

**PLAGIARISM: PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF UNIMAS  
HUMANITIES UNDERGRADUATES**

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This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a  
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The project entitled ‘Plagiarism: Perceptions and Practices of UNIMAS humanities undergraduates’ was prepared by Mavis ak Valentine Jhir and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Education with Honours (*Teaching English as a Second Language*).

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **PLAGIARISM: PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF UNIMAS HUMANITIES UNDERGRADUATES**

**MAVIS AK VALENTINE JIHIR**

Plagiarism has been a global issue worldwide and this is not a new issue in tertiary education. The aim of the study was to investigate the perceptions and practices of UNIMAS humanities undergraduates on plagiarism. 311 participants (221 females and 90 males) of Year 2, Year 3, and Year 4 undergraduates from ten humanities courses in the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, and the Faculty of Social Sciences in UNIMAS were involved in this study. Besides that, 10 UNIMAS humanities lecturers were interviewed on their understanding of plagiarism, their perceptions on the seriousness of plagiarism, and the reasons for undergraduates' plagiarism. The study was conducted by using a survey research in which questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed for the purpose of data collection. The results showed that the undergraduates' ability to identify plagiarism acts was on average and their views on the seriousness of plagiarism acts were also on average. The main reason for undergraduates' plagiarism in this study was due to poor academic skills. With this study, the undergraduates would have awareness toward the seriousness of plagiarism acts.

## **ABSTRAK**

### ***PLAGIAT: PERSEPSI DAN AMALAN MAHASISWA/MAHASISWI PROGRAM KEMANUSIAAN DI UNIMAS***

**MAVIS AK VALENTINE JIHIR**

*Plagiat telah mejadi satu isu seluruh dunia di mana isu ini bukanlah perkara baru di institusi pengajian tinggi. Matlamat kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat persepsi dan amalan mahasiswa/mahasiswi program kemanusiaan di UNIMAS berkenaan plagiat. Seramai 311 respondens (221 perempuan dan 90 lelaki) dari Tahun pengajian kedua, ketiga, dan keempat yang melibatkan sepuluh program kemanusiaan dari Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia dan Fakulti Sains Sosial terlibat dalam kajian ini. Di samping itu, 10 orang pensyarah telah ditemu ramah mengenai pemahaman mereka berkenaan plagiat, persepsi terhadap plagiat dan sebab-sebab mahasiswa/mahasiswi plagiat. Kajian ini berbentuk tinjauan, soal selidik dan temu-ramah bagi tujuan pengumpulan data. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahawa pemahaman mahasiswa/mahasiswi berkenaan plagiat masih di tahap sederhana dan data juga menunjukkan yang isu plagiat dipandang sederhana serius. Sebab utama mereka plagiat adalah kurang kemahiran akademik. Kajian ini akan memberi kesedaran kepada mahasiswa/mahasiswi supaya tidak memandang remeh isu ini dan mengambil langkah untuk menghidari amalan ini.*

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Chapter overview**

This chapter starts with the presentation of the background of the study. Then the present study is introduced. It includes research aims, research questions, scope of the study, and significance of the study. This is followed by the definition of key terms.

### **1.1 Background of the study**

“As if there was much of anything in any human utterance, oral or written except plagiarism. The kernel, the soul – let us go further and say the substance, the bulk, the actual and valuable material of all human utterances – is plagiarism.” (Twain, 1903 as cited in Marshall & Garry 2005).

The term “plagiarism” is used to explain a wide range of acts (Oliphant, 2002 as cited in Arbib & Yaari, 2004). “The presentation of another’s words or

ideas as your own” is the well-accepted definition in literature (Babble, 1998, as cited in Arbib & Yaari, 2004).

Furthermore, plagiarism is usually defined as “passing off someone else’s work or writing as your own” (McDowell & Brown, The Higher Education Academy). They indicate that students who take a large sections of a published text, or a whole essay and incorporate them into an own essay or assignment then transforms it possibly by changing the font or layout of the essay without any acknowledgement is accountable of plagiarism. Most academics will recognize the experience of students who unconsciously copying a word for word with the original text.

No doubt that plagiarism has been a global issue in this world. Several studies had been done regarding the issue of academic dishonesty or plagiarism in higher education for example Devlin and Gray (2007), Marshall and Garry (2005), Lambert, Ellen and Taylor (2003), Stokes and Newstead (1995) and etc.

