



Factors Influencing Plagiarism Amongst Undergraduate Students at an Institution of Higher Learning: Kwazulu-Natal

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Abstract. Plagiarism is seen as a form of dishonesty, especially within an Institution of Higher Learning. It is a phenomenon that has been encountered more often inside the classroom over the past few years with easier access to technology. Plagiarism has therefore been classified as a multi-layer phenomenon of dishonesty in Higher Education and continues to be a leading concern within Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL). According to Plagiarism Policy and Procedures for staff and students, the responsibility for developing an understanding of plagiarism lies with the university for students' academics, as it puts their academic life at risk if caught committing the act of plagiarising. Socialisation, gender, and easy access to electronic information through the internet are contributing factors driving plagiarism. In addition, students do not learn or gain anything from plagiarism; this, therefore, robs them of their ability to be critical thinkers. The research aimed to determine the factors influencing plagiarism amongst undergraduate students at an Institution of Higher Learning. A cross-sectional descriptive survey employing quantitative data collection methods, including questionnaires, was used. The study was conducted at the University of Technology, and the target population was undergraduate students from their first to their final year. The significant findings of this research paper show that accessibility, pride, and teaching factors considerably influence plagiarism. In conclusion, there is a growing need for Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa to create comprehensive frameworks for dealing with student plagiarism that are based on prevention and supported by effective detection and sanctioning systems that are transparent and consistently applied.

Keywords: Access · Plagiarism · Teaching · Technology

1 Introduction

Plagiarism continues to be a leading concern in higher institutions. Plagiarism is highly discussed and considered a severe problem in Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) [1]. Past experiences indicate that if plagiarism is not addressed effectively; as a result, students continue to plagiarise, which can promote laziness and the awarding of marks. Šprajc et al. reveal that students know plagiarism is wrong and unethical [2]. However, the

academic community is aware of students plagiarising because they believe that no one will detect them. Training at IHL on how to reference and improve their academic writing skills are given, but unfortunately, plagiarism is still seen as problematic. Assignments and PowerPoint presentations are done in almost every module; hence, acknowledging the sources of information is not done correctly.

It is known as plagiarism when work has not been recognised and referenced.

Plagiarising is duplicating another person's conceptions, words or work and pretending they are your own [3]. It is displaying another creator's thoughts or words as your own in a course report or potentially electronic posting [4] and taking credit for it. Plagiarism occurs in various aspects of our lives, and the ultimate aim of it is to pass at all costs. In media, piracy is a form of plagiarism; in schools, it can be in a written document, which may be known as literary theft. Written falsification and literary theft in schools can be exceptionally demotivating for lecturers and students as they cannot work effectively and efficiently. This can be attributed to the intentional plagiarism committed by some awarded students, as there are no consequences. The purposeful theft of another person's work and making it your own without citing it is an example of plagiarism. Students do not learn or gain anything from plagiarising, and this, unfortunately, has a lifelong impact on their academic writing skills. In addition, lecturers will not know how much their students know or have learnt.

Plagiarism is not just a problem experienced locally or nationally in South Africa but a well-known worldwide issue [5]. If plagiarism is not addressed sufficiently, plagiarists could attain undue advantages such as receiving credits for work they did not do. Literature shows that plagiarism can be intentional or unintentional, relying on a single approach, particularly punishment or sanctions, to curb plagiarism [6]. Atrak defines "*intentional*" as doing something deliberately [7]. Intentional plagiarism incorporates referring to a source yet precluding quotes for direct citation of words, just as the reference of page numbers. Student plagiarism is rampant practice and a significant concern within IHL. It interferes with their ability to succeed academically and encourages laziness. According to Plagiarism Policy and Procedures at DUT for staff and students, the responsibility for developing an understanding of plagiarism lies with the university for students' academics. It puts their academic life at risk if caught committing the act of plagiarising. This can lead to being penalised in the task or even failing; in a worst-case scenario, suspension or academic exclusion following due process is instituted on the offender [8]. This research study aims to determine the factors influencing plagiarism amongst students at an institution of Higher Learning: KwaZulu-Natal.

