

Arab Gulf Student's Plagiarism Acts

Dr Amer Nizar AbuAli

aabuali@philadelphia.edu.jo

Philadelphia University, Jordan, Faculty of Information Technology

drabuali@yahoo.com

Abstract-- In this study we tried to shed light on plagiarism especially on Gulf student's. Also, this paper discuss how could plagiarism be justified by utilitarian acts. Plagiarism is treated as a negative action with serious implications. We conducted a pilot study to discover the plagiarism acts amongst students and the reasons behinds.

Index Term-- Plagiarism, Utilitarianism, Deontological

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Internet has changed the way students discover, use and source content for writing. Students now have more information available to them than was previously imaginable. Plagiarism is the act of copying someone else's work and effort then publishing it as your own. This includes text, media, and ideas. Whenever another person's work is copied and republished without an appropriate reference or citation, it is considered plagiarism

The Web evolution has made plagiarism easier to commit and originality more difficult to define. In higher education many students act could be considered dishonest. Dishonest practicing could include copying from previous assignments or from books, inappropriate collaboration on assignments, inappropriate reference, cheating and lying

The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding why learners may plagiarize. This paper is organized as follows. The paper presents a review of literature that includes ethical theory, perceptions of plagiarism, and pilot study to explore the extent of plagiarism amongst students and the reasons why they plagiarize so that we can understand the students' behavior.

2. ETHICS

Throughout history many ethical theories have developed. Each individual must choose one, or a combination of them. There are two basic approaches to ethics: Teleological theories which consider the consequences of an action as a measure of an action's good. Deontological theories (Duty vs Right based) which put the rightness of an action above its "goodness."

2.1 Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism first presented by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in the mid and late 19th century (Sullivan & Pecorino, 2002). Utilitarianism theory advocates that the actions worth is determined by maximizing utility (pleasure or happiness). One's decision should be based on the consequences that can be deduced before the action has taken place. There are many types of this theory which include act

vs. rule, two level, motive, negative and average vs. total. (Clifford and John , 2009) Utilitarianism sometimes is used to justify plagiarism.

2.2 Duty-based ethics

Duty-based ethics are usually what people are talking about when they refer to 'the principle of the thing'. Duty-based ethics teaches that some acts are right or wrong because of the sorts of things they are, and people have a duty to act accordingly, regardless of the good or bad consequences that may be produced.

This theory developed by Immanuel Kant. Kant's theory on thinking and acting does place high value on ethics (McCormack, 2001). It stresses that fidelity to principle and duty are the most important. The consequences of an action, according to Kant do not matter. What matters is that the act itself is right, that one does one's duty. One's actions should be ruled by the following imperative " I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." That is, if one believes that everyone should act this way and if everyone acting this does not logically lead to a contradiction, the action is valid. Spinello (2009) gives a good example: The rule, " It is permissible for everyone to break promises when it is in their best interest to do so," cannot be a valid ethical rule since it leads to a contradiction. That is, if everyone broke promises, the whole notion of promises would collapse.

2.3 Rights-based ethics

The concept of rights based ethics is that there are some rights, both positive and negative, that all humans have based only on the fact that they are human. These rights can be natural or conventional. That is, natural rights are those that are moral while conventional are those created by humans and reflect society's values.

This theory is based on the tradition of Locke and Hobbes (as cited by Martin, 1994) on upholding an individual's human or legal rights, such as the rights to privacy and ownership of property. In the philosophical arena, rights are split up into positive and negative rights. Negative rights refer to freedom from outside interference in certain activities which are defined by the social norm of the moment. Such rights are freedom of speech, the right to liberty and privacy. Positive rights "are those that give one what is needed to freely pursue his or her interests. " Such rights are right to health care, education and other similar things. Spinello (2009) notes that "In American society there has been far more emphasis on negative rights then on positive rights". Contractarianism is a

rights-based approach to morality and ethics. According to this approach, morality is based on the social contract between government and its citizens. This contract provides certain inalienable rights such as life, liberty and property. Contractarianism stresses that a system must be fair and accord all its participants due respect.

