

Pakistani University ESL Teachers and Students' Perceptions Regarding Plagiarism

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Abstract: *The study aims to explore the perception of Pakistani ESL teachers and students regarding plagiarism at the university level in the Pakistani context. The study employed the mixed method approach to collect data from students and teachers by distributing questionnaires among students for quantitative data and by conducting interviews of teachers for qualitative data. Using the purposive sampling technique, a survey questionnaire was distributed among 332 ESL students of the BS English program at two private and two public sector universities in Karachi. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed by thematic analysis. The analysis of students' survey responses revealed that students' commit plagiarism due to a lack of awareness about plagiarism, its types and consequences, limited language competency, and a lack of using critical thinking skills. They were also provided limited support from their teachers and university, and were unaware of university policy against plagiarism. The analysis of university teachers' semi-structured interviews also confirmed that students are not aware of plagiarism and its types, and they commit it owing to a lack of language capability and critical approach in the process of learning. University teachers were aware of the concept of plagiarism, but had limited understanding of the types of plagiarism. They complained about the absence of plagiarism policy at undergraduate levels, limited or no access to plagiarism detection software, and lack of training and resources to combat plagiarism among the students.*

Keywords: *Plagiarism, Perceptions, ESL university students, ESL university teachers, Academic Integrity, Ethics*

Introduction

Using the information of others regarding their name and acknowledging them with proper citation reflects the credibility and authenticity of the author while mentioning historical facts or related information in terms of providing substantial evidence to support one's viewpoint or argument in their stance (Brown, 2017). The word plagiarism is derived from the Latin word *pagurids*, which means kidnap or stealing of word. It also means the theft of words as well as slaves. It is defined as the illegal use of another's work, ideas, methods, or words without citing the original author. Khoi and Atefi (2019) believe that taking a piece of writing without acknowledging the creator is plain theft.' In other words, plagiarism is the act of presenting someone else's work as if it were yours whether you mean to or not (Pecorori, 2013; Ahmad, Noorani, & Sewani, 2025). The problem of plagiarism is prevalent in an academic setting especially when it comes to university education; students tend to use different websites to prepare their assignments and try to acquire the data from unreliable sources that further deteriorate their academic performances (Att, 2019). Students have no concepts of plagiarism and its avoidance. Copying the work without giving credit is not accepted by many universities. Still, many students do their assignments or research paper without acknowledging the source of knowledge (Tran et al; 2022).

Literature Review

The word plagiarism is derived from the Latin word *pagurids*, which means kidnap or stealing of word. It also means the theft of words as well as slaves. It is defined as the illegal use of another's work, ideas, methods, or words without citing the original author. Khoi & Atefi (2019) believes that taking a piece of writing without acknowledging the creator is plain theft.' In other words, plagiarism is the act of presenting someone else's work as if it were yours whether you mean to or not (Pecorori, 2013).

Aurangzeb & Akhter (2020) reported that many authors/researchers involved in the academic research area have demarcated plagiarism in a variety of ways. Students sometimes paraphrase the original work but fail to give proper documentation of the source. Similarly, students have the knowledge of

paraphrasing and summation, but they ignore or forget to write quotation marks or indentation properly. They claim another author's work as their own without making the actual person know about his work (Memon & Mavrinac 2017; Pamies et al., 2019; Ahmad, Sewani, & Ali, 2024). Using internet/online resources such as websites and completely copying the work or content with summarizing or paraphrasing, i.e. complete copy and paste, falls into plagiarism (Razera, 2011). Students have no concepts of plagiarism and it's avoidance with very poor writing skills which contributes to their plagiarism (Tran et al., 2022).