2 Literature Review

Plagiarism is the most reported type on research misconduct and academic dishonesty [9]. Further, it threatens our information and education system, as stealing someone's work is misconduct [10]. Many studies have indicated that attitude affects plagiarism intentions, for example, self-control, attitude and perceived opportunity. Various factors may contribute to the tendency of plagiarism. These factors include student background, language, societal, demographic, and technological factors.

The practice of plagiarism may be traced back to high school assignments. Students were rewarded with excellent grades despite their teachers discovering that they had

plagiarised from encyclopedias and other reference materials or used projects they had purchased [11]. Transitioning from high school to the tertiary level may cause students to encounter new and unfamiliar academic obstacles [12]. For instance, they cited and paraphrased different university value systems such as the student portal, writing centre and academic development. Institutions of higher learning lack appropriate admission standards and admit students who lack the prerequisite knowledge for their courses. Most students do not understand what constitutes plagiarism and what it entails [11]. Even though more skill is needed to rephrase intense and complex text, this practice could be interpreted as plagiarism due to the absence of attribution [13]. The ineffective production of lecture notes, which might result in the lack of text references, is a frequent cause of literacy theft. Poor explanations and lousy teaching of course content can also drive students to plagiarise [14]. In the high school setting, it was discovered that a quarter of educators and almost half of the scholars did not realise that paraphrased text must be accredited [13]. It was found that some undergraduates unintentionally plagiarise because there is a lack of familiarity with writing conventions when citing and rephrasing [13]. Furthermore, not understanding the policy may contribute to widespread ignorance of what behaviours cause plagiarism.

Ledesma found that grade level has a significant aspect. Still, on the other hand, they found that senior students had a significantly higher degree of plagiarism than junior students [15]. Even though students know the proper usage of academic sources, they claim they still have a propensity to plagiarise while using internet sources. This result might be associated with students' knowledge of academic writing rules [15]. Lacking the ability to understand English causes a barrier because students tend to fail to paraphrase correctly. The authority of the English language is another crucial factor that affects a student's propensity to plagiarise. According to Hosny & Fatima, the more proficient a student is with the English language, the less probable it is that they will do so [16]. Hence, there is a high probability for non-mother tongue English speakers to commit plagiarism than English-speaking peers [15]. Rephrasing, generally understood as the similarity of meaning between different words, is the language mechanism underlying many plagiarism acts and the linguistic process on which plagiarism is based [17]. Copy and paste or verbatim copy, also known as word-by-word plagiarism, contains the replica of a text from a source into the plagiarised document.

The language phenomena underlying plagiarism have hardly been studied, which is considered a vital issue for their improvement [17]. Studies on plagiarism frequently use Western, native English speakers' viewpoints as a baseline from which understanding this issue should unfold [18]. The procedures and principles concerning plagiarism are built on Western academic conventions. Previous studies examining native English-speaking teachers' perceptions of intentional/unintentional plagiarism have shown that most educators are not likely to consider unintentional plagiarism to be actual plagiarism [18].

Students are prone to plagiarise due to family pressure. Ramzan et al. showed that the cultural and family pressure of getting high grades influences plagiarism [19]. Such pressure sometimes pushes the student to enjoy unreasonable methods, for example, written falsifications, an alternate way to perform better on the test or believing several distributions. The concept of personal success was addressed in statements coded as

individualism, where a student may say, “Our culture tells us to do whatever it takes to be successful even if it means cheating” [15].

