

The Subjective Reality of the Reasons behind Plagiarism: A Phenomenological Analysis of Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is considered as one of the universal issues. Different research methods have been used to understand this phenomenon globally. It is not injurious to scientific community rather it affects the society as a whole. It creates hurdles in scientific knowledge by affecting the creativity and intellectual growth of the people. The present study explored the reasons behind undergraduate student plagiarism. Qualitative phenomenological approach has been used to capture the lived experiences of undergraduate students. In-depth interviews were taken from 13 final year undergraduate students of three different faculties of a public university in Karachi. The findings show that positive attitudes towards plagiarism, poor time management, language barrier, lengthy assignments, creative suffocation and negative role of teachers are among the major reasons behind student plagiarism. These findings can be useful for academicians and policymakers to understand the root causes of plagiarism so that they can formulate effective and student friendly policies in the system.

Introduction

The definition of plagiarism is still evolving in research. The concept of plagiarism invokes complex judgments and consequences depending upon the intent of an author (Drisko, 2022). It also depends upon the cultural settings and perceptions of the people (Yi, Nemery, & Dierickx , 2022). There are different types of plagiarism, and each type carries its own essence. Helgesson and Eriksson (2015) defined plagiarism as taking someone else's intellectual work and presenting it as your own but self-plagiarism deviates from this concept, using your own ideas in more than one place to gain benefits is known as self-plagiarism. Hence the borderline in the definition of plagiarism is getting credit for a job which you haven't earned.

There are two components of plagiarism: literal and intelligent. Literal plagiarism is done by the people who are not smart enough or do not have much time to hide their academic dishonesty. They plagiarized the whole paragraphs and

passages with little or no alterations. Whereas intelligent plagiarism is considered a serious crime. In intelligent plagiarism people manipulate other people's work, translate foreign language articles in another language, steal other's ideas and consciously present it as their own (Alzahrani, Salim, & Abraham, 2012).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to find out the reasons behind undergraduate student plagiarism and to understand its essence through students lived experiences. The researchers want to capture the phenomenon of plagiarism as undergraduate students perceive it in their lives.

Related Literature

In the quest of finding the reasons behind plagiarism Selemani, Chawinga and Dube (2018) research shows that most of the students admitted of doing plagiarism because of an academic pressure. In order to

beat this pressure and to meet assignments deadlines they go for the plagiarism. Plagiarism in this case is considered as an intentional and unethical act. Students attribute the poor time management to the short period of time given for the submission of academic assignments. Furthermore, they claim that most of the assignments are theoretical, and the material is easily available on the internet, that is why it is easier and time convenient for them to plagiarize (Forgas & Negre, 2010). Not prioritizing and planning the assignments and leaving it for the last minute often create desperation in students. In this desperation they copy other's work and take material from internet (Goh, 2015).

Students believe that the basic nature of all assignments is the same. Therefore, due to poor time management and laziness they plagiarize. They do not bother to give proper references and do not make efforts in citations due to the same belief (Dias & Bastos, 2014). Thinking about ideas and working to make it real takes time and effort. Copying and plagiarism are easier than thinking. That is why laziness makes them choose plagiarism (Dawson, 2004). Mental health along with plagiarism among students is also the rising studied phenomenon in academia (Tindall & Curtis, 2019). Studies have shown that stress, anxiety and depression are negatively related to self-control and self-efficacy (Schwarzer, 1992). Self-control and self-efficacy play an important role in plagiarism. The lower self-control and self-efficacy higher will be the plagiarism (Bruin & Rudnick, 2007). Students with lower self-control are more likely to lure in temptations and engage in academic dishonesty to gain immediate benefits (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1992). All of this creates negative emotionality among students. This negative emotionality is

significantly related to the positive attitudes towards plagiarism (Fu & Tremayne, 2021).

They see their peers plagiarizing and receiving gains and benefits without any costs and consequences. They also see the plagiarism of their teachers and those on senior positions which further motivate them in it. They take these examples and people as their role models and carry this behavior in their own academic journey (Thompson, 2006).

Undetected plagiarism encourages students to plagiarize. Seeing their peers and friends plagiarize and getting away with it makes them believe that plagiarism is not a serious issue for teachers (Batane, 2010). On the other hand, the academic environment also facilitates plagiarism. The students are viewed as customers, and their happiness comes at first. Parents and academicians failed to believe that learning is of utmost importance in academia. Lower grades and harsh remarks are challenged by the students and their parents. That is why teachers and staff think twice before giving grades. Many teachers are also not aware about the plagiarism detection software. They don't have the means and resources to use such software. As a result of which plagiarism remains undetected and unpunishable in many academic institutes (Thompson, 2006).

Methodology

Qualitative phenomenological approach has been used in the study as it explores the empirical world by observing and analyzing people's own words and seeks to find out the meaning people attach to their words and actions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It does not set out to approve or reject the preconceived hypothesis and theories rather it gathers in depth rich data and produces concepts, understandings and theories inductively through it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the

early twentieth century Edmund Husserl introduced phenomenology with the aim of providing the foundation of knowledge.

Phenomenology deals with real-life experiences and produces concepts which are directly linked with the people's consciousness and perceptions (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The present research explores the reasons behind undergraduate student plagiarism by taking in-depth interviews with 13 final year undergraduate students.

