

Exploring the Attitudes of Undergraduate Students towards Plagiarism in Public and Private Institutions

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore the attitude of undergraduate students towards plagiarism from both public and private higher educational institutions. A cross-sectional survey was used to collect the data through adopted questionnaire which comprised of three subscales; positive attitude, negative attitude and subjective norms towards plagiarism. Data was collected from 309 students of BS-Mathematics (n=155) and BS-English (n=154) programs in which 153 students are from public and 156 are from private institutions. Descriptive and inferential statistics methods were used to analyse the data. The results of the study revealed that undergraduate students from both programs have medium level of positive and negative attitude towards plagiarism. The findings show that there is no difference in positive attitude towards plagiarism, however difference is noted in negative attitude and subjective norms towards plagiarism between public and private students. Similarly no difference appears on the basis of three subscales between BS Mathematics and BS English undergraduate students.

Key Words: Plagiarism, Positive Attitude, Negative Attitude, Subjective Norms

Rationale of the Study

In USA and many other countries of the world, strong bachelor's level education is foundational. The new chairman of Higher Education Commission (HEC) Tariq Banuri advocates US Education system and has strong belief in strengthening of the undergraduate programs on priority basis than postgraduate programs, therefore he is "concentrating the bulk of HEC's resources into widening and strengthening undergraduate teaching across Pakistan. Every eligible student, he says, should be able to obtain a four-year BS degree irrespective of income or

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region” (Hoodbhoy, 2019, p. 1). HEC has disseminated to all Higher Education Institutions (HEI) for the implementation of semester system in all undergraduate programs. Therefore, it is obvious to the practice of both formative and summative assessment at undergraduate level. Different flavors of formative assessment may be practiced in HEIs but the most common is giving tasks as a written assignment. The purpose of such type of assessments is not only to make the students critical in readings literature but also to facilitate them in the learning of academic writing. But unfortunately most of the students copy material from internet to complete their tasks given as an assignment. They submit the same to the teachers without bothering that it is an academic dishonesty. Either they do intentionally or unintentionally, we are not sure that such type of students are aware of this academic dishonesty or not. As Anderson (2004) states that students do not take plagiarism as a contemplated activity rather a fun activity. He further added that they mostly do so only to meet deadlines fixed by the teacher and to meet the academic standards what they set in competent environment or in an ideal way. As a result such academic dishonesty/ plagiarism is affecting the performance of teachers and students at all levels. The growing level of plagiarism warns educationists to explore the reasons which are motivating people towards plagiarism. More specifically we are interested to investigate the attitude towards plagiarism of undergraduate students to complete their degree. Furthermore, it is an important step to identify factors that influence the attitudes of students towards plagiarism (Erkaya, 2009). Researcher are mostly focusing on exploring the relationship of gender and other demographics with plagiarism and less studies are being conducted to know the positive and negative attitude towards plagiarism (Devlin & Gray, 2007).

Literature Review

Plagiarism in Concise Oxford Dictionary is defined as "taking and using the thoughts, writings, and inventions of another person as one's own" plagiarism attitude can be defined as acceptance or rejection of particular behavior (Furneau, 2011). Kubsch, Hansen, & Huyser-Eatwell (2008) state that positive attitude towards plagiarism reflects the appeal or appraisal of completing a behavior or justification towards the act. Positive attitude of plagiarism consists of justifications such as short time, defiance of academic instructions, teacher incompetence, poor reference access, shortage of books in the library and in personal capacity their own procrastination and low self-esteem. On the other hand, negative attitude presents dissatisfaction and negative consequences towards plagiarism. Having negative attitude towards plagiarism students show disapproval towards the act by valuing the serious consequences such as devaluation of their work and to be appear among black list people charged by academic authorities. These positive and negative attitudes further lead to develop

intentions or subjective norms of a person to perform or avoid the plagiarism activity. Subjective norms present reflection of thought to value certain act and acceptance of such behavior with justification of contextual norms.

The study aims to explore the positive, negative attitudes and subjective norms towards plagiarism among undergraduates. Another objective is to examine the difference of undergraduate attitude towards plagiarism across gender, institutional type and subjective norms. In the present study, through assessment of five-point Likert plagiarism scale the high score in positive attitude shows high perception or intentions towards plagiarism and low score presents low intention towards plagiarism and moderate score expresses the average acceptance of the act. While negative attitude high score demonstrates dissatisfaction and disapproval towards plagiarism and low score shows acceptance of the act (Mavrinac et al, 2010). Subjective norms score display intentions and motivation of students to act on plagiarism, so high score presents their high intentions towards plagiarism while low score shows low desirability of the act (Furneaux, 2011).