3. PLAGIARISM PERCEPTION: PUBLIC POINT OF VIEW

Weiss and Bader (2003) report that the public perception of academic dishonesty in higher education is that it is a serious problem. Because public perception is so poor, they argue it will be difficult to change the perception where mistrust and disinterest are prevalent. Peirce and Allshouse (1999) suggest that situations such as take-home tests, previous tests kept on file, and online services that practically beg learners to download ready-to-submit papers only exacerbate the public perceptions on cheating. Another finding by Heberling (2002) indicates the public perception on cheating is that it takes place online more than in the classroom on ground wherein the reality is that academic dishonesty takes place in both environments. The results of a three study analysis by Education Testing Services (1999) indicates the general “public perception is that cheating is more prevalent and accepted today;” the respondents to the surveys see cheating “in many facets of life: politics, business, home, and school,” and “collaborative environments like the Internet are making the definition of cheating even murkier” . ETS also reports that “56% of educators and 31% of the public (including parents, and learners) say that they hear about cheating incidents. However, only 35% of educators and 41% of the public (including learners and parents) agree that there is a problem with cheating on tests”. The fact that these respondents know plagiarism is taking place but don’t consider it to be a problem makes addressing the problem from a preventative nature in higher education more important.

4. PLAGIARISM PERCEPTION: STUDENTS POINT OF VIEW

Many researchers argue that there is ambiguity on what is perceived as academic dishonesty among learners (Ashworth et al., 1997; Heron, 2001; Lathrop & Foss, 2000; Peirce & Allshouse, 1999; & Weiss & Bader, 2003). Learners have claimed that they don’t know what instructors consider to be dishonest or cheating. An example of an area of ambiguity might include peer collaboration and knowing to what extent the collaboration is considered inappropriate (Weiss & Bader, 2003). Lathrop and Foss (2000) agree that there is an inherent conflict between an instructor’s desire to assign collaborative work to learners for preparation for future careers and the need to teach learners to do their own work. The point of crossing the line to cheating may differ by each instructor (Williams, 2001). Even though there is ambiguity among learners on what constitutes academic dishonesty, there is also a cavalier attitude toward cheating by learners in higher education (ETS, 1999; McCabe, n.d.; McCabe & Trevino, 1993, 1997). Research consistently reports that learners feel their cheating

will not affect others (Weinstein & Dobkin, 2002). Some researchers argue that students understand plagiarism to be a victimless crime; the only person that plagiarism is cheating is oneself. Studies on self-reported plagiarism indicate that plagiarism is accepted among their peers (Gillespie, 2003), the likelihood of getting caught is slim, and if the learner does get caught, the punishment will be minimal (Weinstein & Dobkin, 2002). Gibbs (1975, as cited by McCabe and Trevino, 1993) suggests that learners will not be deterred from misconduct, in this case cheating, unless they perceive they will get caught and that the punishment is perceived to be severe. Learners will simply weigh the cost and benefits of plagiarizing based on their personal beliefs (Weinstein & Dobkin, 2002). The potential cost is the probability of getting caught and the perceived punishment. The perceived benefit is based on learner perception of how much plagiarism will improve his or her grade. Under this theory, faculty must establish policy, inform learners of the policy, and enforce the policy with strict consequences in order to deter plagiarism in the course. Learners accepting plagiarism as the “norm” are the people responsible for the future “civil society and the economy” (Gillespie, 2003) and, unfortunately, this cavalier attitude of learners is not ending at graduation, but is continuing with resume fraud, crib notes for the CPR exam, and altering of other learner scores (ETS, 1999). In 1993, Sims published an article on the relationship between academic dishonesty and unethical business practices (as cited by Gillespie, 2003). Sixty people were surveyed and 91% of the respondents admitted they had been dishonest in college and 98% of the respondents admitted to dishonest work behaviors. The author of this study concludes that his data is consistent with the results of a 2001 study by Nonis and Swift (as cited by Gillespie, 2003) who found that many students accept academic dishonesty as acceptable behavior and that learners that are dishonest in college are more likely to carry the dishonesty into the work place. For learners to have this cavalier attitude toward dishonesty is of concern because, in most cases, institutions of higher education have a learner conduct code and in many cases this code is published right on the course syllabus. What learners don’t understand is the credibility of their alma mater and that their degree is at risk due to this behavior.

According to Edudemic Website (2013) between 2010 and 2011, over 35 million papers were submitted to turnitin.com. There were over 128 million content matches from these papers on the web. That represents about 3.7 content matches per paper submitted. For both secondary and higher education, most of these content matches come from social and content sharing sites (like wikipedia, yahoo answers, etc). Cheat sites and paper mills represent about 14-20% of the content matching. Observe Figure 1.