Plagiarism is also more common among students who have a negative attitude toward their lessons and feel that the module is unimportant and uninteresting or that the task is not challenging [11]. Some students cheat since they have a negative frame of mind toward assignments and understanding that educators accept to have meaning, yet they do not [15]. Students that plagiarise often do so because of societal reasons such as a lack of understanding of the assignment’s requirements, a task that is too difficult, or a lack of self-assurance. Ineffective time management, a lack of reading motivation in students, staff resistance to reporting academic dishonesty in students, and a lack of citation and paraphrasing abilities.

It is common knowledge that students may lack time management skills or make inefficient plans for the time and effort needed for research-based writing, leading them to believe they have no other option except to plagiarise. Students often underestimate how long an assignment will take them. They may not be mindful of the degree of work included in a research paper or may straightforwardly be overpowered by the project and put it off until the last minute, leaving them with no time for original work. According to Doro, students usually realise that their due date for submission is so close, and they do not have enough time to do their assignments, so they choose to plagiarise [20]. Eret & Ok state that the higher tendency for senior students to plagiarise could be interpreted as not having enough time to complete assignments or projects due to graduation worries [14]. Most of the students copied to give accurate responses to study questions with the ultimate’s objective of getting higher evaluations rather than expertise in their subject of study [15]. Jereb et al. expressed that what inspired the student to plagiarise is the goal of getting a proper evaluation and comparing their success with that of their peers [15]. Jereb et al. state that numerous activities take up a student’s time, such as peer pressure to keep up functioning public action, commitment to college sports and performance activities, family obligations, and strain to finish different work assignments in a short measure of time [15]. In addition to time pressure, they found another six significant reasons the student gave to clarify conning practices the longing for a supporting companion, a dread of disappointment, sluggishness, exceptional condition, the probability of recovering a fiscal benefit, and because everyone does it. The most frequent defence of plagiarism given by students, according to Jereb et al., was that it was the faculty’s responsibility. In the longer narratives, students complained that assignments weren’t communicated well, that professors had high expectations, or that they wouldn’t be caught [15]. Another student’s observation was that “there is a huge emphasis on making sure you are one step ahead of everyone else; hard effort and self-knowledge have taken a backburner”, demonstrating the idea of individual success at all costs. According to Jereb et al., rewards are exclusively given based on grades rather than placing value on the education-obtaining process and the knowledge acquired throughout that process [15]. This is because of our culture’s priority on individual success.

Technological factors such as using the internet (copy and paste) for assignments contribute to plagiarism. There is no gain in saying that the internet is the crucial factor that has raised worldwide concern about the phenomenon of plagiarism [21]. Some students believe that the information on the internet does not belong to any author and,

therefore, can delicately be used by them in the assignment [22]. As the internet is a public field and reference rules on internet sources are not well known, students see information on the internet as free to use; with so much information, it is easy for students to plagiarise [11]. Students often find accessing the information on the internet easier without acknowledging the source. Nowadays, the popularity of the web has made it simpler for students to take another person's work [15] illegally. Sentleng & King recognised students studying science and technology as the most likely students of plagiarism because they are prone to manipulate data related to their discipline [11].

3 Methodology

A quantitative descriptive, cross-sectional design was used for the research study. The researcher aimed to investigate factors that lead to plagiarism. The research study was conducted on campus at the University of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal. The target population were all students currently enrolled in an undergraduate program at the University of Technology. Simple random sampling was used as it was the most basic of probability sampling. It was achieved by randomly selecting elements from the sampling frame where participants had an equal chance of being selected. There was a total of 165 respondents. The inclusion criteria were all undergraduate students registered for an undergraduate programme. The exclusion criteria were non-registered students and students registered for a post-graduate programme.

Ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity was adhered to by not mentioning any names of the participants in the study and coding the questionnaires. Ethical clearance was sought from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee and data collection only commenced after full ethics approval was obtained. No coercion was exerted as participation in this study was voluntary, so the participant's right to self-determination was considered.