Purposive sampling was used, and data was taken from three different faculties of a public university in Karachi: the faculty of social sciences, the faculty of pharmacy, and the faculty of management and administrative sciences. Permission was taken from all the departments' heads and respondents were located by teachers' help. A researcher went into each class to introduce her research topic and gave her contact details. Only those students who claim to plagiarize the most voluntarily participated in the study and asked for complete anonymity and confidentiality. All the interviews were taken either in libraries, parks or in empty available classrooms, depending upon the ease of respondents. All the interviews were taken in Urdu and transcribed by the researchers. The final themes were reapproved by the respondents and any additional thing they wanted to add was incorporated accordingly.

Analysis

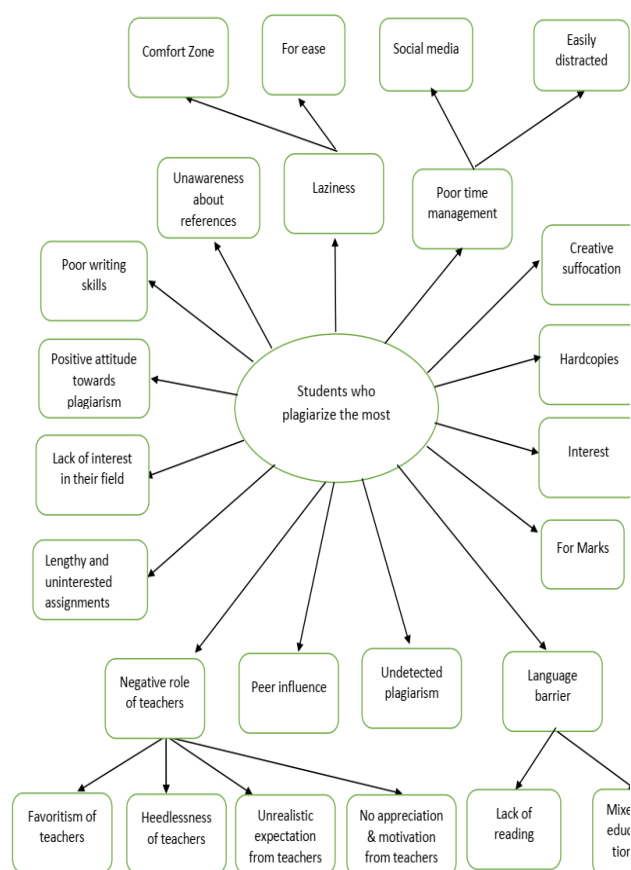
Unclear about References

As shown in fig 1 that students who claim to plagiarize the most are unclear about references. They know what plagiarism is but their definition is limited to copying only. The concept of references is familiar to them but is still ambiguous in many areas. They mostly associate references with research purposes only and do not apply them on assignments and other projects. The confusion about referencing techniques was also evident since not a single student knows about the different references' styles and their application.

Plagiarism is just copy paste only, references are not that much of importance. It's understood that we are students so we cannot write everything on our own and we have to take help from internet or other sources. So, it becomes very difficult to give the reference of everything. And on top of it all I do not even know how to give proper references. - R4.

References are only for research purposes. If I do a research assignment, then I give proper references while I do not give references in other random assignments. Why bother that much in regular assignments? And to be honest teachers are not going to check anyway. – R1.

Figure 1: Reasons for the students who plagiarize the most.



Another student said that references are the plagiarist's suicide because by giving references she will hand over the sources through which she has copy pasted. Therefore, she avoids references in her assignments.

I copy paste a lot, but I never give proper references. Research is something else but why should I give references in general assignments? So that the teachers go to these websites and see that I have plagiarized! –R7

Positive Attitudes towards Plagiarism

The students who claim to plagiarize the most have positive attitudes towards it (fig 1). They believe that although plagiarism at large is detrimental to the system, it is justifiable at the student level. They stated that students are at the learning stage, and

they need books and internet for it. Since they do not see plagiarism as an immoral act at student's level, they do not hesitate to do it in their work. They justify it with their right to learn, and they claim that it doesn't harm the original authors because students use their work for learning and academic gains and not for some professional recognition.

At a larger level plagiarism is bad because people are credit takers and this is wrong, but student plagiarism is different, and I think it is ok too because what do you do when you don't know something? Of course, you get help, and plagiarism is helpful for us in this situation. –R5

Plagiarism is not a bad thing. What do you do when you don't know about certain topics? Of course, you take help from different sources and that is a reason for their existence right! So that we who are not equipped with knowledge can go and take help from it. It is not a big deal. –R4

Plagiarism is okay for students because authors are writing for us and at times, we don't have words or ideas and through plagiarism we enhance our creativity and new methods or ways are introduced. I get to know how others have done things and what the structures behind it are. –R11

There are other students who consider plagiarism easy and time saving therefore they think that plagiarism is beneficial in order to meet deadlines and handle academic pressure.

Plagiarism is a very good thing. Everyone is stuck in many issues such as family problems, financial issues and other stuff so it becomes very difficult for every student to live a plagiarism free life. I am not saying that it should be allowed but there must be some leniency in it like 50% to 60% should be allowed. - R3

Plagiarism is good for me because it gets my work done and I never copy from one website only rather I take material from different websites and this way I get to see the diversity of available work on the topic. -R13

Plagiarism works for me at least it is better than nothing. I am a CR student in our class, so I have to maintain my positive image and I have many other things to do too so plagiarism is good for me. -R7

Laziness

Data shows that laziness plays an important role behind student plagiarism. Although there are many reasons behind plagiarism, laziness is considered as an innate excuse for plagiarism.

