et al., 2019; Rosman et al., 2008). Some researchers studied plagiarism from a legal perspective, such as research on plagiarism law in Indonesia (Disantara,

2020), Australia (Douglas & Watt, 2019), and Malaysia (Mohamed et al., 2018). Others studied plagiarism prevention strategies (Prashanth et al., 2018) in India, Indonesia (Wajdi et al., 2018), and Malaysia (Bakhtiyari et al., 2014) that focused on ethical writing techniques. Studies have also focused on variables related to plagiarism, such as courses (BavaHarji et al., 2016), year of study (Javaid et al., 2021; Nabee et al., 2020), and level of education (Bielska and Rutkowski, 2021).

According to Md. Yusof and Masrom (2011), Malaysian students' knowledge of plagiarism is low, and thus, students may not be aware of the various types of plagiarism. Mehar Singh (2015) found that Malaysian university students lack information on plagiarism, leading to academic misconduct. Students may understand what plagiarism is but uncertain about the proper citation (Al-Shaibani et al., 2016 as cited in Ahmad et al., 2022). In addition, there is a lack of research exploring understanding of plagiarism among students especially in Sabah, and even fewer studies investigating variables such as year of study, course, and level of education.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Sampling

This is a questionnaire survey and cross-sectional study in terms of design. According to Kitchin & Thrift (2009), a cross-sectional study involves a study on a large number of people at one time using a planned series of questions involving different variables. The unit of analysis was individual diplomas and degree students of UiTM Sabah Branch in Kota Kinabalu. There are more than 4,000 students in UiTM Sabah Branch. The sample size for this study was 357 students, which it decided using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator with an estimated population of 5,000. The sampling technique used is the Stratified sampling technique. Data were collected from six different faculties at UiTM Sabah Branch in Kota Kinabalu: Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Faculty of Management and Business, Faculty of Accounting, Faculty of Applied Science, Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, and Faculty of Plantation and Agrotechnology. The respondents included full-time diploma and degree students from different semesters (semester one to semester six).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was made using a questionnaire distributed online (google form) to semester March - August 2022 diploma and degree students in UiTM Sabah Branch in Kota Kinabalu. The questionnaire consisted of three sections and was prepared in dual languages (Malay and English) to ensure the respondents could understand the questions in the questionnaire. The level of understanding of plagiarism is measured using 14 questions. Data analysis was made using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 28. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and frequency, and test of difference (Kruskal Wallis) were used.

FINDINGS

The level of understanding of plagiarism among diploma and degree students in the UiTM Sabah Branch is presented below. In addition, significant differences between students' understanding of plagiarism with the year of study, course, and level of education, are also shown.

Understanding of Plagiarism among UiTM Sabah Branch Students in Kota Kinabalu

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis Result of Understanding of Plagiarism

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderately agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD	Var.
1. Using others' word without providing acknowledgement or reference is plagiarism.	1		27	124	205	4.49	.660	.436
2. Copying the ideas of others without acknowledgement is plagiarism.	1	5	16	117	218	4.53	.677	.458
3. Rewriting or paraphrasing the material from others without saying where the material comes from is plagiarism.	4	6	33	116	198	4.39	.813	.661
4. Using quotes from an article but citing only the author of the quotation but not the author of the article where it came from is not plagiarism.	18	61	156	68	54	3.22	1.059	1.122
5. Copying the organization or structure of others' piece of work without appropriate reference or acknowledgement is plagiarism.	6	8	52	161	130	4.12	.859	.738
6. Changing the words of material from another piece of work and representing it as your own is not considered plagiarism.	49	89	73	95	51	3.03	1.280	1.640
7. Copying the ideas from other's piece of work without appropriate reference or acknowledgement is plagiarism.	1	8	32	163	153	4.29	.744	.553
8. Copying a website and putting your own	3	11	41	142	160	4.25	.839	.703

