PLAGIARISM: EXPLORING STUDENTS' AWARENESS LEVEL IN HIGHER EDUCATION SETTING

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Abstract: Plagiarism is the most frequent form of academic dishonesty in an academic setting. Due to the seriousness of plagiarism among students, this study is conducted to evaluate the awareness towards academic plagiarism among undergraduate students at the private Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Malaysia. A total of 314 undergraduate students at the private HEIs were selected using an online survey. Independent sample t-test and standard multiple regression were used to analyse the data. The finding of this study reveals that plagiarism among Malaysian undergraduate students is prevalent even though the students are aware of what constitutes academic plagiarism. Lack of ideas, language proficiency limitations, health problems, pressure, the volume of work, and the lack of interest in the required task are among the reasons for committing academic plagiarism. Consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), this study suggests that attitudes and knowledge are the predictors that influence students to commit plagiarism. This study allows HEIs management as well as policy-makers to formulate strategies in eliminating plagiarism among undergraduate students because academic plagiarism threatens the reputation of nations, universities, teachers, and students.

Keywords: Awareness, Knowledge, Attitude, Plagiarism, Academic Dishonesty

1. Introduction

Plagiarism is a growing concern in higher education institutions (HEIs) because it deals with ethical and integrity issues (Murniati, 2019). Those students who are looking for the easy way out of their assignment, plagiarising is one of the ways to keep them doing their task (Aasheim et al., 2019). The continued practice of plagiarism can only produce incompetent graduates who have no integrity. Plagiarism refers to presenting a certain work as one's own, without giving credit to the original owner, within or without the knowledge of the originator (Mohd Razali et al., 2016; Park, 2003). Plagiarism is also regarded as a fraud and showing a lack of integrity in the offender (Park, 2003). There are many forms of plagiarism, such as copying directly without quoting the source; acknowledging the source but not doing any paraphrasing; copying former students' reports as one's own or 'recycling' reports and many more (Walker, 1998). In the academic context, plagiarism should not be taken

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lightly, and students who commit this offence should be penalised for being unethical and having no integrity.

Many students have been noticed practicing plagiarism and lecturers are not taking any action against them. Thus, this practice continuous over the years (Pandoi & Gupta, 2018). These days, the internet also offers the affluent resources of knowledge for individuals. A number of studies reveal that the lack of awareness causes plagiarism among students (Kumar & Mohindra, 2018; Smith et al., 2007; Zejno, 2018). Besides, previous studies argue that plagiarism is also linked to lack of knowledge among students concerning citing, paraphrasing, and referencing (Selemani et al., 2018) as well as attitude towards plagiarism (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). According to Jomaa (2019), in most plagiarism cases, students are not aware that they are doing so and they do not have the knowledge on the correct way to reference words or ideas of authors.

Although various attempts to reduce the misconduct have been conducted by HEIs (Zulaichah et al., 2013), the result is not as expected. For example, violations of academic code of conducts and plagiarism among HEIs community still often appear in the media. A research conducted by Wan et al. (2011) about plagiarism practices among students in an engineering-based university in Malaysia reveal that the level of awareness about plagiarism among students is considerably low. In addition, Hussein et al. (2016) suggest that the level of awareness among students from business degree program in a public university in Malaysia on plagiarism is high. However, that does not stop them from engaging with plagiarism as they have easy access to the internet and the fact that they have a habit of doing last-minute work. Due to the seriousness of plagiarism behaviour among students, the present study aims at evaluating the awareness towards academic plagiarism, with a particular focus on undergraduate students at the private HEIs in Malaysia. Specifically, the study intends to examine the influence of knowledge and attitudes towards plagiarism behaviour among undergraduate students in Malaysian HEIs.

2. Literature Review

Plagiarism is "anything but a cut-and-paste concept" (Mishra & Gautam, 2017) while, plagiarism is commonly defined as using the work of another person and claiming it as one's own (Smith, 2012). According to Bartley et al. (2014), plagiarism is the theft of intellectual property with a lack of source acknowledgement. East (2010) argues that plagiarism as a person who intentionally used other's work without any source of indication, thus trying to give the impression that such work is their own. Zejno (2018) suggests that one of the main reasons that cause students to involve in the unethical practice of plagiarism in their academic writing is the failure of the educational system to create awareness about the issue. According to him, students reveal that either they, themselves are not aware of all forms of plagiarism, or that they have noticed in other students the amount of confusion about what constitutes plagiarism.

