

# Plagiarism in the context of higher education - The intention and perception of students

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## Abstract:

This study reviews the result of other research regarding plagiarism in Western countries. It has six different focuses: the reason behind cheating, the tendency of plagiarism, students' knowledge about plagiarism, the student's thoughts about education approach, the reason behind not plagiarizing other's work, and students' actions about classmates plagiarizing. An interview is also conducted with a Taiwanese student to explore the difference between Western and Eastern countries. It is concluded that the majority of students do not have adequate knowledge about plagiarism. Moreover, the current education approach is insufficient, according to students' feedback. It is also concluded that most Western students do not avoid plagiarism because it is unethical. In contrast, Taiwanese student does avoid plagiarism because it is morally wrong. It is also recommended that educator in higher education improve their approach according to students' perceptions.

## 1. Introduction

As the time gets closer to the 2022 mayoral election in Taiwan (The author's home country), an ex-mayor, Lin Chih-Chien, has found out that he committed plagiarism in both of his master's degree thesis, which resulted in his master's degree being revoked by both National Taiwan University(NTU) and also Chung Hua University(CHU). Furthermore, he was demanded to withdraw from the upcoming municipality election. The scandal reflects that plagiarism is still a massive problem in higher education. The reasons behind students committing plagiarism have much-been researched [1]. Since plagiarism can also be seen as a form of cheating [2], it is also interesting to understand students' perceptions of plagiarism and the motivation of why (why not) a student committed plagiarism [3].

Two pieces of research are mainly examined in this study. The one by Chris Park [1] is used to understand what kind of students have a higher tendency to plagiarize other's work. Another research by Lori G. Power [3] is used to understand the student's perspective toward plagiarism. This study aims to take a closer look at students' knowledge about plagiarism and if educators need to change their approach to preventing plagiarism in higher education.

## 2. The Reason for committed plagiarism

Sometimes, plagiarism is committed intentionally. It is often due to time-saving, the pressure of getting good grades, efficiency gain, personal values, student's attitude towards the class, and lack of deterrence [1]. In contrast, there are also lots of occasions when plagiarism is committed unintentionally. It is often due to a lack of understanding. There are many ways one can count as plagiarism, copying others' work without referencing it, using graphs and data from the internet without the original author's permission, or even duplicating a publication. Most of the time, students are careless about plagiarism, so they do not notice when it occurs [4]. Moreover, many students also took plagiarism as "Not a big deal" as it is more tolerant compared to workplace [3]. In short, the lack of attention and knowledge are the main reasons students commit plagiarism.

The lack of knowledge is also a significant reason students plagiarize in Taiwan. In the author's personal experience, professors usually do not emphasize plagiarism when giving out assignments. Because of that, students often complete assignments with bad references or no

references. Moreover, professors and university staff did not put enough effort into policing plagiarism. It is unusual for professors to check if students copy their assignments online. They usually only focus on peer plagiarism. This result in many students being used to using bad references, pirating resources online, and then getting into trouble with plagiarism in more critical tasks, such as a thesis.

### **3. The tendency of Plagiarism**

In Chris Park's research [1], he listed several groups of people that are more likely to commit plagiarism. One of them is young and immature students because they lack academic ability and knowledge about plagiarism. Young students are also the target group (first and second-year students) Lori [3] chose to interview for her research. Other groups of students, such as foreign students, students with lower GPAs, and students with a bad attitude towards the class, are also considered to have a higher tendency of plagiarism.

The research done by Chris Parker is very accessible, but most of his research is based on others' research, which makes some parts inconsistent. In addition, there is a part that contradicts itself. In the "Determinants" section, he stated that younger students are more likely to cheat than older students. However, in the "Trend and Patterns" section, he states that the difference in plagiarism rate between undergraduate and graduate students is negligible in business-related areas. This error can be improved by giving more context about why the difference occurs and collecting new data about the group mentioned in the research.

### **4. Student's perspective**

#### *4.1. Research Method*

In Lori's research [3], the author uses grounded theory [5] to design the interview. The methodology is chosen to solve the unreliability issue of only using self-reporting data in many traditional kinds of research. The interview with 31 students focused on whether the student had correct knowledge of plagiarism, how the student learned about plagiarism, why students considered plagiarism wrong, and most importantly, why students avoid plagiarism.

Using grounded theory, in other words, not making a hypothesis before data collection, is a good way not to be restricted by the framework laid down before the interview. Still, collecting data from students from different cultural backgrounds will be beneficial. Also, the number of students can be increased to sufficiently analyze the student's perspective. Furthermore, it will be interesting to analyze the commonalities between students with similar thoughts.

#### *4.2. Lori's Observation*

Most students avoid plagiarism out of fear of getting punished. It is a huge concern as many students do not avoid plagiarism because it is unethical [3]. Some students have also felt accused falsely because of unintentional plagiarism. Interestingly, many students have the same thoughts about the flaw in education about plagiarism. In the research, Lori mentions numerous times that students often expressed plagiarism as something the authority imposed on them. Therefore, a strong agency for students is necessary, as only an external reason for not plagiarism is not sufficient [3]. The approach educators use to teach students should be reconsidered as many students would like to understand the "true" reason for not plagiarism.

#### *4.3. Interview with Taiwanese student*

This interview aims to understand Taiwanese students' perspectives toward plagiarism and explore the difference with Lori's studies. A Master's degree student, Szu-Yu Chen, from the Institute of Statistic and Data Science NTU, was interviewed. Szu-Yu considers plagiarism as any form of

copying, using others' work without permission, and incorrect referencing. She also referred that plagiarism is as bad as cheating on an exam, which is different from Lori's research. Surprisingly, she mentioned that she understood the concept of plagiarism by herself, despite the educator she met never explaining the reason behind not plagiarizing adequately. She said, "Most professors only focus on the punishment when one committed it. Some even allowed copying and altering work online as long as it was not from another classmate." It shows the lack of attention by the educator in Taiwan.

On the other hand, Szu-Yu tries to avoid plagiarism according to her conscience, not because of the fear of punishment; her answer is different from Lore G.'s observation. She thought this was due to cultural differences between Western and Eastern countries. During the interview, another question was asked to understand the student's perspective when he/she finds out others are cheating. The answer provided by Szu-Yu is that it depends on who committed it and if it will affect her study, this is an expected answer from students. Since most students want to keep a good relationship with their peers [1], but also do not want to lose out on academic performances.

#### **4.4. Interview questions**

1. What kind of behavior will you consider plagiarism?
2. In your opinion, how severe is the problem with plagiarism in the context of higher education?
3. In some research, students often illustrate that the educator did not explain plagiarism well enough. Do you have similar thoughts?
4. Have you ever committed plagiarism during your undergraduate and graduate studies? If not, what is the reason?
5. What is your professors' attitude towards plagiarism? Are they very strict, or do they have tolerance about what counts as plagiarism?
6. What will you do if you find out your classmate is plagiarizing? Will you blow the whistle?
7. Do you think the university needs to change its approach to how they teach the importance of plagiarism?

#### **5. Conclusion**

Plagiarism continuously being a problem in higher education's research field. Using others' work without correct referencing is just another form of cheating. In this study, we have found that many students do not have enough education related to plagiarism and only avoid plagiarism because they are told not to do so. Also, there has no significant difference between Western and Eastern students' perspectives about the education on plagiarism. According to the observation in this research, solely relying on a student's conscience is not practical. Therefore, ensuring students have better knowledge about plagiarism and understanding the consequences is essential. That is to say, in order to achieve a zero plagiarism environment, educators of higher education must take account of students' perceptions and improve their teaching approach based on them.

#### **References**

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