Conducting research and writing articles are mandatory in the postgraduate and higher education programs of many institutions of higher education level, and this causes insurmountable pressure on the students and scholars. This pressure is not only on students but on faculty members as well, which tempts both to plagiarize (Tran et al, 2022, Kirthi et al., 2015; Ahmad, Sewani, & Khoso, 2024). This emerging issue has been known by academia for several years and is now a challenge to be catered for. Before information technology and digitalization, it was hard for students to plagiarize as they had to copy data by hand. Easy access to the internet and a quick search engine helps students finish their assigned tasks during the learning course with the help of two very easy commands, cut paste or copy-paste that is copying the text. They also buy stuff online (Perkins, 2020, Onuoha, & Ikonne 2013; Razera, 2011; Akram, Ahmad & Sewani, 2024).

Alimorad (2019) writes as in an attempt of uncovering the main reasons for plagiarism, that many students do not understand the concept of plagiarism. They possess insufficient linguistics abilities and writing skills. They have no or limited knowledge of research. Orim (2014) writes that students don't treat plagiarism as stealing or as an intellectual theft at all moreover, in another study Tahriri and Eslam-Navaz (2014) reported a lack of enough instructions and familiarity with the concept as well as students' laziness are the reasons for this misconduct. Incidence of Plagiarism in academic research is a severe problem. It is one of the key challenges for higher education institutions, especially in developing countries, where students do not possess adequate knowledge or have much exposure to principles of scholarly conduct and behavior

and thus resulting in a lack of academic ethics. It is also because they have poor academic writing skills (Onuoha, & Ikonne 2013; Ibegbulam & Eze, 2015).

Academic dishonesty is growing like an epidemic and is a mounting concern for all the higher education institutions and concerning regulatory bodies (Loan & Kein, 2022). To secure a good ranking among the peer globally the universities or research institutions must produce and maintain the quality research. Quality of research impacts the reputation and integrity of the higher education institutions and academics.(Kumar, 2019; Mohammed et al., 2015). To discourage their students from committing plagiarism special measures are taken by the institutes. For example in Peru, much higher educational institutes do follow zero-tolerance policies but students continue to fall into this habit of plagiarism. As if they couldn't help it. The main reason was that they were unaware of what construes as plagiarism (Stuhmcke, Booth & Wangmann, 2016; Ahmad, Noorani, & Ali, 2024).

In Pakistan Higher Education Commission (HEC) established in 2002 which looks into the higher education in country. HEC has issue a detailed plagiarism policy which defines and outlines the detail procedure for investigating academic dishonesty cases and punishment if found guilty. It is mandatory for universities to follow the HEC plagiarism policies. Universities in Pakistan follow HEC plagiarism policy and share it with stakeholders, use plagiarism detecting software and in class advice (Mansoor & Ameen, 2016).

As a developing country, Pakistan is far behind in technology and in the development and use of different techniques. Among these issues, the issue of academic misconduct has not been addressed adequately (Ghias et al., 2014).. In light of the student's behavior of academic misconduct, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has adopted a quality assurance strategy. It is to improve all the categories and dimensions of academia. Universities in Pakistan face the issues of adequate resources, among them the viability and use of plagiarism software is a major issue, which is also contributing to the plagiarism issues (Javaeed et al., 2019; Khan, 2012). A study of the relevant literature suggests that many students have

confusion about the proper way of referencing. They clearly have no understanding of the boundaries of what plagiarism is. What is acceptable and what is not, but they are afraid of being accused of committing an act of plagiarism. It's every academic advisor or faculty's ethical duty to inform and explain clearly the referencing conventions (Anyanwu, 2004, p. 179; Pecorari, 2013). When teachers overlook academic dishonesty, they are passively contributing as well as premising such behavior for future conduct. Studies suggested that students lack awareness regarding plagiarism and many have no knowledge of what construes plagiarism different students from different cities and cultures have different notions towards plagiarism. Students' lack of knowledge and awareness gives rise to the challenge for faculty and universities to handle plagiarism in academics. Copying the work without giving credit is not accepted by many universities. Still, many students do their assignments or research paper without acknowledging the source of knowledge (Anyanwu, 2004; Pecorari & Petric 2014; Tran et al; 2020; Kolachi et al., 2024).