An informed consent form and participant information sheet were given to participants requesting consent to partake in the study. Once permission was obtained, the questionnaire was issued. The questionnaire was closed-ended and consisted of a 5-point Likert scale adopted from Germany, where consent was requested and approved by Dr E. Jereb [15]. It consisted of section A, which referred to the demographic data, and Section B, which consisted of 6 sections that assisted in answering the aim of the study, namely, ICT and Web, relations, academic skills, teaching factors, pressure, pride and other reasons.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe and synthesise the data, expressed in frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations. Results were represented in the form of graphs and pie charts. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 28 was used for data capturing and analysis with the expertise of a statistician. The utilisation of the research instrument cannot be separated from the concepts of validity and reliability. Content validity and reliability were examined utilising a pilot study.

4 Results and Discussion

Section A of the questionnaire referred to the demographic data of the participants. The gender distribution for the participants who responded was 37% ($n = 61$) males and 63%

Table 1. Gender Distribution (n = 165)

Gender	N	%
Male	61	37
Female	104	63
Total	165	100

Table 2. Age Distribution (n = 165)

Age	N	%
18–19	15	9.1
20–24	116	70.3
25–30	33	20
>30	1	6
Total	165	100

Table 3. Language Distribution (n = 165)

Language	n	%
Zulu	142	86.1
English	5	3
Afrikaans	1	0.6
Other	17	10.3
Total	165	100

(n = 104) females. This is supported by the fact that more female students are enrolled at institutions of higher learning than males (Table 1).

Age Distribution

The ages of undergraduate students ranged from 18 years old to above 30 years old. The majority of participants (70.3%, n = 116) were aged between 20–24 years; 20% (n = 33) were between 25–30, and 9.1% (15) were between 18 and 19 years old, as shown in Table 2.

Language

The most dominant language amongst the respondents was Zulu (86.1%, n = 142), while only 3% (n = 5) of respondents' first language was English, as shown in Table 3. This is supported by the fact that 77.3% of people who live in KwaZulu-Natal speak isiZulu.

The study aimed to determine factors that contribute to plagiarism among undergraduate students. Factor analysis with Promax rotation was applied to these 54 items as seen

in Table 4. Fourteen items were dropped because they either did not load strongly enough onto any factor or cross-loaded onto multiple factors. Eight factors were extracted, which account for 52.92% of the variance in the data. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) of .790 and a significant Bartlett's test indicates that the data was adequate for successful and reliable extraction. Rotation converged in 8 iterations. The extracted factors and individual item factor loadings showed that convergent and discriminant validity was achieved. Each factor was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. An alpha value $>.7$ indicated reliability.

Information on the factors and their assigned labels are summarised in Table 5.

The reliability of all these factors was confirmed, with all alpha values exceeding the accepted minimum of 0.7 as seen in Table 5. Composite variables were formed by calculating the average agreement scores for all items included in a variable. Figure 1 shows that there was a significant agreement that pride affected plagiarism. Students felt proud and did not want to embarrass themselves. In addition, accessibility to the WEB/Internet information also contributed to plagiarism. One can be deduced that accessibility to the internet and technology has made it easier to plagiarise. These days, university students have daily internet exposure and the inclusion of the internet in the academic environment. This ease of access to the internet can therefore be seen as a catalyst for plagiarism [23]. Students also agreed that teaching contributed to plagiarism. On the contrary, there was a significant disagreement that plagiarism regulations do not exist; they have difficulty communicating in English; they are under pressure to plagiarise; they lack academic skills, and they are disengaged and not interested in doing their studies.

Further analysis was done to determine if there is a correlation between the factors found above and the frequency variable. Figure 1 shows that accessibility to the internet plays a massive role in plagiarism. This can be because technology nowadays forms part of our daily lives. In today's society, technology forms part of a being's everyday life, whether accessing WhatsApp, Facebook or the internet. Even though it is the most effective form of socialising, one can also say that it can contribute to plagiarism and, in turn, promote laziness.

