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MUSIC STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLAGIARISM

EDU 650

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is a serious offense that most people take lightly especially students. One question that keep running in educator's mind is whether students do it intentionally or unintentionally, or whether students know what plagiarism means. This research tries to probe students' knowledge on plagiarism, their perceptions towards plagiarism and also to understand the factors that drive them to plagiarize. Sample for this study were 61 music degree students at the Faculty of Music, UiTM. Questionnaires were distributed to students and consisted of questions which sought to investigate students' knowledge and perception of plagiarism. The questionnaire also consists of questions which investigate the factors that drive students to plagiarize. Findings indicate that most students have heard about plagiarism but only a few who knows its exact definition. It also showed that most students do not take plagiarism as a serious matter and tend to take it lightly. There were hardly any significant differences found between programs and the factors that drive students to plagiarize, but there were many significant differences between gender. Overall, it shows that students need to be exposed more on the topic of plagiarism as they seemed unclear about the correct way to write when they borrow ideas from other sources.

INTRODUCTION

Students in higher education are overflowing in all the academic institutions all over the world. In a way, it is a good thing that students now are more determined to be a step ahead and further their studies in higher education after they finished their high school. Students' behavior and attitudes vary from one to the other. Some may be very hardworking, focused, and determined to succeed while others may be lazy, likes to procrastinate and take things lightly. Differences in student behaviour and attitudes also differ according to age. But it does not mean that the older they are, the more able and hardworking they will be. Student success often depends on whether they know how to manage their time wisely. Those who do not manage their time wisely will suffer the consequences of doing their assignments at the very last minute, when their mind is too tensed and stressed to the point that they cannot think clearly.

Procrastination can lead to panic, and panic can cause students to make poor judgments which leads them to take desperate measures to complete their assignments, such as plagiarizing other peoples' work and ideas and call it their own. This is called plagiarism. Plagiarism simply means taking someone else's work into one's own without acknowledging its source. Plagiarism is a part of cheating too.

Cheating is not accepted in any academic establishment and is especially not condoned in institutions of higher learning. According to Bramer (1995), if someone completes an assignment by copying materials from other sources, they actually do not understand what the whole thing is all about. He also mentioned that as higher education students, they are supposed to have ideas of their own. It is alright to read information from many sources, but they need to explain it in their own words, not copy everything they have read. Barnbaum (2002) from Valdosta State University stated that there are five types of plagiarism – copy and paste, word switch, style, metaphor and idea. These types of using other people's works let it be from journals, websites, or quotes, still falls under the word plagiarism.

Plagiarism committed by students is called academic plagiarism. Academic plagiarism is a very serious offense that may result from a failing grade on the particular course or even worse, suspension or termination from the academic institutions. Many students feel pressured to complete their assignments well and now, with the new era of technology, which is the internet surrounding us, students can easily find information they need with just

a click of a button. Without thinking rationally or carefully, they often resort to copying and pasting the information they get without altering or acknowledging it.

Interestingly, educators tend to be able to detect whether the students' works are truly their own work or whether it has been plagiarized. For example, the lecturer knows that the particular student is not a capable writer and usually commits grammatical errors in the sentences used in their previous works and assignments. But when this student submits his or her assignment or project, the work may seem so well done that it has no grammatical errors. Another example is in the copying of other people's ideas or words which indicate a maturity well beyond the capability of the student, and thus demonstrates the possibility of it being plagiarized. These are some of the ways that lecturers could detect plagiarized works.

There are many factors that lead students to take the easy way out, which is to plagiarize. The Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), in 2003 said that students may have poor time management or they do not plan their work properly, which causes them to plagiarize. Students may also have fears that they might do badly in their work, so copying and pasting seems to be the only solution for them.

Unfortunately, what students do not realize is that their actions could cause them problems if they were caught. But many of them take this matter very lightly because they have a thinking that they might not get caught or perhaps they did not know that by copying other people's sentences or ideas without acknowledging it, is actually plagiarizing their work.

Problem Statement

Plagiarism has always been a worrying topic for all educators. It happens in all schools as well as in higher education institutions. It is almost like a trend, more so in this day and age of technology. Educators expect their students to put in the effort and commitment into their projects and assignments which would indicate achievement in the learning outcomes. But it appears that it is quite a difficult thing for students to do. Nowadays, with the new era of technology conquering the world and with the access of the Internet, it is easy to find materials they need and students feel it is alright to copy a few sentences from the websites and paste them into their assignments.

The question is, do students really know that their actions are wrong? Or do they even know that they are actually plagiarizing? There are not many holistic researches that have been done about students understanding about plagiarism. Do they know the different types of plagiarism and what makes them plagiarize?. Marshall and Garry (2005) carried out a research on how well students really understand plagiarism. While Sergiou (2004) did a research on why students plagiarize. The details of their research are discussed in the literature review.

Rutgers' Management Education Center conducted a survey and discovered that out of 4,500 high school students, 75 percent of them engage in serious cheating and more than half of the amount confessed to have plagiarized their work from the Internet. One of the confessors admits that "cheating is a way to survive in high school and what's important is getting ahead". This shows that the students do not care about this matter and take it lightly.

