

QUALITY ASSESSMENT: STUDENT PERSPECTIVE AND REALITY.

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Abstract

Our research focuses on the student perception of plagiarism, the extent to which they truly understand what is meant by the term, and sincerity with which they address the issue in their studies and written assignments. Whether they feel that they have received sufficient input and training from the institution in terms of being able to avoid plagiarising others works. All of which, has a direct impact upon the quality of academic assessment and output in the institution.

The OED defines plagiarism as: "...to take and use as one's own, the thoughts, writing or inventions of another", for academic purposes this is better expressed by the Hong Kong University as: "...the unacknowledged use, as one's own, of work of another person, whether or not such work has been published", and it is with reference to this definition of plagiarism that we focus this research.

Our investigations will carry out questionnaire based research on groups of Polytechnic of Namibia students, ensuring equal weighting of students from the different Poly Faculties to provide the necessary primary research findings for our paper. It is a timely and important piece of research as we transform into a university, and our paper will help to highlight some of the challenges faced by students in terms of their ability to comprehend and address quality and specifically plagiarism issues in their studies, as well as the degree of assistance that they perceive they receive from the institution and staff. Research findings will be both qualitative and quantitative.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the act using professional written information, which is obtained from an existing primary source, failing to acknowledge the source by referencing, and ultimately presenting the information as your own. According to (Joshua, 2013), the American Psychological Association referencing style is a broadly used standard way of referencing. It provides guidelines as to how information from different sources such as internet, journals and books should be cited, especially if it is to be used in essays and assignments. Citation has to be applied when quoting, summarising or paraphrasing. Since plagiarism can be prevalent among students and they do not fully comprehend how serious this matter actually is, awareness with regard to plagiarism has to be created. In order that plagiarism can be reduced, and with a view to eventual elimination in higher education. For this reason, a research investigation has been conducted at the Polytechnic of Namibia, to explore the issues and prevalence of plagiarism, what it is, what causes it and how students can avoid it.

The extent to which this is a universal quality issue in higher education, can be seen by the 2012 plagiarism controversy at Harvard University the world's leading university (Times Higher Education, 2013):

'Harvard has forced dozens of students to leave in its largest cheating scandal in memory, the university made clear in summing up the affair, but it would not address assertions that the blame rested partly with a professor and his teaching assistants' (New York Times, 2013). Around seventy students were expelled from the university, as a result of this cheating scandal. Following which, in 2013, The Harvard University Committee on Academic Integrity proposed a five-point honor code, following in the tracks of over one hundred U.S.

universities which already have such policies in place. The language of the proposed code reads:

The proposed Harvard honor code.

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work with integrity—that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, ... Cheating on exams or problems sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the idea or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

Literature Review

Plagiarism is a serious problem on academic institutions. Taking the words or ideas of another person and using them without proper acknowledgement is a commonly accepted definition of plagiarism. Culwin and Lancaster (2001). Plagiarism itself is usually linked with academic misconduct by students and by lecturers. Researchers agree that plagiarism generally one of a number of practices deemed by universities to institute cheating, or in university-speak: 'a lack of academic integrity which means honesty and responsibility in scholarship There are also Allegations that plagiarism can ruin the reputations of institutions and academic careers of students and lecturers alike. Therefore Academic institutions should be concerned about this since student plagiarism appears to be on the increase. Researchers have also drawn different conclusions in addressing the following questions:

1. What plagiarism is and how students know about it?
2. What are the students' perceptions of what constitutes plagiarism?
3. Reasons for plagiarising
4. Knowledge on consequences of plagiarism
5. What measures to curb plagiarism?

This literature review on plagiarism focuses on these five questions.

Plagiarism is and how students know about it?

Hannabuss (2001) stated that Plagiarism is using others' ideas or words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information. It may be intentional for e.g. copying or

purchasing papers from an online source or unintentional for e.g. failing to give credit for an author's ideas that you have paraphrased or summarized in your own words. He further argued that Plagiarism occurs in research in all academic disciplines.

In a study conducted on plagiarism issues in higher education by Culwin and Lancaster (2001). Plagiarism is referred to as dishonest and prevents lectures from being able to assess students' authentic strengths and weaknesses and thereby help students to improve. It is crippling to your intellectual progress as it interferes with your ability to trust your own thinking, and it constipates future creative thinking. It is also an infraction of academic integrity and could result in expulsion from the university.