I'm a lazy person by nature so I avoid working hard in assignments. Sometimes my conscience tells me that you have come this far and have spent money on this degree so start working hard or at least give some of your efforts. But I don't because as I said I'm a lazy person. I know I can do much better in the future if I really want to because I'm a smart one too. Once I decide to start putting in effort then there is no force to stop me. -R9

Two of the respondents said that the lack of pressure and lack of motivation makes them lazy towards their academic work therefore they go for plagiarism.

Well, I plagiarize because of laziness, and I believe teachers are somewhat responsible for it. They just give us assignments with a due date but take no in-between reports. They never check our progress, and they are just interested in the final report. There is no pressure on us, and this lack of pressure makes me lazy. So, I leave it for the last day. -R4

I think motivation plays an important role in my laziness. I've no motivation left in

me because you know it doesn't matter whether you plagiarize or not. What difference will it make if I start working hard? It's all the same. So, I believe going with the flow (*jo chal raha hai wesa chalne do*) is a wise decision. - R6

For Ease

Plagiarism is easier as compared to putting effort into and producing materials. Students claim that going with the stream and choosing ease over difficulties is convenient for their academic life. This eases their laziness.

I think every student which you interviewed must say that it's because of easiness. It's giving us ease, that is why we are doing it. It's easier to get marks from plagiarism, it's easier to relief pressure through plagiarism and it's easier to get things done through plagiarism at the last moments. Ease is everywhere in plagiarism. -R1

I plagiarize because it's easy and time saving. I cannot sit on an assignment for hours when it's easy to copy paste because I have so many other things to do. There is field work, classes, deadlines, exams and other household chores to be taken care of. - R13

Comfort Zone

One respondent talked about his comfort zone and the anxiety he feels about leaving it. He said that he knows that he can overcome plagiarism if he starts sitting in library and leaving things which make him lethargic. But he doesn't do it because he has developed comfort in these things, and he is not willing to come out of his comfort zone.

You can ask the reasons behind plagiarism and can get many points, but you know what is actually all about our comfort

zone. I have seen it for myself and others. I can give you thousands of excuses for not working hard and many are valid too, but the thing is deep down I know that I am not comfortable leaving my comfort zones and start working on things which demand change in me. -R6

Poor Time Management

Students in interviews highlighted the importance of time management and its role behind student plagiarism. Poor Time management leave little to no time for their academic work and they chose plagiarism to cover it up.

I reach home at around 3 am then I prioritize my activities, and assignments come least in the list. The thing is that I waste a lot of time. I know I have time, but I waste it online or talking. Deep down I know in my heart that if I start managing my time then I can control plagiarism, but I don't. -R7

When assignments are lining up then it's better to plagiarize because it saves a lot of my time for other tasks. Tasks as in exam preparation or there are other related things attached to the students. So why not save some time? -R11

Apart from academic challenges two of the students said that they have to deal with job issues as well. Which makes them tired and drained from academic work. Therefore, it becomes very difficult for them to manage everything efficiently.

It's very difficult for me to manage time between my job and university. I go home through point and it's a very tiring journey to be in a crowded bus and that too standing. Then job has its other issues. When I reach home, I become so tired that I do nothing except use my phone because I've zero energy left for any other thing. -R4

I work and study together. I reach home at around 8 to 9 pm and then I also have to do some household chores. I just have weekends, and these are usually spent in coaching classes. Oftentimes I even forget the deadlines, so the only option left for a last-minute submission is copy pasting and it's easier and convenient too. -R1

Social Media

Phones and social media are found to be like quicksand which grabs the people and does not easily allow leaving. It is designed in a way which holds people's interest, and its content is full of entertainment and enjoyment. Different apps provide different materials for entertainment and switching apps while studying distracts students from their studies. This way their time becomes limited for academic work and plagiarism works as a savior for them.

This phone is a major cause of plagiarism. Almost every day I spend 5 to 6 hours on it. I regret a lot that my other tasks demand my attention but here I am wasting my time. Some days I feel extremely guilty then I say to myself that I'll start doing right things from tomorrow but you know this tomorrow never comes in my life. -R6

The world of social media is a shiny world, and it keeps attracting me. When I enter into this world then what assignment what study, nothing matters. I start watching one video then another then another. One episode is never enough because there are so many other episodes available too. So, all my assignments go to the pending and you know what happens when you leave it for the last-minute right! -R4

It's very hard for me to resist these messages and notifications while studying. Once I open an app then it's harder to put it down. I do feel guilty (many times) and put these apps in a freezer but now when I am

talking to you and really reflect upon the reasons then I realize that how much it is responsible for the last-minute copy paste because there is no other option left in the end. -R11

Easily Distracted

University life includes different experiences of academic and social life. Students believe that they become easily distracted through their social lives which leaves little time for their academic activities. Therefore, plagiarism in the last moments is welcomed by them.