This practice is unethical and it should ensure that students' behavior and integrity are with their moral virtues and values. This study tries to find out what are the perceptions, Pakistani ESL university teachers and students perceptions regarding the plagiarism. T study tries to explore the students' and the lecturers' perceptions regarding plagiarism focusing on the ESL teachers and students studying in the BS-English program in two private sector universities and two public sector universities in Karachi, Pakistan.

The study poses the following two research questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of Pakistani ESL university students about plagiarism?
- 2) What are Pakistani ESL university teachers' perceptions about plagiarism?

Methodology

The participants involved in this study are the ESL Students of BS-English and lecturers. Thematic analysis was used for interviews of lecturers

Data collected through questionnaire analyzed by using SPSS descriptive analysis. The mean score of analysis of scenario-based questions was 41% which was very low, depicting that students have a very light understanding, conceptualization, and awareness regarding plagiarism..

The purpose of giving correct citation is to avoid being accused of plagiarism majority of students out of 332 total students said “yes,” and a minority of students responded with “No.” A large majority of students positively responded that the purpose of giving correct citation is ‘to show that you have read some relevant research papers or books.’ Regarding the students’ responses, they may understand that their written work can be accepted if they cite sources. However students’ responses to the questionnaire indicate that most students (68%) have basic knowledge of plagiarism and what constitutes plagiarism. Although the basic concept of plagiarism and familiarity with the primary cases of plagiarism of the student has been found in the analysis, the ratio is relatively low (See appendix A table-2). Many of them had a misunderstanding and were unsure in the following cases of plagiarism such as, ‘Re-using a part of their previous work to submit in another course’ (43.1% yes) and ‘changing some words in another’s work and submitting it as their work (36%yes). ‘Taking ideas from a source such as a brochure, advertisement, television programmed, or radio programmer, and using them as his or her own without acknowledgment’ (50.3%) said yes.

Most students were aware of some obvious cases of plagiarism, such as submitting another’s work word for word as someone’s own, and ‘copying word-for-word from a source without giving proper citation ‘Re submitting or re-using some part of another’s work as their own, and Word-for-word copying of text without using quotation marks and proper citation’ was considered a case of plagiarism by most students shown in the replies. However, a large number of students had a misunderstanding. It was unaware in the following cases of plagiarism such as, ‘re-using or re submitting a part of their previous work to submit in another course’ minority of students agree to the statement as plagiarism, similarly a case of “changing some words in another’s work and submitting it as his or her own’ very low number of students were aware of it

as plagiarism. In the case of taking or copying ideas from a source such as a brochure, advertisement, television program, or radio programmer, and using them as their own without proper referencing, a minority of students thought this was plagiarism.

Table- 3 Reasons for students' plagiarism

Items		Frequency/ Percentage Y	Frequency/ Percentage N
	They think lecturers/teachers will not care.	206 62.0	126 38.0
	They think they will not get caught	241 72.6	91 27.4
	They run out of time	258 77.7	74 22.3
	They do not want to learn anything, just pass the assignment	231 69.6	101 30.4
	They cannot express another person's ideas in their own words	234 70.5	98 29.5
	They do not understand how to cite appropriately	244 73.5	88 26.5
	7. They are not aware of penalties for plagiarism.	254 76.5	78 23.5
	8. They are unable to cope with the workload	246 74.1	86 25.9
	They think their written work is not good enough	260 78.3	72 21.7
	They feel that the is task completely beyond their ability	234 70.5	98 29.5
	It is easy to copy and paste from internet	295 88.9	37 11.1
	Using information from the website is free and it does not need to be cited.	295 88.9	37 11.1
	Copying ideas from another's person is one of the learning strategies	136 41.0	178 53.6
	They feel they can get high marks.	251 75.6	81 24.4
	Plagiarism is not seen as wrong	168 50.6	164 49.4
	They are lazy	242 72.9	90 27.1
	They think it is the fastest way to finish assignments	295 88.9	37 11.1
	They have always written like that	214 64.5	118 35.5
	They follow others and they think other students will do the same.	239 72.0	93 28.0