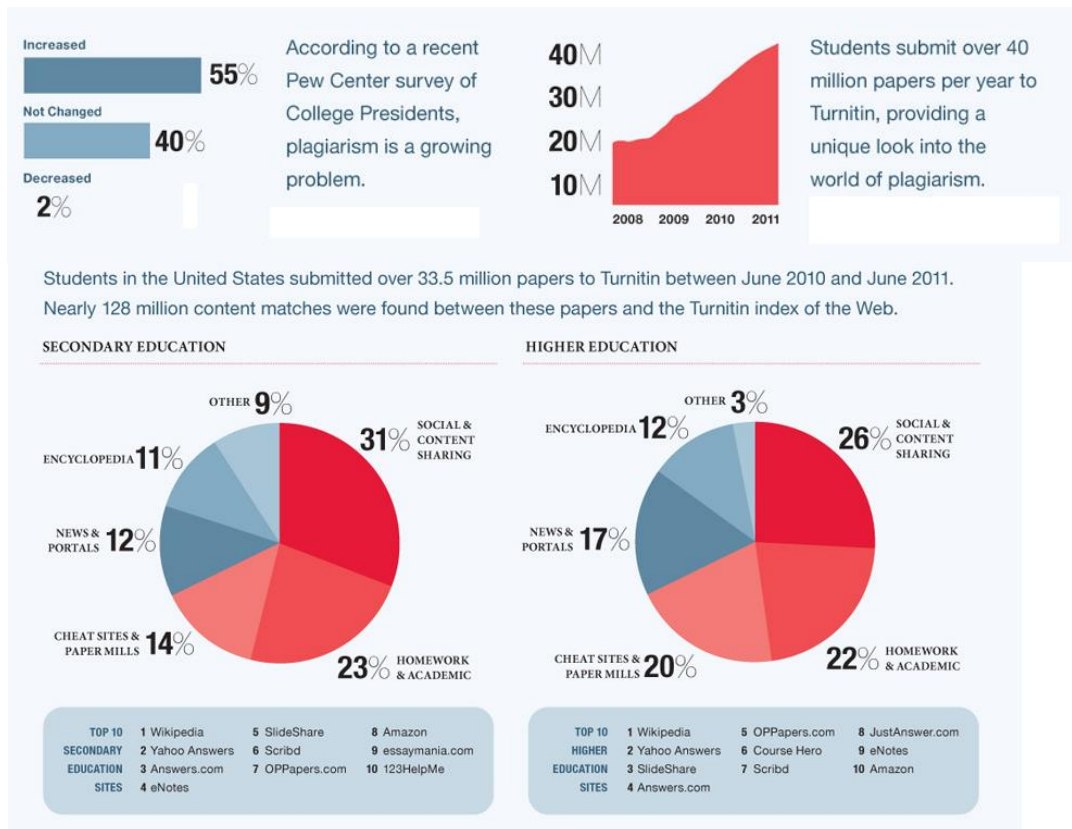


Fig. 1. Students' Plagiarism Acts Categories

5. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research approach with Yes/No questions and 35 participants. A survey questionnaire is the instrument used for the data collection. We were specifically interested in reflecting Arab students' perspective about plagiarism.

A qualitative approach was also adopted to investigate the subjective aspect of unintentional plagiarism. Some open questions were therefore posed in the questionnaire and two focus groups were carried out to verify the questionnaire as well as investigating further what constitutes unintentional plagiarism. The focus groups provided further insight into the students' definitions of plagiarism and the place of unintentional plagiarism within the context of the Arab student perspective on plagiarism.

The sample contained students from 10 different Arab countries. Data from the questionnaires was analyzed from an overall perspective as well as looking at a cultural background. The majority of the respondents fell into three major regions - Middle East, North Africa and Arab Gulf - that the team considered useful for the purposes of an analysis of cultural trends (see table below) and some of the anecdotal assumptions that are often made with regard to cultural background and issues of plagiarism.

5.1 Plagiarism by Intention

With regard to intentional plagiarism, 18 out of the 35 respondents admitted that they had plagiarized. There were

various reasons given for this both within the open-ended question posed in the questionnaire. The most was time pressure and the fact that in their own country copying from textbooks was not an issue. Interestingly a majority admitted copying from books at school. In what might seem to be a contradiction, in response to the open question of whether they believed plagiarism was wrong, most felt that it was immoral or unethical to plagiarize. Piety (2002) expresses suspicion that any culture regards plagiarism as a good thing but acknowledges that some cultures take a more lenient view of the 'offence'. The majority of respondents confirmed that they had learnt about plagiarism at the university they were attending. Almost half (16 out of the 35) acknowledged being tempted to plagiarize even if they had not done so. Plagiarism or the temptation to plagiarize would therefore appear to be rife amongst this particular cohort of students. All but one of the North African respondents admitted to copying from books at school and the focus group highlighted the fact they had expected to do so at university and could not understand lecturer's 'obsession' with discovering their sources of information. Only 3 out of the seven Middle East respondents said they had copied from books at school. However, the majority of Middle East students said they had heard of plagiarism before attending universities. This rather contradicts assumptions made with regard to Middle East students being the group that are culturally are unaware of what we mean by plagiarism. By contrast, most of the Arab Gulf group said they had not heard of plagiarism before attending universities.

