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Perceptions of Nursing Students towards Plagiarism

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Abstract: *This research study was conducted on “Perceptions of Nursing Students towards Plagiarism” at three private Nursing Institutions in Karachi. The objective of the study was to explore the understanding of nursing students towards plagiarism. Plagiarism is prevalent in academia. Nursing students commit plagiarism due to various reasons, such as a lack of understanding and a lack of academic writing skills. Qualitative research methodology as a research design was applied and the phenomenological study method was used to understand if nursing students knew about plagiarism or not. The collected data through semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically. The findings of the study showed that the participants did not have a clear understanding of plagiarism. They were unaware of the types of plagiarism and they had no idea how to avoid plagiarism. The study recommends that courses on preventing plagiarism should be designed and taught to nursing students to enhance their understanding towards plagiarism.*

Key Words: Nursing Students, Perception, Plagiarism, Understanding

Introduction

Academic dishonesty is increasing across academia. However, this phenomenon, especially plagiarism has not been discovered to such a level that its actual cause may be determined. Plagiarism is defined as academic misconduct. The word plagiarism is a Latin word, which means literary theft; in this process, the thief uses ideas, thoughts or written material from somebody else’s work without giving him the due credit and claims that the idea or material is his own. If any author takes the idea from their previously published work and does not give their own

reference, they are also committing plagiarism (Vinod et al [2011](#); Oxford English Dictionary, [2010](#)). Plagiarism is also thought of as scientific malpractice, a moral evil and a copyright violation because it is an act of copying the ideas and the language of other writers without the proper acknowledgement. Plagiarism is a common phenomenon and it is as old as the written composition itself (Sarlauskiene & Stabingis, [2014](#)).

In academia, plagiarism is prevalent. Most of the students are concerned to obtain degrees without creating something new in their concerning area. Different reasons entice

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student scholars to plagiarize sources. Lack of academic skills, lack of understanding of plagiarism, poor instructions from teachers, students' idleness, wish for getting high marks, ignorance of citing the sources, and incapability to cope with the workload are some of the reasons that force students to plagiarize in the given assignments (Al Darwish & Sadeqi, 2016; Sprajc et al., 2017).

Nursing students are no exception. There are some other reasons that make nursing students commit plagiarism, such as work pressure, assignment deadlines, less interest in the assigned tasks and inappropriate guidelines from the lecturers' side. Most of the students due to their hectic schedules invest less effort and time in their given work which leads to committing plagiarism. A good number of students have been reported to have plagiarized the sources unintentionally (Doró, 2014; Abusafia et al., 2018). There is another reason for students to involve in practising plagiarism is the repetition of the assignments by instructors the whole semester. Nursing lecturers never vary the topics of assignments; therefore, students get access to previously written assignments by their seniors and submit them with little modification. Furthermore, lack of academic writing skills, lack of reference of books and easy access to the internet data are counted as some other reasons for plagiarism. Few of the indolent students who are unenthusiastic to work hard may also jump towards plagiarism because it is easy to plagiarize and copy-paste as it demands no effort to do so (Javeed et al., 2019; Anney & Mosh, 2015).

Education related to avoiding plagiarism could be given to students who have no knowledge about plagiarism because once the students are guided about plagiarism, they will be less likely to commit plagiarism intentionally. The real definition of plagiarism must be identified so that students may gain an understanding of the phenomenon. Training students to paraphrase and reword the taken material and cite the proper quotation are skills that are improved through proper teaching and effective practice. A good number of students

are willing to avoid plagiarism, but they are unable to do so because they are not skilled enough at the art, so students may be exposed to the opportunity to summarize the text, write the assignments and place the quotations with the correct writing styles. This is the only technique through which the students may understand and avoid plagiarism (Hafsa, 2021; Carter et al., 2019).

Literature Review

This review of literature assists to explore what has already been written and what else is required to be written on the topic under discussion. This chapter reviews the factors which contribute to the understanding of students towards plagiarism. The purpose of this chapter is to ensure that the researcher has a thorough knowledge of the topic and can compare earlier findings, analyze the current findings and suggest more studies.