Teachers give us lectures and assignments related to the syllabus, but I don't pay attention to the lectures and sometimes don't even attend the class. It's because of friends and university life. There is so much to explore, and I don't want to be boring like nerds. But the main reason is that I get easily distracted. One message or notification is enough to distract me even from the most important things. I always have this strange urge to check my phone every now and then. -R4

I am a very easily distracted kind of a person. I can set up the whole environment for studying or assignments and then somebody calls me for tea and hours are wasted in talking. I talk a lot. Whenever I sit to do an assignment, something comes to my mind, and I need to share it with others. This way a lot of my time is wasted and limited time remains for assignments. -R7

Language Barrier

Language as a barrier comes as a dominant theme in data analysis (fig 1). Students admitted that they are weak in English, and they do not feel good about it. They think that their educational foundation is not build in a way which cater English language writing and reading. They do not understand the

material in English therefore they plagiarize because they feel they are not able to paraphrase and to write their own.

Throughout my academic life I was never taught to learn English language. We just used to rattafy (memorize) everything and learning a language was never a priority for me or teachers. Then all of a sudden, we are expected to write everything in English! It's not going to happen that soon. I read articles to make my bases strong but they're still weak, so I plagiarize. -R5

I can write basic common words of English, but these are not appreciated in academia. So, I go for plagiarism because language is a barrier for me. -R12

Hopelessness was found in the students upon asking about switching language medium in academic writing. They think that they are good in Urdu and can explain better in it, but Urdu assignments and research (thesis) are not welcomed in different departments. Hence in order to meet the standards they plagiarize.

I am good at explaining things in Urdu. I usually take my exams in Urdu but those answers which are easily rattafiable (memorized) are written in English. Same with assignments too. But thesis here is not appreciated in Urdu so I'm more likely to compromise my creativity and will do it in English and for that plagiarism is must. See you can't get everything you want. Some things are going to be compromised in the process. -R6

Urdu assignments, especially Urdu in research assignments is not allowed here. I came from Sindh board and my English is not good. Whatever little English I've learned is through reading online. How can teachers expect me to give them all English

assignments! So, plagiarism is the cure here.
-R1

Mixed Education

Students having the blended educational background found to be struggling with English. They have two different language mediums in their early education and English was not there. They claim to have a difficulty in adjusting to the environment which requires English material. They have been trained in another language and adapting to English is difficult for them.

This is a very personal issue. Many times, it happens that when you start doing an assignment or research report then you have all the ideas and structure clear in your mind, but you cannot put it in words because of English. It took me hours and hours just to form a complete sentence and when I see a similar thing available on Google then I just copy and paste it and save myself from trouble. This is because my early and secondary education is from Saudi Arabia. I'm good in Arabic and can express my ideas in Urdu too but English is just not my thing.
-R9

Students like me whose early education is from interior design suffer a lot in universities. We are shy and not sharp like others. We cannot openly ask questions from teachers because we know we are lacking in so many things. Our educational foundation is weak, and we know it. We struggle a lot in adapting to this environment and language creates barriers. I even came to know about smartphones or Instagram here in my second year. I don't even understand hard topics in English let alone write it down in English. So, plagiarism comes here because I just don't understand the topics and language. -R8

Lack of Reading

Reading introduces new worlds and enhances vocabulary. Data shows that student's reading habits are related to the grip on language and plagiarism. Reading and paraphrasing play an important part in avoiding plagiarism. Lack of reading results in a lack of words which makes them less confident about their academic writing skills, and they trust other's work more than their own.

I was taught to focus on the syllabus only and reading was never encouraged. Our whole education system is designed this way as a result of which weak bases are created. I believe it's the parent's role to introduce reading to their children, but it didn't happen in my case. I cannot develop this habit at this stage of my life because there are so many assignments to catch up on and so much pending work to do. -R8

When you don't have words then you automatically copy other's words. It's all because of lack of reading. In university I do read some articles to know about scientific writing and skills, but I don't have the skills which other students have. I can't work on it because of assignments, labs, academic burden and other family responsibilities. A professional degree requires a lot from you. -R5

The problem is not limited to the English material only rather it is found in Urdu books too. Students are not familiar with Urdu terminology and jargon therefore they have difficulty in reading Urdu books.

Since my English is not good so I try reading Urdu books, but the sad thing is that I don't even understand the Urdu ones. Difficult wording is used in all of them. If you don't believe me, just take an Urdu book from this library and start reading one

paragraph, even if you won't be able to understand it. I go to my teachers for help but unfortunately some words are difficult, and they also don't know their meanings. So how am I going to help with it? How can I read it without understanding anything? -R6

Poor Writing Skills

Fig 1 shows that poor writing skills along with language barriers play an important role in student plagiarism. Although they have ideas of their own, they feel hesitant to put them in writing because of language issues and structural constraints. They feel that they cannot meet the standards if they start writing their own. Therefore, they choose plagiarism as this case.