The descriptive analysis showed that the majority of the students, i.e., 76.5% were aware of the penalties for plagiarism. Still, they also agreed that 72.6% responded with yes that they thought they would not get caught for plagiarism. Eighty –two percent (82%) of the students admitted that they find it very convenient (easy) to copy information directly from the source (Information available on the internet). Seventy-five percent of students (75%) have a positive inclination towards the notion that information from the website is free to use however one pleases. The findings also showed that 72% of students plagiarizing under the influence of other students or their peers has an impact on students' plagiaristic behavior as most of the students stated that students follow others' plagiarism behavior. They think that the others will do the same. Fifty percent (50.6%) of the students do not see plagiarism as wrong. However, it is shocking that the majority, 73% of students, also do not know how to cite correctly

The finding showed that 'the university has policies and procedures including penalties for plagiarism,' but a very low percentage of students, 44.3%, are aware of such policies(See appendix-A table 4). Similarly, in response to 'Plagiarism policies guidance and penalties for plagiarism which are available to students in the University,' 44.3% were aware of it and were informed in class. In response to the questions regarding how teachers treat plagiarism, students believed that t the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student in the University' 51.5% of the students' answers were positive responses the question positively. Students overall had very low knowledge awareness regarding plagiarism and its policies

The major source of information and support students get is from their teacher's lectures and advice in their classes in their respective departments. There is almost no concept of workshops to support the avoidance of plagiarism in universities. 52.7% show that they are equal to no workshops held at university to guide the students about plagiarism awareness and how to avoid it, which needs to be looked upon by university management and can help in giving awareness to the students regarding plagiarism.

Findings of research question number two

Thematic analysis revealed respondents defined plagiarism as copying and pasting content or word-for-word copy without references. Others described it as copying others' original work without giving credits or proper citations. As respondent ten defined, *"Simple copy paste is called plagiarism, meaning you copy (the content) and you paste it"* (T10, MPhil).

Apart from copy, paste minority of research respondents told the researcher the types of plagiarism and described a type of plagiarism as self-plagiarism.

Still, it was also found that most research respondents were unaware of the types of plagiarism. Only a few respondents answered self-plagiarism and ghostwriting as plagiarism types and were mainly unaware of them. Respondent 7 said, *"There are some types, but I do not know."* (T7, Masters).

When asked the type of plagiarism committed by the student was copying of the content found on the internet or any other source and paste it on their document without giving any citation or references.

Respondent 5 said, *"They simply copy and paste from the internet and without giving any credit or even paraphrasing without citations; that is what they do."* (T5, MPhil)

Another type of plagiarism that respondents told was self-plagiarism *"Apart from copy-paste ... Students do self-plagiarism as well"* (T2, Masters)

Respondent also reported the incidents of students buying stuff online or hiring a writer to do their assignments., and the respondents also reported ghostwriting incidents. It was also found out that few lecturers were not aware of *the type of plagiarism* when asked about it.

Respondent 7 said, *"There are some, but I do not know."* (T7, Masters).

In connection with the *reasons for plagiarism behavior*, the majority of lecturers said that they lack plagiarism awareness and how to avoid it. Respondent 2 says they are *unaware of it as a theft. It is illegal when they are unaware of something ...* (T2, Masters)

Another reason for the students' plagiaristic behavior was that they think that they will get away with it. Likewise, respondent 1 mentioned that *"they think that teacher will give us marks they will not notice so they submit it as copied from the internet and submitted to us as it is"*(T1, MPhil)

A large number of lecturers endorsed the notion that technology and its feasibility is a significant contribution to the plagiaristic behavior of the students Respondent 8 pointed out, *"The stuff is available on the internet, this thing attracts them the work which is available readymade things are available on the internet on the different sites."*(T8, MPhil)

Another reason teachers gave was that the they sometimes teachers themselves are not aware of plagiarism, so they cannot guide their students.