According to Yang et al, (2019) plagiarism committed by students increases uneasiness across various academic disciplines and dealing with this issue has continuously been a tiresome and hostile challenge. The word plagiarism may be a rare phenomenon to most students; on the contrary, a great number of sophomores must have exercised it once in their academic life unintentionally (Vinod et al., 2011).

Accidental plagiarism may occur because students never understand when they are collecting ideas and information for an assignment or a project, they are capable of acknowledging the source of the information and ideas, but they do not do it; as a result, they commit plagiarism. Avoiding plagiarism is mere paraphrasing, and quoting then correctly citing the source by crediting the actual authors (Hill, 2015).

There are a great number of students who are practising plagiarism in academia. Plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. Intentional plagiarism is a cautious effort in which a plagiarist takes somebody else's piece of work and writes it as their own work. Unintentional plagiarism may take place in the writings of research scholars who are juniors

and in the writing of students. It happens due to a lack of skills and lack of knowledge of citing the proper source. Both types cause consequences and may damage the reputation of the plagiarizer (Mohammed et al., [2015](#); Das & Panjabi, [2011](#); Freckelton, [2010](#)).

A cross-sectional study was conducted on nursing and medical students at Hawler Medical University in Erbil, Iraq to explore their perceptions, knowledge and understanding and to examine the factors that lead to plagiarizing. Findings showed that the students lacked an understanding of plagiarism and its consequences. The study suggested that students' understanding of plagiarism should be enhanced so as to diminish this kind of academic misconduct (Ismail, [2018](#)).

Nursing students indisputably plagiarize resources and never give credit to the original authors of the works. There are different reasons that make students commit plagiarism. Most Muslim students accidentally plagiarize the material because they rarely diverge from the Islamic teachings as plagiarism is a kind of stealing and stealing is prohibited in Islam. The causes of plagiarism by Muslim students are the lack of cognizance of plagiarism (Nashruddin, [2013](#)).

A phenomenological case study was conducted at one of the public universities of Karachi, Pakistan to find the reasons that force students to commit plagiarism. The findings of the study specified that most of the participants did not have knowledge about plagiarism and they were not skilled enough to avoid it. The most prevailing reasons for plagiarism were poor academic writing skills, outdated assignments, accessible data on the internet and inadequate digital literacy (Sadrudin, [2021](#)). A qualitative study was conducted at the universities of Pakistan to inspect the reasons for plagiarism and how to avoid it. The findings of the study indicated that the majority of online university students possessed poor knowledge and lacked an understanding towards plagiarism. Reasons for plagiarism were inexperienced teachers, poor time management, and laziness of the students (Malik et al., [2021](#)).

Another study was conducted on the students at the University of Indonesia to assess their understanding of the students about plagiarism. The results of the study indicated that a great number of participants lacked sound knowledge regarding the concept of plagiarism. Most of the students demonstrated poor knowledge of quoting and paraphrasing the taken material. They also did not know the terms paraphrasing, self-plagiarism and verbatim copy. Students were aware of only verbatim copies with no citations. The study recommended the course be revised to discuss plagiarism deeply (Mustafa, [2016](#)).

A cross-sectional study was conducted at Jordanian Universities on postgraduate students of pharmacy to assess students' perception, knowledge, and behaviour towards plagiarism and the reasons for their research misdemeanours. The results disclosed that despite their understanding of plagiarism and its types, the participants commit plagiarism at a high rate. To raise awareness of plagiarism, the study recommended that policies be introduced and penalties for plagiarizers be imposed (Farha, et al., [2020](#)).

An online survey was conducted among biomedical research scholars in China and Europe to detect the differences in perceptions and understandings of researchers towards plagiarism between China and European universities. The findings showed that the respondents were well-aware of the most perceptible types of plagiarism; there were uncertainties in other aspects of plagiarism. Some of the participants from China were not aware of some types of plagiarism (Yi et al., [2020](#)).

A cross-sectional survey was conducted at the University of Sydney, Australia to assess the prevalence and type of academic dishonesty committed by registered nursing students and to determine the understanding of participants between professional conduct and academic honesty. Findings showed that the majority of the students were of the view that abuse of professional code of conduct is due to academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is regarded as a problem with serious consequences for

patient care, clinical practice and professional conduct (Bloomfield, et al., [2021](#)).