To be honest, I have very poor writing skills, but I believe it's because of language and not skills. I can write very well in Urdu, and I enjoy writing, but I cannot write well in English because I am not good in language itself. Most of the assignments here require English so plagiarism comes in. -R9

I am not very good in writing, specially research writing because of its structure and requirements. I am comfortable in typing because of copying from the internet but writing dreads me. In fact, I was hesitant about this interview because I thought you might ask me to write down something, which gave me anxiety. -R6

I never try to write on my own because I know I just cannot do it. Exams are different but assignments and reports are another thing. The structure, proper sentences and difficult English is beyond me. -R13

Lack of Interest in Their Fields

Interest is one of the sources of motivation behind discoveries and exploration. Data shows that lack of interest in students' respective fields make them less motivated to

put effort into their own material (fig 1). Students talked about their difficulties during the early stages of their undergraduate program because they were struggling with accepting their fate and discovering their true passion simultaneously.

I selected this department because I didn't know about other disciplines at that time and it seemed to be affordable too. But now I'm kind of regretting it. -R1

I had no idea what to choose at the time of admission. I knew nothing about other disciplines other than the mainstream famous disciplines such as medical or engineering. So, a friend of mine told me that this department is good and then here I am. It was very difficult for me to adjust because I had no interest in it and when you have no interest in assignments then you just copy paste to get marks. But now in the final year I'm finding my interest here. There are so many things which touch my interest, but it does play its role in my plagiarism. R8

I wanted to be a lawyer but missed the entry test and I didn't want to waste my academic year, so I took admission in university. I had no idea about this department. I just wrote it in an admission form because we were required to write five disciplines and see here I am. I'm planning to switch my degree in the future. I might again apply for law or might go for civil services. -R4

Lengthy and Uninterested Assignments

Data reveals that lengthy and uninterested assignments are more likely to be plagiarized by students as compared to the assignments which require critical thinking. Students shared their experiences related to the different types of assignments. They believe that assignments should be designed according to the student's level and marks.

They are at the learning stage and are not able to write pages and pages on their own. Therefore, they choose the easier path of plagiarism.

There are some assignments in which you have no option other than plagiarism in fact I would say you feel forced to plagiarize. Last semester our teacher gave us a 20 marks assignment, and she was expecting 30-40 pages in a minimum time. I mean she knows that we are not able to write that much on our own and that too in English. She just gave us assignments without thinking about the student's caliber. She knew we would plagiarize, and we did plagiarize but she didn't say anything. I plagiarize because I needed those 20 marks and so did others. –R6

Some topics are so dry that I lose interest in it. For example, if an assignment demands theoretical bookish material, then what do you do other than copying! There are some teachers who say that length matters to them. Then in cases like these I save my time and energy and go for plagiarism because I know I cannot write that much on my own. –R11

Most of the assignments are so boring. I do not feel like doing them. I didn't plagiarize in an assignment in which we were asked to highlight women issues in Pakistani drama. In fact, I found it interesting and did everything myself, I didn't even feel the need to plagiarize, and I learned a lot from it. I hope other assignments are very interesting too. –R4

Negative Role of Teachers

Every single student who claims to plagiarize the most in data puts blame on teachers. They think that teachers are the ones who hold authority and can easily prevent plagiarism in the system. They have shared their experiences and talked about the negative

role of teachers in their decision to plagiarize. As shown in fig 1 this theme is further divided into the sub themes:

Unrealistic Expectations of Teachers

Students in data feel that teachers expect a lot from students. Students have no experience of university life, so they need time, leniency and cooperation from teachers. They also highlighted the issues of communication gap between teachers and students which makes them prone towards plagiarism.

To plagiarize or not to plagiarize depends upon the teachers. I am not saying it's all their fault, but they own 50% of the fault. They have unrealistic expectations from students. They know not everyone is capable to submit long assignments in a minimum time but they give it anyway. But to be honest I feel bad to plagiarize so I own 50% of the fault too. –R6

Teachers have very unrealistic expectations from us. They don't understand that it's difficult to meet back-to-back deadlines. And there is a major communication gap between teachers and students. We try to tell them about our workload, but they dismiss it as if it's nothing. I just stop saying anything now because it's of no use and plagiarism is an easier option in these cases. –R10

Three years of my life are wasted to meet these unrealistic expectations of the teachers. They assume that in graduation level everyone knows everything but we are not from the same background and we don't know everything. They didn't cooperate with me, so I feel embarrassed to ask questions. Beta you have already studied it in the previous semester, beta this is very basic you should already know, things like that demotivated me. What they will think of me and my question literally haunted me, so I

stopped asking questions completely. I started asking questions from google and this is how plagiarism started. Things are changing in the final year. Now I feel more comfortable with them, and they cooperate too but old habits die hard. –R8

No Appreciation and Motivation from Teachers

Students in data reveal that they do not feel appreciated and motivated by the teachers. They have avoided plagiarism and have submitted non-plagiarized assignments, but they did not receive any appreciation in return be it in marks or in words. As a result of which they started feeling demotivated and relying on others' work. They started questioning their own abilities and believed that their own work cannot be as good as other's work or internet material. Which led them towards plagiarism.