Statement								
words and name into the content part of the pages is plagiarism.								
9. Creating a new piece of work on the same theme as an existing one but in a new context and without copying the existing one is plagiarism.	35	82	139	51	50	3.00	1.153	1.329
10. Using other's piece of work to identify useful secondary citations that you cite in your own work without reading the cited material is considered plagiarism.	20	55	165	70	47	3.19	1.033	1.066
11. Copying short sentences (less than 50 words) from other's work without appropriate reference or acknowledgement is plagiarism.	5	20	59	169	104	3.97	.899	.808
12.I just need to provide the list of reference for all my sources without providing citation.	32	126	116	52	31	2.79	1.078	1.162
13. When giving a citation, the citation does not really matter as long as citation is made.	31	91	133	76	26	2.93	1.051	1.105
14. I do not have to provide a citation if I paraphrase others' sentences.	39	105	92	85	36	2.93	1.171	1.371

N = 357

Table 1 above shows the result of descriptive analysis relating to understanding plagiarism among UiTM students in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Most respondents showed a good understanding about of what constitutes plagiarism in 9 of 14 questions used to gauge understanding of plagiarism. However, in four cases (questions 4, 6, 9, 13, and 14), the majority of the respondents showed a low understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. For example, most agree with the statement that "Using quotes from an article but citing only the author of the quotation but not the author of the article where it came from is not plagiarism" which is an act of plagiarism. slightly

over a third (38.6%) of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, "Changing the words of material from another piece of work and representing it as your own is not considered plagiarism", which is an act of plagiarism. On the other hand, the majority (67.2%) agreed that "Creating a new piece of work on the same theme as an existing one but in a new context and without copying the existing one is plagiarism", when it is not. The majority (65.8%) mistakenly agreed that "When giving a citation, the citation does not really matter as long as citation is made" and the majority(59.7%) agreed with the statement that "I do not have to provide a citation if I paraphrase others' sentences" when it is an act of plagiarism.

Overall Mean & Frequency Understanding of Plagiarism among UiTM Sabah Students in Kota Kinabalu

Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and percentage) were employed to examine the student's level of understanding of plagiarism among UiTM Sabah students in Kota Kinabalu. The level of understanding is categorized as low, moderate, and high as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2. Overall Mean of understanding and level of understanding

	Mean		N	%
Mean of understanding of plagiarism	3.6675	Low understanding	1	.3
		Moderate understanding	128	35.9
		High understanding	228	63.9

N = 357

Table 3. Mean Value Classification

VALUE	CLASSIFICATION
<1 - 3	Low
>3 – 4	Moderate
>4 – 5	High

As shown in Table 2, the mean of understanding of plagiarism is 3.6675, which is moderate according to Sekaran and Bougie (2016) categorical mean (Table 3). As for the level of understanding of plagiarism, it has been classified into three, namely low, moderate, and high understanding. However, the frequency and percentage (228 and 63.9% respectively) indicate a high understanding of plagiarism among the respondents.

Significance Differences Between Student Understanding of Plagiarism Based on Year of Study, Course and Level of Education

Kruskal Wallis Test of Student Understanding of Plagiarism Based on Year of Study

Figure 1. Kruskal Wallis test result on student understanding of Plagiarism and Years of Study

Ranks

	Years of study	N	Mean Rank
Level_understanding	Year 1 (Part 1 & 2)/ Tahun 1 (Bahagian 1 & 2)	116	175.98
	Year 2 (Part 3 & 4)/ Tahun 2 (Bahagian 3 & 4)	131	187.79
	Year 3 (Part 5 & above)/ Tahun 3 (Bahagian 5 & keatas)	110	171.71
	Total	357	

Test Statistics[a,b]

	Level_understanding
Kruskal-Wallis H	2.304
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.316

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Years of study

Kruskal Wallis H test in Figure 1 shows that there was no significant difference in student understanding based on year of study, X^2 (2, $\underline{N}$ = 357) = 2.034, p > .05, with the mean rank level of student understanding of 175.98 for year 1 (part 1 & 2), 187.79 for year 2 (part 3 & 4) and 171.71 for year 3 (part 5 & above).