A study was conducted at the University of United States to observe the nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism as well as the software of plagiarism detector Turnitin.com and to prevent plagiarism and citation issues. The findings of the studies showed that students strongly agreed that patchwriting and copy-paste must be regarded as plagiarism; however, the students shared diverse opinions related to the reuse of thoughts and ideas. A great number of students were of the view that only reusing ideas may not be considered plagiarism. The majority of the students had a view to applying plagiarism detection software to prevent plagiarism (Childers & Bruton, [2016](#)).

A case study using a qualitative exploratory approach was conducted on an online psychiatric nurses' educational program in a college in Canada. The objectives of the study were to determine the understanding of nursing students towards academic integrity, to explore the strategies to stop plagiarism and to guarantee academic integrity. The study discovered students' perceptions of academic integrity specifically plagiarism at a high rate. Recommendations of the study were to create awareness of plagiarism among faculty and students and they might be trained for the virtual writing lab. APA guidelines needed to be provided and academic integrity material may be inculcated in the courses (Burlington, [2020](#)).

Having gone through the previous research studies, the researcher found out that there are various reasons for students to plagiarize sources. Students' perception related to plagiarism is not clear. They lacked knowledge of plagiarism and lacked the skills to avoid it. Plagiarism is prevalent in academia due to a lack of knowledge about plagiarism and a lack of skills to avoid plagiarism. Nursing students need to be given awareness regarding plagiarism.

Objectives of Study

1. To explore the understanding of nursing students towards plagiarism

Research Question

1. What is the understanding of nursing students towards plagiarism?

Research Methodology

Various studies have been conducted on plagiarism previously; however, the studies were simply quantitative surveys. Very few studies were conducted on nursing students related to plagiarism locally. The current study is undertaken using a qualitative research paradigm. Creswell, ([1994](#)) describes qualitative research as an unfolding model that happens in a natural setting that enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences. Qualitative research methodology as a research design was applied throughout the study and the phenomenological study method was used to understand if nursing students knew about plagiarism or not. A descriptive phenomenological study is adopted to gather an individual's lived experience directly as firsthand knowledge (Patton, [2014](#); Creswell, [2013](#)).

Population & Sampling

Population is the entire collection of the people in which the researcher is interested to research (Omona, [2013](#)). All the students of BS Nursing were the study population.

However, students from year II, and semester III were the sample of the study. Criterion sampling is a technique through which individuals were selected as a sample for the study purpose and the sample must meet the set criteria. The purpose of the technique is to make sure quality assurance (Omona, [2013](#)). In this study, the numbers of the sample size of the study were 45 BS nursing students from three private nursing institutes, in Karachi. The criterion was set for the sample that the participants had been studying for more than a year and did not have any idea of plagiarism. Their academic assignments were observed to be full of plagiarism because they had never been taught how to avoid plagiarism.

Data Collection

Previous studies that were conducted on plagiarism, assessed the perceptions of nursing students by distributing questionnaires. In this study, in-depth phenomenological semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. According to Creswell (2013), in-depth interviews are adequate to reach saturation in a phenomenological study. Interview questions were validated through the experts' opinions.

Data Analysis

After the collection of the required data, it is assembled, coded, compared, interpreted and reported for the outcome. The researcher analyzes the data to summarize it accurately and the data is interpreted to find meaning from the data (Burns, 2010). In the current study, the data were analyzed thematically. The researcher followed thematic analysis steps as suggested by Braun & Clark (2006). Discussion is affixed within data analysis.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical consideration provides rights to the participants with independence and freedom; therefore, there are effective outcomes for participants educationally (Burns, 2005). Proper permission in written form was granted from the heads of the Nursing Departments to conduct the study on nursing students. The consent of the participants was also gained by taking an informed consent form/letter before data collection. The confidentiality of the data provided by the respondents was made sure. It is the right of individuals who take part in a study as participants to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, the participants were also informed that the study would not harm

Findings & Discussion

A cross-sectional study was conducted in Peshawar, Pakistan to measure the perception of the final year students from the faculty of physical therapy towards plagiarism. Findings indicated that the students did not know about plagiarism (Afridi, et al., 2019). Similarly, in

the current study, few of the students knew about plagiarism, but they were not aware of placing the in-text citation.