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to find the attitude of BS- Mathematics and BS-English students towards plagiarism from both public and private institutions.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is likely to be a significant difference in the mean value of positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norm towards plagiarism between public and private undergraduate students
2. There is likely to be a significant difference in the mean value of positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norm towards plagiarism between male and female undergraduate students.
3. There is likely to be a significant difference in the mean value of positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norm towards plagiarism between Mathematics and English programs.

Methodology

A cross sectional survey with a large sample of 309 undergraduate students of BS English and BS Mathematics programs of age ranges between 19 to 23 years was randomly selected from public and private institutions of one district of Punjab. However, institutions were conveniently selected for the study. The detail is given in the table 1:

Table 1: Participants of the Study

Institution	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Public	111	42	153
Private	95	61	156
Total	206	103	309
Math	107	48	155
English	99	55	154
Total	206	103	309

Data collection Tool

A standardize tool ‘Attitude towards Plagiarism Questionnaire’ (APQ) (Pupovac, Bilic-Zulle, Mavrinac, & Petroveck, 2010, p. 311) was adopted to collect the data from undergraduate students of both BS programs. The tool consists of 29 items based on 5-point Likert scale. The ranging of each item is taken from (SA)-5, agree (A)-4, neutral (N)-3, (SD) -2 to disagree (D) -1. Moreover the tool has two parts: (1) demographic variable, and (2) APQ, which is further divided into three subscales; (a) positive attitude which consists of twelve items “reflect the approval and acceptance of plagiarism”, (b) negative attitude which consists of seven items “reflects the deprecation and condemnation of such act” and (c) subjective norms contains 10 items “ indicate personal perception of extent and acceptance of plagiarism in society” 8 (Pupovac et al., 2010, p. 308). We are using the following same reference range as used by Pupovac et al. (2010) for scoring of each subscale . Mavrinac et al. (2010) reported the reliability of these subscales: (a) – Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$; (b) $\alpha = 0.79$; and (c) – $\alpha = 0.85$.

Table 2: Score range of attitudinal subscales

Subscale	Reference Range	
positive attitude	Low	12-28
	Medium	29-45
	High	46-60
negative attitude	Low	7-16
	Medium	17-26
	High	27-35
subjective norms	Low	10-23
	Medium	24-37
	High	38-50

Data Collection Procedure

Date was collected with the permission of all public and private institutional heads and participating students from both programs. Researchers briefed about the study and that the questionnaire may take 20-25 minutes to complete. It was further explained to the participants that it is not mandatory to fill the questionnaire; they can leave the room if they are not interested to participate in the study. However, none of the students left the room. All the questionnaires were collected by the researchers after completion.

Analysis

A software (SPSS) was used for data analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 3: Percentage of positive attitude towards plagiarism w.r.t. Reference Range

Reference Range	Frequency of respondent	Percentage (%)	
Low	12 – 28	9	3
Medium	29 – 45	242	78
High	46 – 60	58	19
		309	

The table 3 shows that 78 percentage undergraduate students have medium attitude towards plagiarism. However, 3 % have low and 19% have high positive attitude towards plagiarism.

Table 4: Percentage of negative attitude towards plagiarism w.r.t. Reference Range

Reference Range	Frequency of respondent	Percentage (%)	
Low	12 – 28	13	4
Medium	29 – 45	267	86
High	46 – 60	29	10
		309	

The table 4 describes 86% undergraduate students having medium negative attitude towards, and only 4 % have low negative attitude whereas 10% have high negative attitude towards plagiarism.

Table 5: Percentage of subjective norms w.r.t. Reference Range

Reference Range		Frequency of respondent	Percentage (%)
Low	12 – 28	11	4
Medium	29 – 45	226	73
High	46 – 60	72	23
		309	

The table 5 shows that 73% undergraduate students have medium attitude towards plagiarism, and 23 % have high subjective norms towards plagiarism.