Teachers give us assignments, and they want specific wording for it. They want it in a proper structural manner and in a good English. They don't appreciate our general language and words. We are not going to learn it overnight, but they never appreciate our own writing, at least I have never received this appreciation here. I submitted an assignment which I had worked very hard, and my friend submitted the same assignment copied from the internet and you know what he got more marks and appreciation. This really demotivates me because I need marks too. You write for your readers and my readers are my teachers, so I plagiarize because my readers like it. –R12

It was my first year and first presentation. I was so motivated and full of energy. I started my presentation and within five minutes everyone in the class started laughing at me because of my weak English I still kept going on but then my teacher told me that it's way lower than my level and I

should take help from internet or books. He didn't say a word to those who were laughing at me which means he didn't care much about student's self-esteem. It shattered my confidence, and you know what happened next. A friend of mine who had copied each and every word from the internet received praises and good marks. That was it for me. That is how plagiarism came in to my life. –R1

Our teacher gave us an assignment. I went to her two days before the submission date and showed her two of my assignments on the same topic and asked her to tell me which one is better. That was my first assignment, I still remember the amount of hard work I had done in it. Anyway, one assignment was copied from the internet and another one was solely done by me. Believe me, she knew that first timers are not going to write that well in first attempt but still she said that copied one is better for submission. Then I thought why working hard and writing your own when you have everything available on the internet and too in an impressive manner. –R13

Heedlessness of Teachers

Data shows that students who plagiarize the most believe that teachers are not interested and affected by student plagiarism. They said that their teachers pay no heed to plagiarism and claimed that their teachers know about it but didn't do anything against it. That is how it got normalized in their academic life because there was no deterrent force to prevent it.

Every single one of us including me, other students and teachers possess a short cut mentality. Teachers are role models here; they create an environment of learning but unfortunately, they are not. What do you think even after all this experience they can't recognize plagiarize and non-plagiarize

assignments? They somehow silently endorse this behavior because they know we are doing it but they don't say anything. They know we are going to plagiarize but they still give us the same lengthy boring assignments so that they can easily check it. Critical assignments need both teachers and students to work hard so you will find these rare everywhere. There is same treatment and marks for everyone here. I got 85 in my one course, and it was all plagiarized, so I did and did the same on others too. –R9

I heard about the term plagiarism in my first year but didn't know much about it. Throughout my three years of graduation, I have been plagiarism, neither do I take it seriously nor do teachers say anything against it. I believed it is normal and it was okay. Now in the final year all of a sudden it became a theft, and we are expected to give plagiarism free thesis. Tell me how we are going to do it amidst the pressure and chaos of the final year? If teachers righted our mistakes and guided us during these first years, then things would have been different –R2

There are teachers who give assignments but never evaluate them. We know that they are not going to check each and every individual assignment, so I plagiarize in these assignments, it saves my time and energy. Then there are teachers who are very strict they detect plagiarism and they always correct us, I never plagiarize in their assignments because they care about our growth. –R11

Favoritism of Teachers

Favoritism is another element which is experienced by the students who plagiarize the most in data. They believe that their work and efforts are not recognized as much as the efforts of their favorite students. They shared their experiences of getting average marks

despite putting efforts and hard work. They see that teachers' favorite students get good marks and appreciation whereas they remain in the list of average students.

Favoritism is something which has definitely played its role in my plagiarism. I don't want to say this, but I do feel jealous and disappointed. Teachers don't respond to me the way they respond to their favorite students. So why working hard in this course because I will get the same 50-60 marks and they will get marks in 80s. – R8

Favoritism affects me badly. No one recognizes my efforts, and no one appreciates me. Teachers always praise their favorite students as if they are the only humans alive. I stayed up the whole night for an assignment and received no appreciation or recognition and as always, my favorites got all the spotlight. Their assignments might be better than mine, but my efforts were no less than them. This really demotivates me. I know I will work double hard if only teachers appreciate my efforts. –R7

Peer Influence

The environment of the university affects students. Data shows that students learned plagiarized behavior from their peers and started thinking it is normal because everyone around them was doing it (fig 1).

I came to the university with the notions of hard work, but everyone here plagiarizes. So, I did the same and still doing it. We are all going in the same direction. – R4

Everyone is doing it so I feel dumb or stupid about not doing it. Plus, teachers know about it too and they don't control it. It's kind of a norm here. –R9

No one is doing it on their own. Everyone is plagiarizing so I do the same. If

I were in a different environment where everyone works hard then I would be different. Have you seen the same Pakistani students going abroad and getting degrees with flying colors? They do it because they are in a different environment. We just don't have it here. -R6

Internet Dependency

One of the common things among all students who plagiarize the most in data is dependency on the internet. They feel comfortable with the internet as compared to books. They believe that books are expensive and require more effort than internet. The Internet also has everything and in an easier way. The language and techniques used by the internet are friendly and accessible to all, whereas books are difficult to access and understand. Furthermore, copying from the internet is just a click away whereas copying from books requires time and effort. I do write by myself on paper but not in assignments because assignments have proper structure and it's hard to follow it. Also, the internet has way better structure than

I could ever have so I just take material from there. -R6

I do rely mostly on the internet, but YouTube is my concept clarification tool. It gives me confidence because it teaches better and then I feel I can write down on my own. It's interesting and there is also less reading in it because it's in video format. -R13

Google is my go-to place. Whenever I find difficulty in anything then I go to google, sometimes YouTube too but mostly google... Not books because they are boring. -R2

I am dependent on google for information because you need information for assignments. Books here are old editions

and google has everything in it. It's easily accessible and it's easier to copy. -R10

We are living in an information overloading world. Whatever I am thinking has already been thought of by someone and is available on the internet in better wording. So, I just copy it from there, because ideas are almost the same. -R9