On the other hand, many students do not know or are aware of the different types of plagiarism. They often think that if they change a few words in the original sentence, or rearrange the sentence it is considered acceptable and not categorized as plagiarism, thus they think they do not need to acknowledge the original author. Some students also assume that their lecturers will never know that the sentences have been plagiarized if they make minor alterations here and there. After all, most students would think that their lecturers would never know where they got the ideas and sentences from. As a result of this, the

issue of plagiarism seems to be of concern to all educators. Many educators may have tried to look at the matter from the student's perspective, but without coming to a conclusion. Questions that remain are whether these students do it intentionally or unintentionally. This study therefore hopes to delve into these issues of plagiarism and hope to achieve some understanding of why it happens.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the understanding of plagiarism among the degree students in the MARA University of Technology. The main purpose of the study is to:

1. investigate students' knowledge and understanding of plagiarism
2. investigate students attitudes towards plagiarism
3. examine the factors that encourage students to plagiarize

Research Question

This study will attempt to answer these following questions:

1. How well do students know about plagiarism?
2. What are the factors that drive students to plagiarize?
3. What are the student's perceptions towards plagiarism?

Significance of the Study

A few studies about plagiarism have been done in the USA, in the UK and some other countries (Marshall & Garry, 2005; Introna, Hayes, Blair & Wood, 2003; Paynter & Mills, 2004; Park, 2003; Hart & Graham, 2004; Sergiou, 2004). But very limited researches have been done in Malaysia (Smith, Ghazali, & Noor Minhad, 2007) regarding this issue. So, with this study, hopefully people, especially educators, can have a better understanding or an overview of the issue of plagiarism. It hopes to give clarity to why students plagiarize, whether intentionally or unintentionally. With this study too, hopefully it will provide information regarding how well students know about plagiarism and what they do when they try to complete assignments. This study could assist educators and institutions in planning the dissemination of information regarding plagiarism so that the problem could be minimized.

Limitations of the Study

As this study comprise of students in the Faculty of Music, it would be difficult to generalize the findings to all students in UiTM. Furthermore, as the sample is small in number, it is possible that results of data analysis would be restricted. In addition, because the issue of plagiarism is a sensitive one, it is expected that some students may not provide honest responses to the questions asked for fear of being identified or penalized.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Past researches that are related to the issues surrounding plagiarism such as those conducted in the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Australia will be discussed. There seem to be very limited studies done here in Malaysia and this section hopes to uncover the meaning of plagiarism, the types of plagiarism, the attitudes and perceptions of students towards plagiarism, and the reasons why many of them plagiarize.

Definition of Plagiarism

Plagiarism as defined by Hannabus (2001, p.18) is "the unauthorized use or close imitation of the ideas and language/expression of someone else". The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles (1993) defined plagiarism as "take and use as one's own (the thoughts, writings, inventions, etc., of another person); copy (literary work, ideas, etc.) improperly or without acknowledgement; pass off the thoughts, work, etc. of (another person) as one's own". Martin (2004) stated that "plagiarism thus involves claiming credit for ideas or creations without proper acknowledgement" (p.2).

Researches on different aspects of plagiarism were done by researchers to get more detailed information. Some studies tried to find out how well students understand plagiarism. Marshall and Garry (2005) found that 94% from the total of 181 respondents in their study correctly defined plagiarism. Nevertheless, 17% of their respondents misunderstood the meaning as they think that copying people's work with acknowledgement is plagiarism. According to Marshall and Garry, this is a disturbing result because the extent of misunderstanding occurs in the most obvious form of plagiarism.

Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Plagiarism

Many studies had been conducted on the attitudes and perceptions of students towards plagiarism or academic dishonesty. Some of them had even touched on the cultural attitudes towards it (Introna, Hayes, Blair & Wood, 2003; Hayes & Introna, 2005). A different but interesting reason why students plagiarize have been discussed by Introna, Hayes, Blair and Wood (2005) who stated that people from different cultures tend to experience culture shock upon entering a new environment other than the culture they have been brought up in. As a result they have to get used to it and adapt to being in different environment. This is often not an easy task for them to accomplish. In order to achieve success, some people resort to using or taking words from other people (plagiarize) and passing it off as their own. On the contrary, taking other peoples words is seen as a sign of respect among the Chinese people (Pennycook, 1996) but this is totally contradictory to other cultures and is unacceptable in academic writing.

In Malaysia, a study was conducted by Smith, Ghazali, and Noor Minhad (2007) to investigate the attitudes towards plagiarism among undergraduate accounting students. From the findings of the study, it is found that the factors contributing to plagiarized works are the fact that the students lack of understanding, and awareness of what plagiarism is. Their weakness and incompetence in academic writing forces them to use measures which will help them produce papers and assignments that looks good enough to pass off as their own.

Reasons for Plagiarism

There are many reasons why students plagiarize, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Sergiou (2004) found that the main reasons why student plagiarize are due to fears that they might disappoint their parents or teachers. The students are also afraid of the thought that they might be referred to as "less smart" by other students. Over half of the students questioned from Sergiou's study admitted that they had plagiarized intentionally.

University of Alabama in Huntsville (2007) listed down reasons why students plagiarize. Among the reasons is lack of writing and research skills. This usually happens to students that are doing assignments that are not in their mother-tongue language. It also listed not knowing how to cite sources. Students sometimes do not know the correct way to cite the sources which eventually results to plagiarism although they do not do it intentionally.