Before 90s, plagiarism is only limited to the printed sources such as books, encyclopedias, newspapers, and articles. However, in the 90s, the use of internet has widened the opportunity to plagiarism because the information can easily be obtained from the websites (Arbib & Yaari, 2004).

For instance, Stokes and Newstead (1995), Ashworth, Bannister and Thorne (1997), Aluede, Omoregie and Edoh (2006), Devlin and Gray (2007) etc found out that there were many reasons why students plagiarize. These include desire for a better grade, pressures include time pressure, stress, pressure from the family and society, poor academic skills, poor understanding of plagiarism, peer influence etc.

## **1.2 Research problem**

Plagiarism has been a global issue particularly in tertiary education. It happens worldwide. Fifteen Malaysian students had been caught plagiarized in an Australian university. This not only affected the good name of our country but had also attracted attention from the media. Hence, this issue cannot be taken lightly as it will affect the integrity of the university and Malaysian students to compete with the international students (Media Statement, 2003).

Plagiarism occurs either intentionally or unintentionally. The act of plagiarizing should be prevented because it is an unethical act. It is also important to obtain a clear understanding on plagiarism in order to avoid committing in any form of plagiarism acts.

Moreover, there are several factors that cause plagiarism. Findings from several researchers indicated that cheating are caused by 'time pressure' and 'desire for a better grade' (Roig & Ballew as cited in Lambert, Ellen & Taylor, 2003).

Plagiarism can be seen as a problem in higher institution as it is an act of unethical academic practice. UNIMAS is not an exception from the occurrence of plagiarism. Before this issue becomes a norm and more serious in the university, it is crucial to carry out an investigation as an act of deterrence. Therefore, the present study will explore on the aspect of perception and practices of undergraduates on plagiarism.

## **1.3 Present study**

The study aims to investigate the perception and practices of lecturers and undergraduates in UNIMAS in relation to the issue of plagiarism. It attempts to answer the research questions as below:

### **1.3.1 Research questions**

- i) Are the UNIMAS humanities undergraduates able to identify the acts of plagiarism?
- ii) What do UNIMAS humanities lecturers understand on the meaning of plagiarism?
- iii) What are the perceptions of UNIMAS humanities undergraduates toward the seriousness of plagiarism?
- iv) What are the perceptions of UNIMAS humanities lecturers toward the seriousness of plagiarism?
- v) What are the plagiarism acts committed by UNIMAS humanities undergraduates?
- vi) What are UNIMAS humanities undergraduates' reasons for plagiarism?
- vii) What are UNIMAS humanities lecturers' reasons for undergraduates' plagiarism?

### **1.5 Scope of the study**

The present study is only concentrating on the exploration and investigation of the undergraduates' perceptions and practices of plagiarism in UNIMAS humanities courses.

The focus of the present study is thus centred on what lecturers and undergraduates perceive as plagiarism practice followed by their perception on the seriousness of plagiarism acts, the admission of plagiarism practice, and the possible causes of plagiarism.

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

This study would provide awareness to the undergraduates, lecturers, and the faculties on the seriousness of plagiarism acts in the university. This issue

cannot be taken lightly and it is crucial for the educators and the university to find the best ways to discourage and reduce the acts of plagiarism.

By doing this research, the university can improve on their policy regarding plagiarism issue. This can prevent more and more plagiarism acts occur in the university. Thus, the quality of the undergraduates will be increased and improved. This can also contribute to the good name of the university.

## **1.6 Definition of key terms**

### **1.6.1 Plagiarism**

In this study, plagiarism refers to Babble's (1998) definition that it is "a presentation of another's words or ideas as your own" (cited in Arbib and Yaari, p. 2, 2006). Howard discusses four types of academic plagiarism: (a) "submission of a paper that was written by other student"; (b) "patchwriting- copying sentences from a source and mixing them with your own words without attribution"; (c) "failure to cite sources"; and (d) "failure to use quotation marks" (Arbib & Yaari, 2004).

### **1.6.2 Perception**

Campbell (1967) defines perception as closely associated with something that is being observed and being said about it. It is a process that derives someone to form an impression about someone or something. In this context of the study, perception is described as how the lecturers and undergraduates perceive the act of plagiarism and the seriousness of this offence.

### **1.6.3 Practice**

Richardson (1995) defines practice as the structure and content of the mental states that leads someone to an action. In this context of the study, practice is described as what the lecturers and undergraduates consider as plagiarism practice and the admission of any forms of plagiarism.