To understand more about plagiarism behaviour, this study focuses on the awareness about plagiarism from the perspective of knowledge and attitudes towards

plagiarism. Figure 1 shows the research framework for this study. Consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour developed by Ajzen (1985), this study conjectures that the involvement in plagiarism is stimulated by knowledge and attitude concerning behaviour.
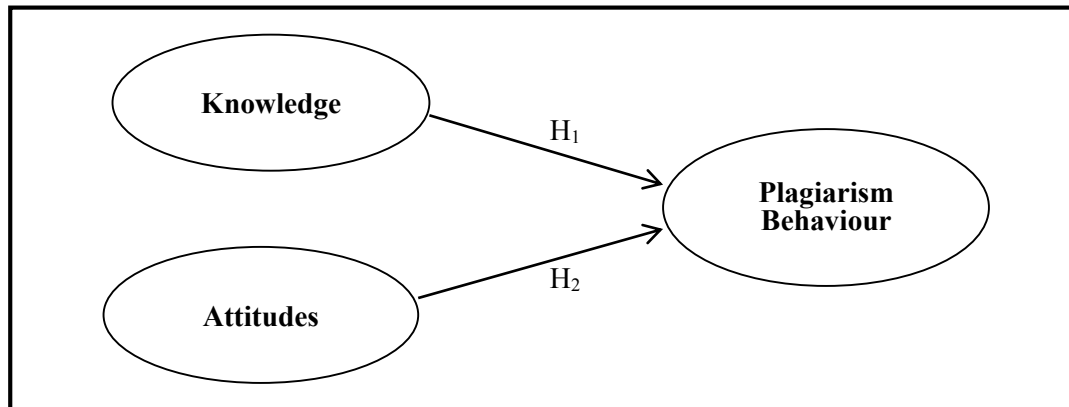
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Knowledge towards Plagiarism

Knowledge towards plagiarism refers to the use of informational, writing, and referencing skills to make sure the text is exempt from plagiarism (Peters & Cadieux, 2019). Several researchers argue that plagiarism knowledge is necessary to write academic articles or assignments with integrity (Amiri & Razmjoo, 2016; Janssens & Tummers, 2015). It is believed that students would participate less in academic plagiarism if they have better and deeper knowledge about plagiarism (Rezanejad & Rezaei, 2013). Lack of knowledge to do proper academic citation and referencing is suggested as a contributing factor for students' plagiarism (Wan et al., 2011). Among the area that can be considered as lack of knowledge is on how to quote, paraphrase, cite, and reference (Eret & Gokmenoglu, 2010; Park, 2003) and knowledge of writing research papers.

Several researchers consider the lack of knowledge in this domain as important factors in committing plagiarism (Varghese & Jacob, 2015; Keyvan-Ara et al., 2013; Zamani et al., 2013). Md. Yusof and Masrom (2011) revealed that Malaysian students' have insufficient knowledge of plagiarism. Tayan (2017) found a significant 35% of students in a Middle Eastern University noted they lacked little or no knowledge into what exactly constituted plagiarism. Similarly, Wan et al. (2011) found that the students are uncertain if it is considered plagiarism if they borrow a few sentences from external sources without acknowledgement as long as most of the essay is their work. They are also not sure if they have the right to use the information and content from a book they have bought.

However, there is evidence that the students still engaged in plagiarism behaviour even though they do know about plagiarism. For instance, BavaHarji et.al. (2016) study revealed that more than 60% of the students reasoned difficult assignments for plagiarising, although they are aware of the consequences of plagiarising and are equipped with the knowledge of how to cite. Similarly, Appiah

(2016) found that more than 50% of the undergraduate students at the HEIs in Ghana are aware of the policies on plagiarism but do not have much knowledge since the education aspect is lacking. Based on the above discussions, this study conjectures that knowledge is one of the important factors in committing plagiarism. Therefore, this study predicts:

H1: There is a significant relationship between students' knowledge and their involvement in plagiarism

2.2 Attitudes towards Plagiarism

Different scholars have diverse opinions and perspectives toward plagiarism. According to Ajzen (1991), attitudes toward a particular set of actions are defined as the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal toward the behaviour in question. This reflects that different individual carries different attitudes for the same behaviour or situation, and it varies on the basis of factors which affect the individual. The attitudes of students towards plagiarism have been studied by numerous researchers. For example, Mustapha et al. (2016) found that attitude is the most powerful predictor of plagiarism intention among Malaysian Muslim students. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2017) found that the general attitudes of Aqai Medical University students were to be positive towards plagiarism. Recently, Santosa et al. (2019) found that there was 69.87% out of 633 English as Foreign Language (EFL) students in a University in North Bali, Indonesia had a positive perception of their attitudes towards plagiarism.