Another finding, by Neville (2010), was that differences in plagiarism practices exist between researchers educated in English-speaking countries and those educated in other domains. The authors contended that scholars who are pressured to publish in English may plagiarise because they do not fully grasp the English language, but are compelled to publish. In regard to gender, the authors noted that men are more apt to plagiarise than women.

What are the students' perceptions of what constitutes plagiarism?

According to Zimerman (2012) there is a link between cultural backgrounds and plagiarism. According to his research findings culture responsible for plagiarism to a certain extend. Due to the fact that if a student in a foreign land is acculturated to a learning style that permits or encourages direct copying of text, they will go on to more advanced education perhaps not thinking that what they are doing is harmful. He further added that some perceptions of peer behaviour also have a powerful effect plagiarism. As his study also found that a number of factors that predict cheating, is when students know that other students have cheated in the past and this has influenced other student's decision to cheat.

Reasons for plagiarising

Zimerman (2012) stated that students engage in plagiarism for a number of reasons, these include the fear of asking for help with assignments, difficulty in finding and analysing research materials. On the other hand there may be a lack of awareness about plagiarism that the students may truly be unaware, especially if they are new to the English language, of what plagiarism consists. They may not know how to write a research paper at all. There may be no motivation to even write the paper. Or they may not know how to write a citation than may have trouble paraphrasing another author's thoughts.

Some students will deliberately plagiarize when they feel themselves backed into a corner in a high-pressure situation with a low risk of being caught. This behaviour is often a result of poor time management and organization skills. Some students also plagiarise as a result of laziness as they are looking for the easy ways to do their assignments.

Measures to curb plagiarism?

Although there is no simple solution to this problem, some researchers had drawn conclusions on some measures on how to reduce and discourage cheating activities. Zimmerman (2012) stated that collaboration between the faculty and the library should be the first option to ensure the proper education of students on plagiarism by Faculty Librarians. He also thinks that educating students in proper research methods towards plagiarism should be the librarian's main goal. This would further extend the collaboration between faculty, librarians and students.

Another research conducted by Hrasky (2010) states that enforcement of academic integrity can also be considered appropriate for dealing with someone who is caught plagiarizing. And that There should be a range of punishments that can be applied such as giving a written warning to a student, allowing the student to rewrite the paper she/he plagiarise, students to get a failing grade in the course they have plagiarised or even get expelled. Another measure suggested by Hrasky was anti-plagiarism software, that there are other tools available to faculty in order to identify plagiarism. These can help to detect internet-based plagiarism. These services usually provide the facility to measure the level of similarity between a student's work and material publicly accessible online.

Over the last two decades, the increase in plagiarism was often attributed to the digital age of copy and paste. This has resulted from the ever-growing amount of information on the Internet, and the ease with which students have access to this information has produced an increasing temptation for students to download web material, then possibly modify it and hand it in as their own original work. Therefore institutions have to employ increasingly technical solutions in order to implement their proactive quality policies in order to tackle and reduce plagiarism.

Research Methodology & Design

The term is a collective term for the structured process of conducting research. There are many different methodologies used in various types of research and the term is usually considered to include research design, data gathering and data analysis (Adrianna, n.d.).

In this section we will describe the methodology and the design of the research, including the sampling population, the sampling technique, the data collection instruments that are to be used, how the instruments will be administered, the validity and reliability of the instruments to be used and how the data will be analyzed.

Research Design

Suitable for this study were designs which were helpful in answering and fulfilling the objectives for this study. For this research qualitative research designs were made available. According to (Susan, 2011), qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. Qualitative Research is also used to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem. Qualitative data collection methods vary using unstructured or semi-structured techniques. Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observations. The sample size is typically small, and respondents are selected to fulfil a given quota.

The questionnaire was carefully crafted in order to elicit right responses. Although most questions were close-ended (in a strongly agree, Agree, Unsure, Disagree, Strongly Disagree response) space was made available for comments to be provided. The questionnaire aimed at capturing details on how Plagiarism can be avoided, the questionnaire also aimed at finding the respondents expectations on, what the Polytechnic of Namibia can do to address this challenge.