And respondent 6 added, *"Plagiarism is a common practice it is not just students but faculty even."* (T6, MPhil)

The qualitative research analysis of the lecturer's interviews gave an insight into the phenomenon *that many students commit plagiarism because* they are unaware of its consequences. Being unaware of the consequences contributes to the student's plagiaristic behavior; as was put by respondent one, *"They do not know the consequences of plagiarism"* (T1, MPhil) Especially students from public sector universities are unaware of the consequences of plagiarism. Since they are unaware, they think it is normal practice. As for the awareness part regarding the consequences of plagiarism, some lecturers and universities tell their students about the plagiarism policies and their consequences at orientations. Moreover, they tell them during classes before the tasks if they have missed the orientation. Awareness regarding plagiarism and its implications is mainly reserved for higher classes such as MS/Ph.D. and, in some cases, at research courses in seventh and eighth research..

The lecturers were asked whether the university *has any policies regarding* plagiarism and whether the students and teachers have been informed. According to the findings, many universities, whether public

or private sector, do not have any policy when it comes to plagiarism policy. As respondent 5 said, *“There is no written or explicit policy regarding plagiarism.” (T5, MPhil)* Some universities have a policy regarding plagiarism, but it is usually exercised strictly at a higher level like MS/Ph.D. level, not for BS level.

Some lecturers were unaware of policies regarding plagiarism *“I do not know about such information” (T9, Masters)*

In connection with the *measures taken* by lecturers and University management to deal with plagiarism lecturers mentioned that the provision of Turnitin software was one of the measures that the university took to deal with plagiarism.

But these were lecturers reported that they have no access to the plagiarism detection software for checking the students’ plagiarism. Another measure taken by lecturers was that they would give plagiarism awareness lectures to the students before giving them any assignments.

Most teachers told us there are no training workshops or seminars for plagiarism awareness and how to avoid it. They are under the impression that plagiarism awareness and avoidance should be taught at later MPhil and Ph.D. levels.

There are no plagiarism-related policies in the first and second years of BS. Lecturers at the BS level suggested that the penalties for plagiarism should not be as severe as at the BS level at the university because they are at a learning stage that may affect their studies.

Discussion

According to our findings, it can be concluded that student’s inadequate and unclear understanding of plagiarism and its concepts. Their concepts regarding plagiarism and its types are very unclear, such as ghostwriting, self-plagiarism and paraphrasing. They are unaware of how to avoid plagiarism. When it came to the types of plagiarism, lectures, too, were unaware of them. The main reasons students commit academic

dishonesty are that they have poor language and creative writing skills and have no fear of getting caught and its consequences and easiness of doing it. Availability of content online and easy access to technology also contributed to the cause of plagiarism. The lecturers backed up these notions and admitted that the students have no fear of getting caught or the way to get away with plagiarism and can cheat the plagiarism detecting software. It was also found out that when it came to university policy for plagiarism, academic support, and guidance, students are unaware of it. Lecturers perceive these policies for high-level MS and Ph.D. students but not for undergraduates. However, there are no strict policies and penalties for plagiarism for undergraduates. The plagiarism detecting software is the only support for the university and higher-level students. These discrepancies in the university system might have influenced the perceptions of students and faculties regarding plagiarism, and they might not take it as a serious matter. It is suggested that universities should give students awareness of plagiarism from the first year of their academic year. Policies regarding plagiarism should be implemented as penalties. Researchers suggest that there should not be harsh penalties at the undergrad level. Accessibility of plagiarism detecting software should be available to all teachers, not for higher levels.

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