There are several reasons why the students have positive attitudes towards plagiarism. Park (2003) highlighted that for the indifferent attitudes of students towards plagiarism, in that the "benefits of plagiarising outweigh the risks, particularly if they think there is little or no chance of getting caught and there is little or no punishment if the authority catches them". Songsriwittaya et al. (2009) revealed that students disregarding copying their peers' work as unethical because they seem to believe that copying a friend's work is not an act of plagiarism as long as they have their consent. Jones (2011) found that students 'neutralising' their actions of plagiarising by assuming that "everyone does it and get away with it?" and hence, it should be acceptable. At the same time, Rezanejad and Rezaei (2013) found similar reasons in their study. They reported that students disregard their academic integrity. They take the act of plagiarism lightly and, they plagiarise for fun or because everyone else is doing it. Based on the discussions, this study assumes that attitude is one of the predictors in committing plagiarism. Therefore, this study predicts the following hypothesis.

H2: There is a significant relationship between students' attitudes and their involvement in plagiarism

3. Methodology

This study employs a cross-sectional research design using a quantitative approach (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Besides, the self-administered questionnaire has been adopted to collect data about the underlying constructs proposed in the

theoretical model. The cross-sectional is used since the data was collected at one particular time across the selected respondents (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The use of such methods may gather accurate, less bias, and high-quality data.

3.1 Data Collection Procedure

The sampling frame of this study is undergraduate students at the private HEIs in Malaysia. As of 31 December 2019, there are 443 private HEIs in Malaysia, with a total of 600 thousand students (Malaysia, Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi, 2019). This study follows the decision model table proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) to determine the necessary sample size because the sample decision model provides a reliable sampling decision as claimed. Since the population of the undergraduate students at the private HEIs in Malaysia is 600 thousand students, this study requires at least 384 sample size to establish as representatives of the population. The study utilises a convenience sampling method in collecting the data based on who is conveniently available to provide it (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A total of 323 valid questionnaires were acquired from the online survey, making a return rate of 84.1% out of 384 targeted respondents. After checking all the surveys received, nine (9) surveys were found to be partially completed and thus they are excluded from the total returned eligible for analysis. The final number of accepted surveys used in the data analysis was 314 surveys

3.2 Survey Instruments

The survey questionnaire for the present study consists of four (4) sections. Section A contains five (5) personal information questions related to gender, age, nationality, education level, and program undertaking. Further, Section B and Section C consist of items about independent variables such as knowledge and attitudes that have been adapted from Ibegbulam and Eze (2015). Finally, Section D focuses on the dependent variable to be tested, which is the plagiarism behaviour among respondents adapted from Razera et al. (2010). All constructs are measured on a five-point Likert scale with the anchors of (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree".

As a preliminary analysis of the collected data, the reliability assessment of the scales was carried out by calculating the values of the Cronbach's alpha for each subscale separately. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), a reliability coefficient test indicates how well the items in a set that positively correlated with one another. Variables can be considered as reliable if the Cronbach's alpha value is set to 0.7 and above (Hair et al., 2015; Pallant, 2016). Table 1 depicts that all variables measuring plagiarism behaviour (knowledge and attitudes), ranging from values 0.871 to 0.878. Besides, the highest Cronbach's Alpha value is obtained for the subscales of items in the plagiarism behaviour construct (α = 0.945). Hence, the internal consistencies of all constructs are considered acceptable since each reliability testing exceeds the suggested threshold.

Further, the assessment of the normality of the metric variables in this study involves empirical measures of a distribution's shape characteristics (skewness and kurtosis). Table 1 shows the normality assessment values for knowledge, attitudes,

and plagiarism behaviour. The skewness statistics shows all value are between ±2.00 as suggested by Hair et al. (2015) which indicates that all items are approximately normally distributed in terms of skewness. Therefore, this assessment confirmed that the data of this study is normally distributed.

Table 1: Reliability and Normality Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Skewness	Kurtosis	No. of Items
Knowledge	0.878	-0.220	0.192	7
Attitudes	0.871	-0.086	1.408	12
Plagiarism Behaviour	0.945	-0.015	-0.271	11

Next, to check for multicollinearity, a collinearity diagnostics test (tolerance and VIF values) was conducted. As shown in Table 2, the tolerance values are greater than 0.10, and the VIF values are lower than 10; hence, no multicollinearity problem exists between independence variable, knowledge and attitudes (Pallant, 2016).