Population and sampling size

How and where data is collected has a direct impact on the sample of respondents that are selected from the population for the research. On this study, the target population was the

Students from the Polytechnic of Namibia, with a sample size of 192 from the various faculties.

Sampling technique

Probability sample will be obtained from the population where each element will have the known chance of being selected as part of a sample. Simple random sampling was used for this study; all the elements of the population had an equal chance to be selected.

Data collection Methods

Only questions based on relevant literature was used for this study; a copy of close ended questionnaire is attached on the annexure.

Validity of the Study

The information obtained through the questionnaires was compiled in an excel sheet with formulas and audited to check its correctness.

Equally important, the research findings should be highly reliable. Reliability is the extent to which the procedure produced similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. To ensure reliability of result in this study, the questionnaires were administered by the Library assistant.

Data Analysis

Statistical procedures and methods were to analyze the data obtained. The data was presented by using tables and graphs in a descriptive form for interpretation.

Key findings.

With reference to table 1, the population of the study on plagiarism are students from the Polytechnic of Namibia. The total number of students for 2014 intake is 13069.

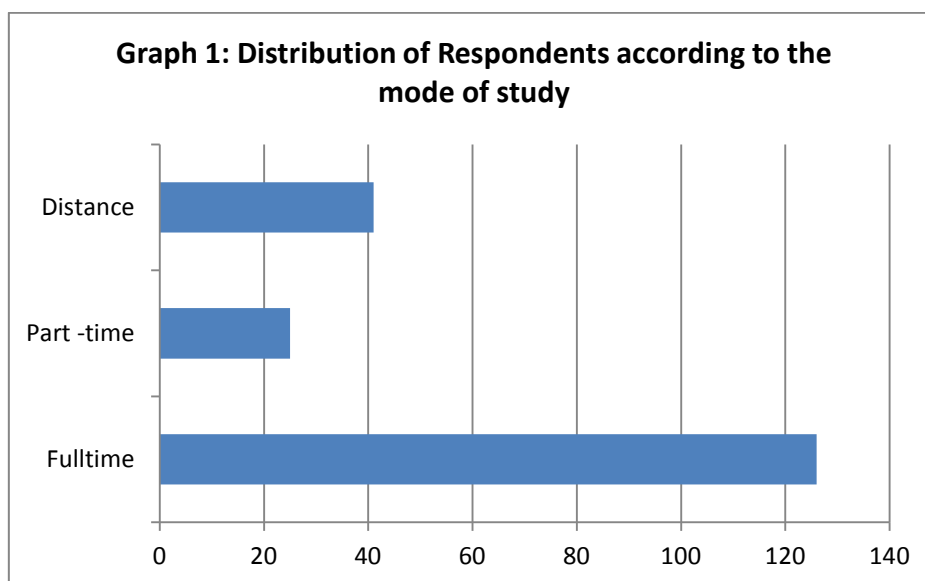
A total of 192 questionnaires were made available to the respondents at the Facilities of the polytechnic of Namibia and through simple random sampling, every student had the chance to be part of this study. Table 1 also provides the percentages of the students (respondents) from the different faculties who participated in the study, with the Health and Applied Sciences faculty having the highest percentage of respondents at 3%.

Table 1: Provisional student data

<u>2014 Student intake</u>		# students who participated in the survey	% students who participated on the survey
Computing Informatics	953	14	1%
Engineering	1126	11	1%
Health and Applied sciences	541	16	3%
Human Sciences	1843	19	1%
Management Sciences	7583	126	2%
Natural resource & Spatial science	1023	5	0%
Faculty not specified	0	1	0%
	13069	192	1.47%

Majority of the respondents were female. An appendix of the questionnaire is provided. The questionnaires had 4 closed questions and additional comments about plagiarism at the Polytechnic of Namibia were welcomed.

Displayed in Graph 1, the majority of the respondents are full time students, followed by Distance students and finally the part time students:



A relatively balanced distribution of students according to the year of study was obtained. However as shown in table 2, the majority of the students in the sample are in the 3rd year of studies. Followed by second year students, then fourth year students and first year students.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to the year of study.

First year	35
Second year	53
Third year	56
Fourth year	48
Total Sample	192

Most of the respondents have not been, nor do they know of anyone who has been detected for plagiarism.

The students were requested to state how they think lecturers would respond to plagiarism, 31% of the students are not sure the lecturers would just ignore detected plagiarism.