## **1.7 Chapter review**

This chapter had presented the background of the present study, research problem, research questions, scope of the study, and significance of the study. Then, the definition of key terms was presented. The next chapter will present the review of related literature on plagiarism.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Chapter overview**

This chapter starts by presenting the definition of plagiarism, and then followed by the review of related literature which includes the extent of plagiarism, and the possible causes of committing plagiarism. Plagiarism can influence the good name of a university and the community that surrounds it. It has gained concern to the previous researchers who had taken the efforts to explore on this issue with the hope to discourage this unethical academic practice. Finally, the chapter ends with the review of the chapter.

#### **2.1 What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism is not a new issue in tertiary education. Howard discusses four types of academic plagiarism: (a) “submission of a paper that was written by other student”; (b) “patchwriting- copying sentences from a source and mixing them with your own words without attribution”; (c) “failure to cite sources”; and (d) “failure to use quotation marks” ( in Arbib & Yaari, 2004). Despite this, there are many definition on plagiarism, but the one well-accepted definition in literature is

“the presentation of another’s words or ideas as your own” (Babble, 1998, p. 1 as cited in Arbib & Yaari, 2004).

Plagiarism has been a global issue worldwide. Several studies have been done on this issue (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997; Marshall & Garry, 2005 etc). The present study aims to explore on undergraduates’ perception and practices of plagiarism of what they consider as the act of plagiarism, the seriousness of this act, and the possible causes of plagiarism.

Michaels and Mieth (1989) noted that students who usually commit academic misconduct in college will repeat the same behaviour in their careers (as cited in Ferrell and Daniel 1995). A research done by Lambert, Ellen and Taylor (2003) on 350 lecturing staff and 380 students on a range of disciplines at universities and polytechnics through New Zealand had aimed to explore on how different groups perceive academic dishonesty and their reasons committing it. The paper also presented the findings of investigations into the reasons given for academic dishonesty and rates of prevalence within New Zealand tertiary institutions.

The method used in their study was survey questionnaire. Three questionnaires were developed and administered to academic institutions, teaching staff and students. The questionnaires were sent to the registrars of all New Zealand polytechnics and universities that consisted of five pages in length which requested for the respondents’ view on a range of given scenarios on the severity of the actions, appropriate penalties, frequency of behaviour, their actual experience of the dishonest act, and their actions taken. They were also asked on the methods used to try to reduce dishonest practices, and their views on the effectiveness of their institutions regarding academic dishonesty policies.

The findings revealed that almost 80% of the staff reported that they had some experience of students either paraphrasing or copying directly from a web site, book, or periodical without acknowledging the source. Students reported that

lack of referencing is one of the most common forms of serious dishonest act. 95.6% of the staff had experienced dishonest practice during their tertiary teaching career and 80.3% of the students reported that they had engaged in any of the listed dishonest practices.

Besides that, the researchers were interested in finding out the differences of the perceptions between staff and students in viewing each of the scenarios as an example of serious cheating, minor cheating or not cheating. They were differentiated by ethnicity, gender, age and faculty. The results showed that academic staff and students had different perceptions of each of the scenarios given in the survey. These will be further discussed under the section of seriousness in chapter 2.4.

In general, academic staff viewing acts of academic dishonesty more seriously than the students. Demographics seem to have effect on the perceptions of seriousness. Moreover, this study suggested that demographics show an anecdotal effect on “prevalence and perceptions of seriousness” (Lambert, Ellen & Taylor, 2003, p. 101). Female students view dishonesty practice more serious than male students. There was a higher percentage of males who admitted to acting dishonestly than females in every category. Students in under-30 year’s age group were more likely to cheat in academic context than their over-30 years counterparts who view academic dishonesty more seriously.

This study provides a larger picture of academic dishonesty in a broader sense. The study also involves both lecturers and undergraduates at universities and polytechnics in New Zealand. However, the researchers claimed that the findings of the study were limited because of the restriction in the sample size and sample constitution. There were more university staff who responded compared to the polytechnic staff. The researchers suggested that a larger range of respondents would have improved the findings of the study.