Technology has caused an increase in plagiarism across different sectors, such as Institutions of Higher Learning itself. Therefore, the rapid adoption of new technologies, such as smartphones and wearable smart devices, combined with the proliferation of social media and online information, have changed the academic dishonesty landscape by adding new ways in which cheating can occur [24]. Plagiarism can be considered a negative outcome when using technology as it can promote cheating, laziness, and academic dishonesty, resulting in no actual learning. This results in students possibly being inadequately prepared for the workplace as the art of "copying and pasting" work without reading has now formed part of their daily lives. The "copying and pasting" has also been noted when students submit assignments and one of the software programmes that aided in this was Turnitin. There is a lack of paraphrasing and even accrediting the authors utilizing referencing, which results in students claiming it to be their work. Some lecturers will inform students to resubmit their work if it has been noted, but at the same time, some will not, and students get awarded for work that has been plagiarized. Unfortunately, this granting of marks for plagiarizing work results in some students continuing the trend of plagiarizing, as there are no repercussions for doing so despite

Table 4. Factor loadings

	Factor							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
There are no penalties for plagiarising others' work	.737							
I will not get caught if I copy others' work	.718							
There are no electronic systems of control to safeguard against	.712							
The penalties for plagiarism are minor	.707							
There is no systematic tracking of violators of plagiarism	.654							
I do not understand the consequences if I am caught plagiarising others'	.592							
I am not aware of penalties if I copy others' work	.515							
I am not aware of a university regulation against plagiarism	.483							
There is no teacher control over plagiarism	.392							
I do not want to embarrass my family.		.929						
I do not want to look stupid in front of my lecturer.		.906						
I do not want to embarrass myself.		.905						
I do not want to look stupid in front of my peers.		.875						
My English writing skills are weak.			.902					
My English reading comprehension skills are weak.			.872					
I sometimes have difficulty expressing my ideas.			.503					
The requirements for assignments are not clearly explained.				.737				
Too many assignments are given in a short amount of time.				.656				
Too many modules are taught in a short space of time.				.599				
Some lecturers do not read students' assignments carefully enough to				.595				
Plagiarism has not been clearly explained.				.453				
The assignments given are too difficult.				.333				
Due to stress, I find it easier to plagiarise than to do my own work.					.832			
I am afraid to fail, so I plagiarise to ensure I pass.					.740			
My fear of performing poorly motivates me to plagiarise					.683			
My peers pressure me to plagiarise					.349			
I do not know how to cite the work of others.						.780		
I do not know how to find research materials.						.777		
I do not know how to cite electronic information.						.540		
I find it difficult to paraphrase someone else's ideas.						.499		
I do not know how to write academically.						.436		
I have easy access to new technologies such as Facebook, WhatsApp,							.808	
I can easily access research material using the internet.							.717	
It is easy to share documents, information, and data with my peers.							.673	
I can easily combine information from multiple sources.							.627	
I just want to pass my course even if I don't learn anything along the								.786
I am too lazy to read everything that I am expected to read.								.656
I do not want to work hard								.592
It is easier to copy someone else's work than to do it myself.								.417
I copy others' work to achieve high marks.								.408

Table 5. Factors perceived to contribute to plagiarism

Factor	Construct	Items included	Variance extracted	Cronbach's alpha
1	Lack of regulation (REG)	2.1; 2.3–2.10	20.3	.857
2	Pride (PRD)	6.1–6.4	9.8	.951
3	Communication skills (COM)	3.5–3.7	5.1	.817
4	Teaching (TEA)	4.1–4.6	4.7	.745
5	Pressure (PRE)	5.2–5.4; 6.8	4.4	.818
6	Lack of academic skills (ASK)	3.2–3.4; 3.8; 1.2	3.6	.747
7	Accessibility of WEB/ICT (ACC)	1.4–1.7	2.8	.786
8	Disengaged (DIS)	7.1–7.3; 7.5–7.6	2.2	.738