Table 2: Collinearity Diagnostics Results

Variables	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Knowledge	0.792	1.262
Attitudes	0.811	1.233

4. Discussion

Table 3 depicts unsurprisingly that 59.6% of the respondents of this study were female as compared to 40.4% males. Further, Table 3 also shows that majority of the respondents are between 18 and 20 years old. They make up more than half (58.3%) of the total responses to the survey given. The nationality status of the respondents shows that 303 (96.5%) of respondents are Malaysian, while only 11 (3.5%) are International students. In terms of education level, the majority of the respondents (69.4%) currently are pursuing a Bachelor's Degree. Those currently in the Diploma level accounted for 30.6% of the total respondents. For the diploma program, the highest number of students who participated in this study came from the Accountancy program with 19.8%, while for the degree, they came from Human Resource Management program with 27.9% out of total respondents.

Table 3: Respondent's Profile

Profile	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	127	40.4
	Female	187	59.6
Age Group	18 – 20 years old	183	58.3
	21 – 23 years old	127	40.4
	24 – 26 years old	4	1.3

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Nationality	Malaysian	303	96.5
	International	11	3.5
Education Level	Diploma	96	30.6
	Bachelor Degree	218	69.4
Program Undertaking	Diploma in Accountancy	61	19.8
	Diploma in Administrative Management	14	4.3
	Diploma in Business Management	12	3.7
	Diploma in Sport Industry Management	9	2.8
	Bachelor of Accountancy	14	4.3
	Bachelor of Business Management	40	12.7
	Bachelor of Business Administration	33	10.5
	Bachelor of Finance	44	13.9
	Bachelor of Human Resource Management	87	27.9

4.1 The Level of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Plagiarism Behaviour

This section reports the level of knowledge, attitudes, and plagiarism behaviour of undergraduate students in Malaysian private HEIs. One sample t-test was conducted to test whether the mean of overall perceived knowledge, attitudes, and plagiarism behaviour are significantly equal to or different from a specified constant. Table 4 shows the mean result of 3.485 for knowledge which indicates that respondents considered themselves to have a moderate level of knowledge on academic plagiarism, and it is statistically significant at a 1% level. Overall, 90% of the participants were aware of the meaning of plagiarism as copying from the internet and not crediting the source. Besides, respondents also revealed that they know that plagiarism is summarising someone else's ideas without crediting the source. In addition, respondents also strongly agreed that plagiarism is using most of someone else's original text but changing the order and not listing in-text but in the reference list.

Table 4: Knowledge, Attitude, and Plagiarism Behaviour Level Shown by Students

	n	Mean	One Sample T-Test	
			t-statistic	p value
Knowledge	314	3.485	83.261	.000***
Attitude	314	3.329	98.901	.000***
Plagiarism Behaviour	314	2.814	54.565	.000***

Note: Result is significantly different at *** 1% level and ** 5% level, respectively, using two-tailed tests.

Table 4 also shows that the mean result of 3.329 for attitudes indicates that respondents moderately agreed that they have an attitude towards academic plagiarism and, it is statistically significant at the 1% level. Respondents moderately

agreed that they could not avoid using other people's words without citing the source because there are not many ways to describe something. Besides, respondents also have an attitude to say that it is justified to use previous descriptions of a method because the method itself remains the same. At the same time, they always translate a part of a paper from a foreign language when they do not know what to write.

Finally, the result in Table 4 reveals that plagiarism behaviour recorded a mean value of 2.814, which indicates that respondents slightly agreed that they have a behaviour towards academic plagiarism and, it is statistically significant at a 1% level. Most respondents reported less engagement in plagiarism behaviours in an academic setting for most items. Respondents responded affirmatively that they had 'copied word by word from textbooks. Further, when asking for a reason why they engaged in plagiarism behaviour, respondents revealed that they do so because they have no idea to add. Sick, stress, or workload was the second frequent reason for academic plagiarism reported by the respondents.

4.2 The Influence of Knowledge and Attitudes towards Plagiarism Behaviour

This section reports and discusses the findings of the study, which is to examine the influence of knowledge and attitudes towards plagiarism behaviour among undergraduate students in Malaysian HEIs. The results in Table 5 shows that the regression model ($F(2, 314) = 19.015$, p-value = 0.000) is significant at the 1% level, but the overall fit of the model is low with an R^2 value of 19.8% of the variation in the plagiarism behaviour. Approximately 19.8% of the total variability in the plagiarism behaviour is accounted for by the predictor variables collectively in the model. The other 80.2% may be due to other factors which are not explained by the model.