Summary: There is a medium attitude of undergraduate students towards plagiarism across three subscales (see tables 3, 4 & 5). It shows that undergraduate students from both private and public institutions agree with the act of plagiarism and results regarding subjective norms revealed that students could not know about the plagiarism appropriately

Inferential Statistics

Hypothesis 1: There is likely to be a significant difference in the mean value of positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norm towards plagiarism between public and private undergraduate students.

Table 6: Mean difference of public and private institutions based on three subscales

Group Statistics					
	Institution	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Positive attitude score	Public	153	38.86	5.601	.453
	Private	156	37.35	7.933	.635
Negative attitude score	Public	153	23.41	2.999	.242
	Private	156	21.45	3.435	.275
Subjective attitude score	Public	153	34.56	4.006	.324
	Private	156	31.81	5.593	.448

The table 6 shows the difference in the mean value and standards deviation of public and private undergraduate students based on three subscales.

Table 7: Results of ‘Independent Samples t Test’ of Public and Private Institutions based on three subscales

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Positive attitude score	Equal variances assumed	12.666	.000	1.938	307	.054	1.517	.783	-.023	3.057
	Equal variances not assumed			1.944	279.074	.053	1.517	.780	-.019	3.052
Negative attitude score	Equal variances assumed	5.427	.020	5.330	307	.000	1.957	.367	1.234	2.679
	Equal variances not assumed			5.337	302.952	.000	1.957	.367	1.235	2.678
Subjective attitude score	Equal variances assumed	17.758	.000	4.957	307	.000	2.748	.554	1.657	3.839
	Equal variances not assumed			4.972	281.146	.000	2.748	.553	1.660	3.836

Interpretation: Significant value of subscale positive attitude towards plagiarism ($p= 0.54$) is greater than alpha value ($\alpha =.05$). Therefore, hypothesis shows no difference in positive attitude towards plagiarism between public and private undergraduate students. However, the significance value of negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norms is less than alpha value, which shows significant difference in both subscale negative attitude and subjective norms towards plagiarism between public and private institutions.

Hypothesis 2: There is likely to be a significant difference in the mean value of positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norm towards plagiarism between male and female undergraduate students.

Table 8: Mean difference between male and female undergraduate students based on three subscales

	gender	N	M	Sd	Std. Error Mean
Positive attitude score	Male	206	38.15	6.443	.449
	Female	103	37.99	7.790	.768
Negative attitude Score	Male	206	22.40	3.383	.236
	Female	103	22.45	3.351	.330
Subjective attitude score	Male	206	33.16	4.879	.340
	Female	103	33.19	5.416	.534
total score	Male	206	95.58	11.631	.810
	Female	103	98.14	11.277	1.111

The table 8 shows that the difference in mean value and standard deviations of male and female students based on three subscales.

Table 9: Results of ‘Independent Samples Test’ of male and female students based on three subscales

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Positive attitude score	Equal variances assumed	3.135	.078	.192	307	.848	.160	.835	-1.483	1.803
	Equal variances not assumed			.180	173.614	.857	.160	.889	-1.595	1.915
Negative attitude Score	Equal variances assumed	.163	.687	-.107	307	.915	-.044	.407	-.844	.757

	Equal variances not assumed			-.108	205.818	.914	-.044	.406	-.843	.756
Subjective attitude score	Equal variances assumed	2.033	.155	-.064	307	.949	-.039	.611	-1.241	1.164
	Equal variances not assumed			-.061	186.288	.951	-.039	.633	-1.287	1.209
total score	Equal variances assumed	.132	.717	-1.84	307	.067	-2.558	1.390	-5.292	.176
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.86	209.813	.064	-2.558	1.375	-5.269	.153

Interpretation: Significant value of subscale positive attitude (.848) and significant value of negative attitude ($p=.915$) towards plagiarism and significant value of subjective norms (.949) is greater than alpha value ($\alpha=.05$). It shows no difference in the positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and social norms between male and female undergraduate students.

Hypothesis 3: There is likely to be a significant subject difference in the mean value of positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norm towards plagiarism between Mathematics and English undergraduate students

Table 10: Mean difference between English and Mathematics undergraduate students based on three subscales

	Subject	N	M	Sd	Std. Error Mean
Positive attitude score	Maths	155	37.75	6.447	.518
	English	154	38.45	7.349	.592
Negative attitude score	Maths	155	22.63	3.127	.251
	English	154	22.20	3.589	.289
Subjective attitude score	Maths	155	33.11	4.791	.385
	English	154	33.23	5.323	.429
Total score	Maths	155	96.61	10.395	.835
	English	154	96.25	12.655	1.020

Table 10 describes the difference in mean values and standard deviation between Math and English undergraduate students of BS programs based on positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norms.