Table I
Cultural Grouping Results

Questions posed	Yes or No	North Africa [8 students]	Middle East [7 students]	Arab Gulf [8 students]
Taken university entrance exams	Y	4	5	6
	N	4	2	2
Copy from texts at school	Y	7	3	2
	N	1	4	6
Know what plagiarism is	Y	7	7	6
	N	0	0	1
Heard about plagiarism before university	Y	3	4	1
	N	4	2	7
Been told about plagiarism at university	Y	7	6	8
	N	1	1	0
Ever given work to a friend	Y	0	2	0
	N	8	5	8
Ever plagiarised	Y	4	3	4
	N	4	4	4
Ever been tempted to plagiarise	Y	2	3	2
	N	2	3	4
Do you think its wrong	Y	7	7	8
	N	0	0	0

In terms of cultural grouping, half of the North African and Arab Gulf students and just under half of the Middle East group admitted to plagiarism. This is probably not unexpected in terms of the gap between the strict definition of plagiarism and the acceptance of textbook copying prior to entry to higher education. The focus groups supported the view that students do not really regard such copying from textbooks as 'cheating', as does the research carried out by Bannister and Ashworth (1998). It is interesting that one of the students whilst denying that he had passed his work to a friend, confessed that he had plagiarized, but highlighted the reason for his plagiarism as being due to copying from a friend. This implies a lack of understanding of the term among Arab students. This is also highlight the utilitarianism issue. As for utilitarianism, it is a point of view that pursues as many profits as possible that as many people as possible can be provided. In this case, if using others' ideas without citing their origins provides most of people lots of profits, it is a morally okay

thing for some students to do. Although plagiarism can give harm or disadvantage for many people.

5.2 Unintentional plagiarism

While the majority of students questioned appear to understand the moral and academic implications of plagiarism, some simply do not. Martin (1994) discovered that many students simply do not understand proper acknowledgement in practice. Therefore, it is true to say that in some cases the plagiarism was unintentional. Although the notion of unintentional plagiarism is a debatable issue, it clearly presented itself, particularly in the focus groups discussions. Out of the eight students interviewed in focus group one, three admitted that their knowledge on plagiarism was 'hazy' and that they had probably plagiarized at some point throughout the past year, but not intentionally. Perry (2001) explains that confusion between plagiarism and paraphrasing will always exist. He found that some students believe that if you copy from several different sources, and then combine them, it is not actually plagiarism but 'research'. The second focus group

expressed identical concerns about plagiarism but also expressed their lack of understanding of what they regarded as an obsessive attitude towards what they perceived as something not terribly serious. This further underlines a deep chasm that appears to exist between the acceptable academic norm and the students' perception and/or acceptance of universities standard. In fact it is clear that Arab students have not grasped the finer points of acknowledgement and referencing when it comes to academic pieces of work and cannot therefore be viewed as having plagiarized intentionally. The studies of Alberta University (2001) similarly found that 60% of students interviewed could not distinguish between paraphrased and plagiarized text. Whilst plagiarism cannot be justified, it is clear that in some cases, it is not done with knowledge or with any deliberate intention. As one student cited in Piety (2002) said: "we've all done it, at some point or other, without meaning to".

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a theoretical framework for understanding why Arab students may choose to plagiarize. From the students' responses in the questionnaires, the main reasons for acknowledged plagiarism were external pressures to succeed or time pressure. The picture with regard to unintentional plagiarism is more complex as cultural factors play a role with regard to whether plagiarism is intentional or unintentional. The focus group findings demonstrated that many of the students had plagiarized unintentionally. It is also very difficult to break routine habits amongst students. The implication is that a cultural reorientation is required in order to aid students to master the skill of proper attribution. Unfortunately, there is no simple strategy to break old routines amongst Arab students. It is also worthwhile remembering that plagiarism takes many forms, and as Piety (2002) states, "plagiarism is subjective....what is plagiarism to one person is not necessarily plagiarism to another".

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