## 2.2 Extent of plagiarism

A study done by Marshall and Garry (2005) conducted on 181 students enrolled in three different first year courses at a medium-sized New Zealand university aimed to explore on students attitudes, perceptions and understandings of intellectual property. Survey questionnaires were employed for their data collection. Scenarios were presented to find out the contextual factors that may influence students to plagiarize and also the seriousness of this practice. Their findings revealed that 72% of the respondents admitted that they had engaged in any forms of plagiarism.

The results of their study were grouped into seven categories which included the extent of plagiarism, lack of understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, age, gender, international students, context, and relationship between violation of copyright and plagiarism. The researchers revealed that there was a large proportion of students were unclear on the meaning of plagiarism. They suggested that there was 'little value' to simply asking students whether they understand plagiarism or they themselves have engaged in this act before (Marshall & Garry, 2005, p. 461).

Demographic factors such as age, gender, and context were also presented in their study. Their findings suggested that younger students were more likely to correctly identify plagiarism than older students. This could be the effect that their older students sample size was rather small. The results also showed that there was no significant observable difference between males and females in identifying plagiarism. Looking at the differences on demographic influence on plagiarism such as age and gender could be rather confusing. However, it is still worthwhile to explore.

Lastly, the study indicated that the context such as copying from the web was seen as less serious, but it was frequently admitted to. This can be supported by Morgan's (1996) study which suggested that the use of internet, full-text CD-

ROM databases, electronic journals and etc had contributed to the rise of plagiarism because the sources can be easily downloaded for one's own purposes (as cited in Ashworth; Bannister & Thorne, 1997).

Marshall and Garry (2005) conducted the study on first year students. Therefore, the participants might have little knowledge in understanding the meaning of plagiarism. This study would have been enhanced if the researchers select second or third year students as their participants.

Even though previous literature stated that younger students cheat more often in the academic context, there is no concrete evidence showing how age contributes to the decision to cheat or plagiarism (Haienes et al, 1986; Straw, 2002 as cited in Marshall & Garry, 2005).

Furthermore, Stokes and Newstead's (1995) conducted two studies, whereby the first study was on assessing staff and students perceptions of the seriousness and frequency of different types of cheating which was then improved and utilized for the second study that aimed to elicit self-reports by undergraduates and the reasons of doing it.

This first study was conducted on 20 staff and 112 second-year students from the psychology departments of one old university and one new university. The questionnaires were developed from a set of cheating behaviours compiled based on North American literature and from current students' discussions. It included the seriousness of cheating which was measured on a six-point scale from 1 (not at all serious) to 6 (very serious), while the frequency was measured on percentage scale from 0% (nobody did it) to 100% (everybody did it at least once). Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the researchers decided not to ask how frequently students cheat instead they were asked to estimate how frequently cheating occurred in their year group. Minimal demographic data were requested including sex, age (18-20; 21-24; 25+), and course. Students at the age of 25+ viewed cheating more seriously and less frequently committing cheating

compared to the younger students. There was no significant difference between males and females due to the low number of males students in the sample.

The second study carried out by the same researchers on 128 students from two (non-psychology) science departments in the same university by using almost the same types of behaviour from the first study. This enables correlations to be made between perceived frequencies of cheating and actual cheating (Stokes & Newstead, 1995, p. 166). The variables included in this study were sex and age differences, whether there was any relationship between self-reported cheating and reasons for studying a degree, perceived own ability, and perceived self-standards.

The results suggested that there was no significant difference between males and females however male respondents admitted more cheating than females. There was also no significant difference between the age group reported on cheating and there was no relationship between the two variables (self-rated ability and self-imposed standards) on cheating. Due to confidentiality, the disciplines cannot be identified.

It was also indicated that the main reasons for cheating were time pressure and to increase the mark and the most common reasons for not cheating were it was pointless and it was immoral ((Stokes & Newstead, 1995, p. 169). Finally, there was no relationship between the reason for students studying a degree and the amount of cheating they committed.

It could be concluded that the researchers' studies were good because much efforts had been taken in conducting the two studies and the second study had been elicited from the first study where better results were gathered. Improvements had also been made for the enhancement of the results.

Moreover, Roig and Ballew's (1994) study indicated that several studies have shown that 67%- 86% of students in tertiary level involved in academic

misconduct were male rather than female (as cited in Lambert, Ellen and Taylor, 2003). Both studies were concentrating on the broader issue of academic misconduct. Therefore, there was no clear percentage of males committing plagiarism.

