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ACADEMIC WRITING: CITATION IS TROUBLESOME AND PLAGIARISM IS NO BIG DEAL

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the seriousness of plagiarism in university students' written assignments. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) identify the plagiarism behaviours used by students to complete their written assignments; (2) determine students' attitudes towards penalties of plagiarism; and (3) determine reasons for the occurrence of plagiarism. Questionnaires were distributed to students enrolled in an academic reading and writing course at a non-research intensive Malaysian university. Analysis of 169 questionnaires showed all the students had been involved in some plagiarism behaviours to complete their assignments, primarily use of materials without properly acknowledging the source of the information. The students did not treat plagiarism as a serious act of academic dishonesty as shown by their preference for light penalties for students caught for plagiarism. It seems that the students' lack of awareness on the severity of plagiarism may be due to the lack of emphasis on inclusion of citations in assignments by lecturers. The findings suggest that it is not enough to teach students the conventions of citation and referencing but they need to be educated on the practices of academia, particularly pertaining to research, publications and academic honesty in use of materials.

Keywords: academic writing, plagiarism, academic integrity, academic dishonesty

Field of Research: *Language, Linguistic and Literature Studies*

1. Introduction

Put simply, plagiarism is "the theft of words or ideas, beyond what would normally be regarded as general knowledge" (Park, 2003, p. 472). Plagiarism has been defined in various tones of language. For students, the definition usually stresses that plagiarism is passing of other people's work as their own. For example, the University of Calgary Calendar defines plagiarism as "submitting or presenting work in a course as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular course when, in fact, it is not" (University of Calgary, n.d.). Although plagiarism occurs in a variety of settings, the focus in this paper is on plagiarism by students.

Plagiarism and cheating "share some common characteristics but [there are] also ... essential differences" (Flint et al., 2006, p. 150). Students and lecturers may have different interpretations of what constitutes plagiarism. Students may even receive conflicting information from lecturers on "boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable practices" (Flint, Clegg, & Macdonald, 2006, p. 152). The inconsistent and inequitable institutional policy and practices on plagiarism may have contributed to different understanding of plagiarism (Devlin, 2006; Walker, 1998).