Kruskal Wallis test on student understanding of plagiarism and courses

Figure 2. Kruskal Wallis Test Result on Student Understanding of Plagiarism and Course

Ranks

	Course	N	Mean Rank
Level_understanding	AC110	16	221.25
	AC220	27	230.31
	AM110	25	158.06
	AM228	50	182.98
	AS120	17	166.41
	AS201	15	184.17
	AT110	19	187.29
	AT113	5	101.10
	BA111	19	149.82
	BA117	15	196.03
	BA119	25	165.18
	BA240	26	147.65
	BA242	17	191.15
	BA250	22	170.68
	CS110	13	216.12
	HM110	18	174.28
	HM241	28	167.21
	Total	357	

Test Statistics[a,b]

	Level_understanding
Kruskal-Wallis H	30.228
df	16
Asymp. Sig.	.017

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Course

Kruskal Wallis H test in Figure 2 shows that there was a significant statistical difference between student understanding based on course, X^2 (16, N = 357) = 30.228, p < .05, with a higher mean rank level of student understanding of 230.31 for AC220, and the least of 101.10 for AT113.

Kruskal Wallis Test on Student Understanding of Plagiarism and Level of Education

Figure 3. Kruskal Wallis Test Result on student understanding of Plagiarism and Level of Education

Ranks

Level of education		N	Mean Rank
Level_understanding	Diploma/ Diploma	173	176.25
	Degree/Sarjana Muda	184	181.59
	Total	357	

Test Statistics[a,b]

	Level_understanding
Kruskal-Wallis H	.344
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.557

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Level of education

Kruskal Wallis H test in Figure 3 shows that there was no significant difference in student understanding based on year of study, X^2 (1, N = 357) = 0.344, p > .05, with mean rank level of student understanding of 176.25 for diploma and 181.59 for Degree.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that although the understanding of plagiarism among the respondents was high, a closer look revealed that they had an incomplete understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. For example, the majority of the respondents thought that the following acts do not constitute plagiarism:

(4) "Using quotes from an article but citing only the author of the quotation but not the author of the article where it came from is not plagiarism"
(6) "Changing the words of material from another piece of work and representing it as your own is not considered plagiarism"
(13) "When giving a citation, the citation does not really matter as long as citation is made"
(14) "I do not have to provide a citation if I paraphrase others' sentences"

Items 6 and 14 are particularly alarming because no citation would be provided by students in violation of the principle of plagiarism unlike items 4 and 13 where the violations are more technical. Thus, the findings support previous research such as Bahadori et al. (2012), Malik et al. (2021), Mehar Singh (2015), and Al-Shaibani et al., 2016 as cited in Ahmad et al., (2022), that students lack an understanding of what is plagiarism and one of the reasons for engaging in plagiarism is lack of understanding about what constitute acts of plagiarism.

The findings also show that students in different courses in UiTM Sabah have significantly different statistical understandings of plagiarism. This suggests that efforts to raise awareness and understanding about plagiarism differ among courses. Perhaps some courses put more emphasis on this issue than others, suggesting that efforts make a difference in students' understanding of plagiarism.

CONCLUSION

Plagiarism is widespread for various reasons and is made worse with the availability of the internet and the development of certain software and tools through the internet. It is a serious academic offence and must be taken seriously. One of the reasons for the high rate of plagiarism is an incomplete understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, as shown in this study. Therefore, relevant authorities such as the UiTM management, lecturers, teachers, and student bodies need to intensify efforts to raise awareness and understanding about plagiarism, including taking action against those committing plagiarism. Future research may include studying the responses of relevant authorities such as the academic affairs unit's effort to stop plagiarism among students, including the barriers to dealing effectively with plagiarism.

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