Table 11: Results of ‘Independent Samples Test’ of BS English and BS Mathematics undergraduate students based on three subscales

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Positive attitude score	Equal variances assumed	1.445	.230	-.890	307	.374	-.700	.786	-2.247	.848
	Equal variances not assumed			-.889	301.380	.374	-.700	.787	-2.248	.848
Negative attitude Score	Equal variances assumed	3.761	.053	1.126	307	.261	.431	.383	-.322	1.184
	Equal variances not assumed			1.125	300.823	.261	.431	.383	-.323	1.185
Subjective attitude score	Equal variances assumed	2.043	.154	-.204	307	.838	-.118	.576	-1.251	1.016
	Equal variances not assumed			-.204	303.242	.838	-.118	.576	-1.252	1.016
total score	Equal variances assumed	3.803	.052	.268	307	.789	.353	1.317	-2.239	2.945
	Equal variances not assumed			.268	295.129	.789	.353	1.318	-2.241	2.947

Interpretation: Significant value of subscale positive attitude ($p=.374$) and significant value of negative attitude ($p=.261$) towards plagiarism and significant value of subjective norms ($p=.838$) is greater than alpha value ($\alpha=.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected as it shows no difference in the positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and social norms between BS Mathematics and BS English undergraduate students.

Discussion

The main idea behind the study was to explore the attitude of public and private students towards plagiarism. The results show the variance in the scores in three

subscales used to identify the attitude towards plagiarism in the undergraduate students of BS programs. Moreover, analysis shows that negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norms of both BS programs are different in public and private institution based on scales. Findings show that there is a no significant difference in the positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and social norms between male and female undergraduate students. Similarly, there is no difference in all the three subscale positive, negative attitude towards plagiarism and social norms towards plagiarism between BS Mathematics and BS English undergraduate students. Moreover, a surprising fact is reported that no significant difference of plagiarism attitude in undergraduate students of public and private institutions was found. However, only difference between public and private institutions is noted based on negative attitude towards plagiarism and subjective norms. As Ajzrn (2006) states that such behaviour reflects the desirability or rejection of the act and subjective norms represent the culture and moral values towards the concept. High mean scores in descriptive analysis revealed multiple reasons behind plagiarism attitude in students from both public and private sector. Students mostly showed agreement towards the statement that they mostly get involved in plagiarism because of unaccountability and lenient action of authorities towards accused. They plagiarize because of easy access to internet sources and less effort and hard work in compilation of their academic work including assignments and projects. Moreover, majority think the most significant factor of plagiarism is short deadlines for completion of academic tasks. The findings of Ma et al. (2007) are in lines with these reasons of plagiarism including peer pressure, obscurity of academic material, easy access to internet and mobile resources, unawareness of consequences of plagiarism, heavy workload and less time of accomplishment. Students present negative attitude towards plagiarists and agree that they should not be a part of intellectual community. Further, they present their lack of knowledge towards plagiarism as they do not consider word theft as severe act as car theft. They think it as a right short cut in completion of academic work without hard hassle and do not show understanding towards negative effects of plagiarism.

Students reflect negative attitude by showing disapproval towards plagiarists who they think might not be the part of any intellectual or scientific community and recognition of academic consequences for plagiarism. Most of them present neutral response towards the penalty on plagiarism. It means they are unaware of serious offence of plagiarism. Subjective norms reflect the culture of the society towards any act. The individual's choice is influenced by the extent of the pressure placed by the society and develops the common thinking culture to acquiesce to or refrain from the act (Mavrinac et al., 2010). Students demonstrate acceptance of plagiarism act for completion of their academic work without considering it dangerous activity for academia. Although they agree that it weakens the intellectual capacity of the researcher, but they do not bother in copying material

with or without consent of the writer. They agree to plagiarize the material due to the leniency of the authority or if their friends allow them to use their work and are against to place any kind of punishment against it. No significant gender differences in the present study is inconsistent with previous studies in which males are reported more violent in plagiarism attitude rather females (Kecici, Bulduk, Oruc, & Celik, 2011). No gender difference is seen in positive attitude in public sector students. Similarity, findings showed no significant subject difference among public and private students. It reflects that subject is not much important factor in involving students in plagiarism act rather they do plagiarism with same pace in both English and mathematics subjects.