For Marks

Marks are found to be the main motivator behind plagiarism in the data (Fig 1). Students believe that their own work is not as good as the work available on the internet, hence they copy it from there. They have also experienced that their own work is marked less as compared to the plagiarized work. Therefore, in order to get good marks or maintain their GPA they plagiarize. I plagiarize for marks. In order to get a good job, you need a good GPA and for that you need good marks. I have been through it. I know that GPA is first impression and skills are secondary. Once you get a job, then skills come into play but in order to get this job or position, I need marks. That's even the university's requirement and plagiarism work well for me. -R12

The first thought while starting any assignment should be about reading and analysis because assignments are for our own skills development. But unfortunately, that's not my first thought. What I and other student do is to first go to the google because it's written better over there and copy stuff from it and submit it to teachers for marks. I know it's wrong, but it is what it is. -R8

I don't know about others, but I do it for marks. I believe that teachers are not going to check each and every individual assignment and they just need filled up papers which I do fill through plagiarism. -R4

Marks makes me happy, and plagiarism plays its important role in it. –R7

Undetected Plagiarism

Plagiarism detection software is found to be rarely used in data. No one in data knows about this software and they said that teachers have not mentioned it in class. The only tool which teachers use to detect plagiarism is their experience, not the software. Students believe that since their teachers are experienced and have checked these assignments many times, they know what is plagiarized and what is original. Hence students use different websites and extensive surfing before copy pasting.

The thing is that there is no check and balance. No one is interested in what's happening here. My plagiarism is never detected nor did anyone else. –R12

There are some teachers who caught plagiarism easily but not every teacher. These are mostly honest and experienced teachers who read the assignments and it's obvious because they have been reading it for years so it's easier for them to detect them. They usually insult the students and marks are deducted but nothing else. I never plagiarize in their assignments. –R7

There are some teachers who put effort in plagiarism like our research teacher but no one pays any heed to it. I am careful in her course but not in other courses because it never gets detected on any other course. –R9

Hard Copies

Respondents from management sciences faculties shared their experiences of plagiarism in hard copies. They said plagiarism gets detected in soft copies whereas hard copies are easy to plagiarize. They remain clueless upon asking the plagiarism detecting software and said that

references are not required in both soft and hard copies.

Covid has its impact on plagiarism. Earlier it was easy to plagiarize in hard copies, and it still is but the culture of soft copies is spreading rapidly and it's very difficult to plagiarize in soft copies because it often gets detected. –R10

I am very careful in soft copies because plagiarism gets detected in it while there are no worries in hard copies. You know technology is rapidly growing so the teacher maybe putting it in some software. Marks are deducted this way, so I become extra careful in it. –R1

Creative Suffocation

Creative suffocation is the theme solely found in the respondents of the faculty of pharmacy (fig 1). They shared their experiences in department where they feel that they have no room for creativity. They said that there are fixed standards for everyone, and no creativity is allowed in it. Science bounds them in formulas and theories, and they cannot add or modify it. They feel suffocated this way and some element of hopelessness was also found among them. They do not have research in their undergraduate level, and they believe that research is the only way through which they can show their creativity and innovate new ideas. This suffocation and hopelessness make them prone towards plagiarism.

There is a restrictive environment here, you cannot grow analytically here. We are different from social sciences students who have opportunities to work on their critical analysis skills while we are just required to memorize stuff with no critical backing. The goal is to get a degree only and no one cares about our critical analysis growth. I do want to work on my critical

analysis skills, but I can't because of the labs, assignments, exams, job and family responsibilities. Students who focus on their creativity suffer academically and this is a common observation; you can go and see it for yourself. I sometimes feel suffocated here. The saddest part is that there is no option other than to continue as it is going because I know there is less creative growth here. There is no research on master's level and market doesn't allow much creativity in our field. MPhil and PhDs had not still come up with any groundbreaking research because of their critical analysis skills. The world is much more than our syllabus only. I am more likely to pursue another field which will give a room for creativity and will allow me to grow intellectually. Pharmacy is my interest, but the process has taken away my passion and I need to find my passion. There is leniency here in plagiarism and 40% to 50% plagiarism is allowed because formulas and theories are the same, you cannot change it and have to copy it as it is. So, plagiarism is not much of a big deal here. –R5

The environment here is different. There is a lot of pressure on labs, assignments, classes and I have a job to manage too, so there is no time left for your analytical health. Plus, there is no room for creativity. The monotony of life makes you feel depressed. I didn't even realize it until I joined A. Academy. I was feeling low and afraid of what people would think of me if I started asking questions or started changing my ways. There was no critical input anywhere and it made me anxious day by day. I even lost friends in the journey and didn't know what to do in this situation. I used to go to the self-isolation zone because of demotivation and plagiarism was not a big deal for me because it is a norm. After exploring myself and my potential in A. Academy I try to avoid plagiarism as much as I can. Because now I know that I can do

anything on my own. I have started trusting myself again and this confidence is priceless. I wish people here also understand that critical growth is as important as any other academic achievement. My life before and after A. Academy is completely different like poles apart different. –R10

Structural Description of the Students Who Plagiarize the Most

There are number of reasons behind plagiarism and the foremost reason is that they are not fully aware of plagiarism. All the students define plagiarism as copy pasting only and limited to no knowledge of references is found among them. They do not know how to avoid plagiarism, and they are not equipped with the tools which undo plagiarism in their life. They consider it as a good thing and their positive attitudes towards plagiarism make them see nothing wrong with it. They do not do anything to overcome it because they consider it useful and a non-harmful act. All of their focus is to get a degree, and they want marks for it. Plagiarism does not put them in a list of bright students, but they get marks, nonetheless. Therefore, they plagiarize.