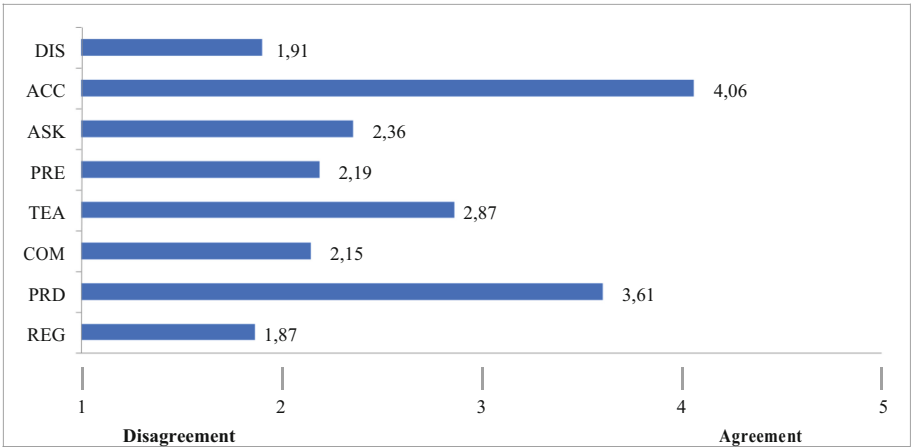


Fig. 1. Factors perceived to contribute to plagiarism

a policy being in place. Therefore, the lack of consequences and the lack of ability in academic writing skills can be a reason why students continue to plagiarize. Lack of knowledge and uncertainties about methodologies are additional factors frequently recognized as reasons for plagiarism [6].

Another major factor that students agreed contributed to plagiarizing was pride, as shown in Fig. 1. For example, students did not want to look stupid in front of their peers, lecturer or family, nor did they also want to embarrass themselves. In addition, their fear of performing poorly motivated them to plagiarize as they were sure they would not be discovered. As mentioned, they knew there would be no consequences for plagiarizing. Pride is also a result of students fearing that they will fail, time pressure and competence in academic writing skills. Fatima, Ming and Abbas conducted a qualitative study in China to explore Chinese students' perception of plagiarism. The results showed that personal pride significantly catalyses the decision to plagiarize [25].

Table 6. Correlations

	REG	PRD	COM	TEA	PRE	ASK	ACC	DIS
FREQ Pearson Correlation	.253**	.061	.061	.234**	.325**	.253**	-.092	.352**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.435	.439	.003	.000	.001	.241	.000
N	165	165	165	165	165	165	165	165

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Teaching factors were another factor that students partly agreed contributed to plagiarism. This included assignments being too hard or the requirements not clearly explained, too many modules being taught in a short time and some lecturers who do not read students' assignments carefully to detect plagiarism. Therefore they find it easy to plagiarize. Lecturers are there to teach students and are meant to assist in upholding academic integrity. Not reading assignments affects students and inadvertently encourages them to engage in plagiarism during their university years.

Lack of regulations, teaching factors, pressure, lack of academic skills and disengagement with one's work are all significantly correlated with a higher frequency of plagiarism, as shown in Table 6. If these factors are not controlled, plagiarism will be an ongoing issue for years to come.

5 Conclusion

In contrast to several preliminary studies, the significant findings of this research paper show that accessibility, pride, and teaching factors considerably influence plagiarism. In contrast, lack of academic skills, regulation and communication skills do not play important roles. However, personal pride is usually the result of students not being competent in academic writing, which might be because students do not read, resulting in laziness that causes students to plagiarize. The sharpening of academic writing skills, vigilant marking assignments, and "punishing" students for plagiarizing should be implemented. This, in turn, might result in a decrease in plagiarism. Even though students strongly disagreed that pressure does not contribute to plagiarism one can deduce that the pressure to succeed has an influence on pride as students might want to appear successful at all costs.

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