43% Students are also not sure if the lecturers would handle plagiarism without involving administrators.

51% of the students are not either sure is plagiarism would be reported to administration.

The students agreed that the main reason why students plagiarise is because, of the pressures that arise because of getting behind on work and in other areas, this is represented by 43% response.

42% of the students agreed that they lack understanding of how to cite and do research.

38% of the students agreed that laziness and 31% agreed that a concern about grades is the reason why students plagiarise.

Finally 20% students are not sure if the perception that every one plagiarises is a reason as to why others can imitate it. Students agree that knowing that getting caught will lead to disciplinary action will discourage students at the Polytechnic of Namibia from plagiarising and this is represented by 46% response.

38% of students strongly agree that knowing that others have been caught and faced consequences.

29% of the students the students strongly agree that discussing assignments and citation requirements with lecturers in advance will discourage plagiarism.

41% of the students agreed to feeling excited about and interested in assignments and projects, 31% of the students agreed that the assignments must submitted online so that plagiarism can be detected..

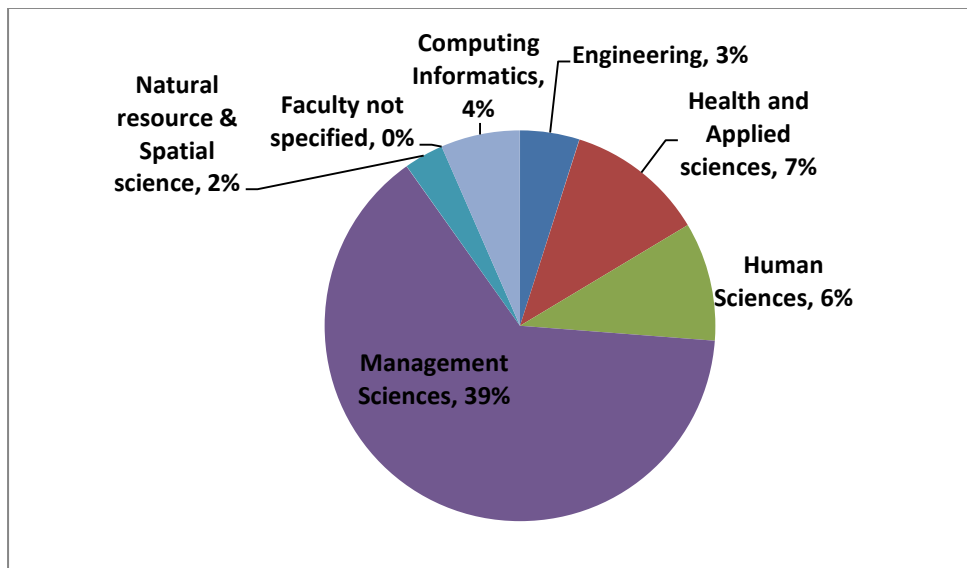
Students were welcome to provide comments about plagiarism, as presented in table 3, with 60% of the students providing additional comments, indicating a high degree of student interest and concern about the prevalence of plagiarism.

Table 3, Response Rate for comments about plagiarism.

<u>Response</u>	#	%
Comment not provided	77	40%
Comment provided	115	60%
	192	100%

As displayed on chart 3, 39% of the students from the Faculty of Management greatly provided comment about Plagiarism, 7% of students from applied health provided comments, 6% of comments was received from Human Sciences, 4% comments was received from Computing Informatics, 3% was received from Engineering and finally 25 of comments from Natural Resources and Spatial Management.

Chart 1, Additional comments by Faculty.



With reference to table 4, various comments about plagiarism were provided by students. Among the most common and repeated comments are that most of the students are not aware of what plagiarism is and APA reference style should be made a compulsory subject for every program.

Students should be taught how to cite from the first year of studies and not just in their final year when they are busy with Research Project.

Consequences of plagiarism should be communicated & implemented. Students also stressed that assignments should not be typed and rather hand written and they believe that lectures also enhance plagiarism as they directly copy assignments and question papers from the internet.

With reference to Graph 1, 41 out of the total sample are Distance students, the respondents also commented that distance students do not really have access to resources and books, and they are in less contact with their lecturers, this is why they opt to plagiarism.

Table 4, student comments.