Their plagiarism remains undetected, and they are not aware about their positives and negatives in academia. They are caught up with the challenges of university life and household responsibilities so much so that they do not see beyond it. They feel that using social media and entertainment makes them relaxed therefore they spend their time on it. They feel hesitant to come out of their comfort zone because they have never done it before and are not aware of how to do it. Sometimes they do try to come out of their shell, but they feel trapped because they do not have words and techniques to avoid plagiarism. They do not read and write on their own because they do not understand the language and terminologies of books. They

have no reading habits which results in weak writing skills. They have tried to produce their own work with original and unique ideas, but they didn't receive any appreciation for it. In fact, their marks were detected in it.

The pool of undergraduate students is diverse, which includes quotas of interior and foreign students. These students come from different backgrounds with different languages. They struggle to adapt in the university environment and their biggest challenge is to overcome the language barrier. Since they have other issues to deal with so little time is saved for learning language on their own. Furthermore, material is available in English be it on internet and books. There are books available in Urdu too, but these are either outdated or written in ancient Urdu. They do not understand the language let alone write on their own. They do try to write in a language which they feel comfortable in, but their teachers and departmental policies are against Urdu.

They know that teachers are aware of the student's caliber, yet they expect certain standards which students don't have. They tried to maintain this standard, and they know it requires time and practice, but they are not ready to sacrifice marks in this process because they know that their own work is not good enough for teachers. All of them have at least one or two incidents in their early university life where they had given non-plagiarized work and got lower grades than ever. So, they lost confidence and started relying on the internet. They see the same topics or answers available on the internet, and they believe that they can never write as perfectly as internet therefore they copy material from there instead of writing their own. They do not try to avoid plagiarism because language works as a barrier for them. They do not give references because they

don't know how to give it. Hence plagiarism continues.

The structure of assignments and reports are foreign to them, and they are afraid that they cannot do it on their own. Lengthy assignments tell them that they are not capable to write that many words on their own so they choose plagiarism in this case. They do their interesting assignments with full honesty because it allows them to pursue their interests, and they feel caged in boring bookish assignments therefore they opt plagiarism. They don't feel good about their situation and do not have harmony with their field. They don't understand what they are doing here and do not know where they want to go. They don't choose to follow the unfamiliar paths because they feel that they do not have maps to guide them.

They do take the blame of their condition and share this blame with teachers also. They consider themselves as molten clay in the hands of teachers and teachers do not shape them as competent and confident beings. They feel demotivated and unappreciated by the teachers because all they receive from them are marks and nothing else. They do not feel comfortable in communicating their problems with teachers because they feel the outcome will be nil. So they keep things to themselves and follow the easier path available, which is plagiarism. They see everyone around them doing plagiarism, so they do the same with little to no thought of future consequences.

Discussion

The findings of the present study explain the findings of Lima, Sousa, Medeiros, Misturada & Novo (2021) they conducted survey research in different European universities to find out the causes behind undergraduate student plagiarism. According to them peer influence, academic hardships

and other forms of academic misconduct are directly related to plagiarism. They discovered that students who plagiarize find difficulty in locating relevant material for their courses, they face difficulty in maintaining and gaining good marks, and they also struggle with foreign language. They concluded that students who face more academic hurdles are more likely to plagiarize. The present study also explored these causes in depth. Students who are weak in English face difficulty in locating, understanding, and paraphrasing the material because everything they find is in English which they are not able to grasp therefore they plagiarize. They also easily come under peer influence and plagiarize because they think that everyone is doing it and it is normal to do so.

The present study also second the study of Khathayut, Gleaves and Humble (2020) according to them partial and lower understanding of a phenomenon, perceived seriousness of plagiarism, and poor paraphrasing and citations lead towards plagiarism. They highlighted that peer influence, laziness, lack of confidence in their own writing, poor time management, not knowing how to cite an article and lack of academic consequences of plagiarism are factors behind undergraduate student plagiarism. Hussain, Al-Shaibani and

Mahfoodh (2017) in their review of studies also talked about the causes of plagiarism. According to their study lack of awareness about plagiarism (Park 2003; Marshall & Garry 2005; Powell 2012), previous academic experiences (Powell, 2012), dependency of internet (Sisti 2007), lack of academic consequences (Barnett & Cox 2005; Remler & Pema 2009), a believe that teachers do not consider plagiarism as a serious offence, teaching methodology and types of assignments (Akbulut et al. 2008; Koul et al. 2009; Devlin & Gray 2007; Sterngold 2004; Phillips & Horton 2000) are some of the explanatory factors of student plagiarism.

Conclusion

Plagiarism has always been a concerned area for academicians. The reasons discovered and highlighted in the study are the reflections of the students' life worlds. Understanding students' perceptions and descriptions of plagiarism, and reasons behind it can be useful for the policy makers and academicians to deal plagiarism accordingly. Effective and student friendly policies can be made by seeing plagiarism as students see it.

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