### **2.3 Reasons for plagiarism**

There were several factors that cause plagiarism. Findings from several researchers indicated that cheating were caused by time pressure and better grade (Roig & Ballew as cited in Lambert, Ellen & Taylor, 2003).

Likewise, Stokes and Newstead's (1995) study (the second study as mentioned above) on 128 students from science departments in a university in the UK from their findings suggested that there were several reasons on why students cheat. The main reasons were time pressure and to increase the mark (Stokes & Newstead, 1995, p. 168). The authors claimed that the increases in the amount and importance of coursework were actually encouraging students to cheat. How far the statement is true is yet to be proved.

For instance, Ashworth, Bannister and Thorne's (1997) study on nineteen students in UK University by using a qualitative research interviewing aimed for discovering students' perception of cheating and plagiarism in academic work and assessment. Their findings were categorized into three main headings which were "cheating and plagiarism", "personal reactions to cheating", and "the institution" (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997, p. 190).

The researchers found out that there was a strong moral basis to students' views such as friendship, interpersonal trust and good learning. Students perceived factors such as alienation from the university due to lack of contact with staff, the impact of large classes, and the greater emphasis on group learning were actually encourage cheating (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997, p. 187). Besides that, the researchers also found out that students viewed paraphrasing

from a textbook or making use of another student's bibliography was seen as less serious. It was seen that the students had lack of understanding on the meaning of plagiarism.

Generally, students viewed plagiarism far less meaningful than the academic staff, and it ranks comparatively low in the student "system of values" (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997, p. 210). From the analysis of the interviews, the researchers found out that students were ignorant to follow the correct procedure of referencing. More than one interviewees admitted that they were uncertain whether or not they need to reference materials properly through the halfway of their degree course. The researchers concluded that their study had given a way to assist the academics in their attempts to communicate appropriate norms. The study had given a message for the students to emphasize and practice to reference properly. They had conducted a good study since the qualitative method was employed. However there was drawback since this study had limited amount of interviewees.

In addition, McCabe and Trevino (1997) conducted a survey to students at nine medium to large state universities on the influences individual and contextual factors on self-reported academic dishonesty. The researchers found out that academic dishonesty was influenced by a variety of individual and contextual factors (McCabe & Trevino, 1997, p. 391). The most prevailing influential factors were peer-related contextual factors. Among the contextual factors, fraternity/sorority membership, peer behavior and peer disapproval had the strongest influence. The authors suggested that fraternity/ sorority membership, peer behavior, and peer disapproval might provide the best framework for understanding academic dishonesty. In the same study, the authors found out that their findings were consistent with previous research which were older students, women, and students with higher GPAs were less self reported academic dishonesty whereas students who were active in extracurricular activities reported more academic dishonesty. This was a good study because it was a multicampus investigation regarding the issue of academic dishonesty. The results could be

useful to all the campus where the survey was conducted either for the intervention or for the improvement of the academic dishonesty policy.

Aluede, Omoregie and Edoh (2006) from Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma in Nigeria reviewed the current literature to support that academic dishonesty had been a contemporary problem in higher education. The authors stated that researchers such as Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2003; McCabe, 1992; Whitley, 1998 had begun to identify the factors that influence academic dishonesty in college and universities. These include competition, and pressures for good grades, tremendously demanding and unfair instructional situations, uncaring or indifferent faculty to their own teaching or to their students' learning, negligent attitudes on the part of the faculty towards academic dishonesty, peer pressures to support a friend, a withdraw sense of academic integrity and ethical values among students (Aluede, Omoregie & Edoh, 2006, p. 101).

Moreover, Pino and Smith (2003) conducted a surveyed on 721 students from Georgia Southern University (a medium-sized state university) aimed to investigate students' attitudes and behaviour about learning. The findings revealed that 52.8% of the respondents had never committed any acts of academic dishonesty and the remaining 47% admitted had committed some types of academic dishonesty. The results also showed that males were more likely to engage in academic dishonesty than females. Furthermore, the results suggested that watching too much television might increase the likelihood of academic dishonesty in order to make up for lost time. Those with an academic ethic were much less likely to engage in academic dishonesty. In addition, the researchers found out that their results regarding which age group of students cheat more were opposite from the previous literature (Haines et al, 1986 as cited in Pino & Smith, 2003). Moreover, they found out that factors such as age, social class, and working for pay had no importance in determining academic dishonesty. The researchers claimed that their study had some limitations mainly they only had one measure which was academic dishonesty whereby independent variables such