'Most students are not aware of what plagiarism is, so they need to be educated'
'APA reference style should be made compulsory as a subject for every program and manuals should be freely printed & distributed.'
'Students are only taught how to cite in the final year instead of in the first year'
'Consequences of plagiarism should be communicated and implemented.'
'Library sessions should be provided and students should be taught about how to cite and avoid plagiarism'
'Assignments should be hand written and not typed; this will discourage students not copy and paste information from internet.'
'Resources and books are in limited supply and distance students are in less contact with their lecturers'
'From my point of view, plagiarism is not a major problem, we pass because of it.'
'Plagiarism is enhanced by lecturers who directly copy question papers & assignments from the internet'
'Sometimes the due dates for assignments are close and yet students have tests to write, therefore students plagiarise'
'Plagiarism is an irresponsible act and a crime, such students do not deserve to be employed in the near future'
'Students must learn to use their own knowledge.'
'Assignments should be handed in online so that plagiarism can be detected.'
'Students do not understand research topics, Lecturers should generalise topics or explain to students so that they can understand.'
'Students plagiarise because of peer pressure, they have learned it from other senior students.'

Conclusion and recommendations.

Some students admit that it is because of plagiarism that they have made it thus far. Plagiarism is a very serious offence in most of the most academically highly regarded countries. The result of the study shows that students are confused as to what plagiarism is, and that they do not know how to apply the appropriate reference style/s such as APA or Harvard.

There are some interesting approaches to this problem internationally:

"On my honor, I pledge that I have neither given nor received help on this assignment."

Over one hundred U.S. universities have an 'Honor code' system in place, and the longest established – since 1842 – is that of the University of Virginia the oldest student-run honor system, University of Virginia (2014). It is regarded as one of that university's most cherished institutions.

Based on the principle that University students want to be trusted, the Honor System helps to create and strengthen a university-wide community of trust. Students at the university make a commitment not to lie, cheat, or steal within the university's home town, or where they represent themselves as University students in order to gain the trust of others. The University of Virginia believes that because of this commitment, there's a strong degree of trust among the various members of the University community. Students are also expected to conduct themselves with integrity and are presumed honourable until proven otherwise. This trust then goes on to manifest itself in an honour committee, a student judiciary body. Whereby students are 'recruited and trained by the Honor Committee to serve as advisors and to provide counsel.' With the students investigating 'honor allegations', and assisting and supporting 'accused students through the Honor System process, and work with accused students in their defence at trial.' The unique character of the University of Virginia academic honesty and anti-plagiarism policies, is that 'Honor jury panels are similarly comprised entirely of students. While anyone may initiate honor proceedings, the process is administered entirely by students.'

Indeed, in the final analysis it is the students themselves who have most to gain or lose, with widespread plagiarism stifling opportunities for higher academic endeavour. The end result being that an institution or a particular course, gains a reputation for being of poor quality,

which will have an effect upon job opportunities for graduates of that institution and/or faculty or particular course in the future.

Motivation for good performance and sanction for poor quality work, the proverbial carrot and stick approach, is necessary to ensure that plagiarism is seen as unacceptable and that the institution is very serious in its responses to potential episodes of such behaviour. Clear guidelines need to be communicated and enforced by the learning institution.

Our research clearly points to the majority of students being very much in favour of clear and severe sanctions being applied to those plagiarising. However, it is also clear that students feel that they are under-equipped in being able to avoid plagiarism, with 83% claiming to have: 'a lack of understanding of how to cite and how to do research'. This indicates that much more research skills preparation training needs to be carried out by academics and the various support bodies such as library services, in order to ensure that students do not suffer unfair sanction due to a lack of academic research knowledge being imparted to them in good time.

It is recommended that research into the extent and understanding and misunderstanding of plagiarism be continued as a matter of urgency, in order to ensure that no student suffers undue and unwarranted accusations of plagiarism, when in fact the institution may be at fault in having failed in its quest to educate the student in proper research practice.

It is recommended that Namibian and southern African institutions look closely at the student body self-governing quality and honesty approaches of other universities, noticeably that of the University of Virginia and its student honour code.

Students need to be properly guided and encouraged to avoid plagiarism, and as such the first responsibility lies with the academic institution to provide the tools and knowledge, in order for the students to excel in their research and assignment work without the need to fall back on dishonest practices such as plagiarism.

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