Conclusion

The study concluded that students plagiarize due to easy excess to internet sources, heavy workload, favorable environment, peer pressure, high demanding academic expectations from their teachers in a short span of time and clarity of material in a classroom. They also show sympathy for their friends and colleagues who engage in plagiarism and do not favour any punishment against them. They reveal unawareness of the true meaning of plagiarism by admitting that copying material from English language is right because it is not our native language. Moreover, they accept plagiarism improvises the intellectual capacity of the researcher but they plagiarize because of not caught yet. It shows weak subjective norms developed through meager societal values and poor examination system in academics.

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Appendices

Descriptive Statistics of subscale

Descriptive analysis provided the means and standard deviation of each item of the adopted tool used to know the positive, negative attitude and subjective norms towards plagiarism.

Appendix A: Positive attitude towards plagiarism

Descriptive statistics regarding positive attitude towards plagiarism

Items describing positive attitude	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sometimes I'm attracted to plagiarize, because everyone else is doing it (students, researchers, physicians).	2.73	1.281
When I don't know what to write, I translate a part of a paper from a foreign language.	2.82	1.265
Self-plagiarism is not punishable because it is not harmful (one cannot steal from oneself).	3.25	1.408
Short deadlines of assignments give me the right to plagiarize a bit.	3.55	1.139
Self-plagiarism should not be punishable as plagiarism.	3.94	.936
It is justified to use one's own published work (self-plagiarism) without providing citation in order to complete the paper one is currently working on.	2.87	1.233
Young researchers who are just learning the ropes should receive minor punishment for plagiarism.	3.69	1.224
It is justified to use previous descriptions of a (research) method, because the method itself remains the same.	3.83	1.168
If one cannot write well in a foreign language (e.g., English), it is justified to copy parts of a similar paper already published in that language	3.59	1.491
If a colleague of mine allows me to copy from her/his paper, I'm NOT doing anything bad, because I have his/her permission	3.37	1.335
Plagiarized parts of a paper may be ignored if the paper is of great scientific value.	2.82	1.389

I could not write a scientific paper without plagiarizing.	2.36	1.156
Cumulative Mean (Positive attitude towards Plagiarism)	3.235	

The Appendix A shows that cumulative mean value of positive attitude towards plagiarism is 3.235.

Appendix B: Negative Attitude towards Plagiarism

Descriptive statistics regarding positive attitude towards plagiarism

Items describing positive attitude	Mean	Std. Deviation
Plagiarism weakens the investigative spirit	3.95	1.248
In times of moral and ethical decline, it is important to discuss issues like plagiarism and self-plagiarism.	3.74	1.156
Since plagiarism is taking other people's words rather than tangible assets, it should NOT be considered very important	3.83	1.115
The names of the authors who plagiarize should be disclosed publically/ to the scientific community	3.63	1.228
A plagiarized paper does no harm to any subject	2.44	1.063
Plagiarists do not belong to the research community.	2.65	1.251
Plagiarizing is as bad as stealing an exam.	3.25	1.303
Cumulative Mean (Negative attitude toward plagiarism)	3.355	

The Appendix B shows that cumulative mean value of negative attitude towards plagiarism is 3.355.

Appendix C: Subjective norms towards plagiarism

Descriptive statistics of subjective norms towards plagiarism

Items describing Subjective Norms	Mean	Std. Deviation
Those who say they never plagiarized are lying.	3.02	1.378
Sometimes I copy a sentence or two just to get inspiration for further writing	3.75	1.312
Authors say they do NOT plagiarize, when they do.	3.64	1.441

I don't have a bad conscience for copying verbatim a sentence or two from my previous papers.	3.24	1.287
Sometimes I'm attracted to plagiarize, because everyone else is doing it (students, researchers, physicians).	2.73	1.283
It is not so bad to plagiarize.	3.54	1.202
I work in a plagiarism free environment	3.17	1.530
Sometimes, it is necessary to plagiarize.	2.99	1.330
Plagiarism is justified if I currently have more important obligations or tasks to do.	3.65	1.351
I keep plagiarizing because I haven't been caught yet.	4.01	1.000
Cumulative Mean (Subjective Norms)	3.374	

The Appendix C shows that cumulative mean value of subjective norms towards plagiarism is 3.374.