Table 5: The Influence of Knowledge and Attitudes towards Plagiarism Behaviour

	Hypotheses	Std. Beta Coefficient	t-statistic	p-value
Intercept			6.032	.000***
Knowledge	H₁	-0.184	-3.486	.001***
Attitude	H₂	0.320	5.663	.000***
Model Summary:				
R² value				19.8%
Anova Results:				
F-value				19.015
Sig. value				.000***
Obs.				314

Note: Association is significant at *** 1% level, ** 5% level, respectively, using two tailed tests.

Regarding Table 5, the result shows that the relationship between knowledge and students' plagiarism behaviour is negative ($t = -3.486$; $p < .01$) and it is

statistically significant at 1% level. Therefore, this finding leads to the acceptance of H1. This signifies that when respondents perceived that they know what plagiarism is, then they will be less likely to involve in academic plagiarism. This result is consistent with previous studies where they suggested that students would participate less in academic plagiarism if they have better and deeper knowledge about plagiarism (Liu et al., 2018; Sarifuddin et al., 2017; Amiri & Razmjoo, 2016; Janssens & Tummers, 2015; Rezanejad & Rezaei, 2013).

Further, as it can be observed from the results in Table 5, attitudes of students were positively related to plagiarism behaviour ($t = 5.663$; $p < .01$), and it is significant at the 1% level. Therefore, H2 was supported. This result indicates that undergraduate students in this study have positive attitudes towards plagiarism even though they understand the meaning of plagiarism. Positive attitude towards plagiarism indicate the support and consent for plagiarism and expressed that practice of copy and paste without citation and referencing is not unethical. Consistent with previous studies, positive attitudes towards plagiarism are getting more common among students, and they are following it blindly to make their task easier (Shrivastava, 2017; Hosny & Fatima, 2014). Perhaps, students 'neutralising' their act of plagiarising due to their lack of proficiency in the target language and writing skills as they admit that they could not avoid using other people's words without citing the source because there are not many ways to describe something.

5. Conclusion

Plagiarism occurs in all learning environments and continues to be the focus of attention in the HEIs (McNair & Haynie, 2017; Wideman, 2011). The present study reveals that plagiarism among Malaysian undergraduate students is prevalent even though students are aware of what constitutes academic plagiarism. Further, this study clearly shows that have nothing (idea) to add, limitations in language proficiency, including reading and writing skills are among the most cited reasons for plagiarism behaviours. Moreover, health problems, pressure, the volume of work, and the lack of interest in the required task have also contributed to the increase in academic plagiarism. Also, this study suggests that positive attitudes towards plagiarism are getting more common among students, and they are following it blindly to make their task easier. A possible reason for this finding is that Malaysian students have strong relationships with each other. This may lead them to help each other during assignments. Further, this study discovers that the practice of plagiarism is associated with a lack of knowledge regarding this misconduct. This signifies that when respondents perceived that they have low knowledge about plagiarism, then they will be more likely to involve in academic plagiarism. The influence of attitudes and knowledge towards plagiarism behaviour is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) that argued that our actual behaviour is preceded by our behaviour intentions and these are equally influenced by attitudes and perceived behavioural control (knowledge).

This study is significant to the HEIs' managerial team to know exactly the reason why students plagiarise. This information should be useful for the HEIs management as well as policy-makers who wish to formulate strategies in eliminating plagiarism

among undergraduate students because academic plagiarism threatens the reputation of nations, universities, teachers, and students. The HEIs can play its part by first making clear its definition of plagiarism and the students need to be not only informed but also trained into using the appropriate conversions of information and ideas into their academic writing. Offering compulsory courses and workshops can help students overcome the uncertainty of what is expected of them in their academic writing practices.

However, the findings need to be interpreted with consideration for its limitations. First, the responses of this survey are representative of undergraduate students at the private HEIs in Malaysia. Hence, there is a scope to cover postgraduate students in the future, giving proper representation to the whole HEIs' students. Second, the selection of predictors influencing students' plagiarism behaviour is not exhaustive. There may be other predictors that may contribute or be a reason in committing academic plagiarism which might provide more insight. Thus, further research may consider to include other predictors such as motivational factors, individual factors, as well as institutional-related factors to enrich findings in various perspectives. Third, the self-reported behaviour on which this study relied is vulnerable to response bias. There is uncertainty regarding the accuracy of responses because self-reports of plagiarism behaviour and their knowledge and attitudes towards plagiarism may be less accurate. To reduce response bias, it is suggested for future research to use in-depth techniques applied to secondary data sources such as interviews or observations. This might help the researcher to explore certain aspects that cannot be discovered using a survey questionnaire.

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