Another cross-sectional research was conducted on undergraduate students in the medical colleges of Rawalpindi, Pakistan to assess the reasons for students' involvement in plagiarism, the consequences, the types, and the solutions to plagiarism and the perceptions of students towards plagiarism. Results disclosed that the presence of plagiarism among the students was due to their unawareness of plagiarism, illegal practices and its consequences. (Javaeed et al., 2019). The same result is found in the current study that nursing students were not aware of the consequences of committing plagiarism.

To assess the knowledge of the participants towards plagiarism, the researcher posed questions related to plagiarism, and a good number of the participants simply narrated the definition of plagiarism. Some of the participants shared their understanding regarding plagiarism. According to them, plagiarism is stealing someone else's ideas or content, data or material without permission. They plagiarize the sources because they do not have time to prepare assignments that are free of plagiarism. Some other participants reported that they commit plagiarism due to a lack of knowledge as they do not know how to avoid plagiarism. They find data easily which entices them to plagiarize the sources. Most of the participants were not familiar with the word plagiarism. According to them, plagiarism was not a crime because they did not know. Some other participants responded that when they waste their time, make others responsible for their tasks, copy-paste, steal in the exam, do not fulfil their parents' wish to study or take a day off, they commit academic dishonesty. A few of the respondents shared that they knew about plagiarism. However, they were only able to define the word but did not know the consequences of plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarism.

The following themes were extracted from the semi-structured interviews.

Lack of Knowledge, Time and Acknowledgement towards Plagiarism

The majority of the participants knew only the definition of plagiarism and knew that plagiarism was literary theft. However, they were unaware of the actual sense of plagiarism. They admitted that they plagiarized the sources to save time as they had other tasks to accomplish within a limited time. They copy-pasted material and took sources without mentioning the real author's name because it was easy for the participants to do.

Some of the participants expressed that

“Taking someone else’s data without his permission and giving your name is plagiarism.”

“Plagiarism is a kind of theft.”

“Taking someone else’s content and an idea is plagiarism.”

“We plagiarize the available data easily. We commit plagiarism because we lack knowledge, to save time, and it is easy to do so.”

“Generating our ideas takes time. If we have plenty of time, we may commit less plagiarism.”

“If we have good time management, we may avoid plagiarism...”

The findings of one of the studies showed that most of the students had poor knowledge and lacked an understanding towards plagiarism. They plagiarized sources because due to a lack of knowledge, inexperienced teachers, poor time management, and laziness (Malik et al., 2021).

Reasons for Plagiarism

According to a good number of the participants, they have to commit plagiarism because they are overburdened, and do part-time jobs; as a result, they are unable to give proper time to their studies.

Two of the participants professed that

“We know all the reasons why most of the students get delayed in completing their research works or thesis submission.”

“We know that students plagiarize material because they are overburdened.”

Work pressure, assignment deadlines, less interest in the given tasks and inappropriate guidelines from the faculty are the reasons for plagiarism. Other common reasons for plagiarism are time constraints and putting less effort into the tasks assigned to the students (Doró, 2014; Abusafia et al., 2018; Bonifacio, 2020).

Stealing as Plagiarism

Most of the participants agreed that if they take material from someone else’s work, they are stealing it because they are not allowed to do so. They commit plagiarism openly and directly because nobody taught them that this was a crime. They take content without permission which is called stealing and plagiarism. Copy-paste is also very common among the participants which they are not ashamed of because they did not know that it was illegal to do so.

One respondent narrated that

“Taking someone else’s material and doing copy-paste without their permission is plagiarism.”

According to another study, copying with quotation marks and reference is acceptable; however, without them, it is a type of plagiarism (Yang et al., 2019; Howard et al., 2010).

Abuse of Rights

Most of the participants were of the view that plagiarism is like an abuse of someone’s rights. They further narrated that if students take material for conducting research or for their knowledge and do not acknowledge the sources, they are abusing the rights of the original authors. This is also unethical to take other work and never give credit. Ideas, creations or patents are the intangible assets of the original creators these ideas and creations should not be taken without permission otherwise it may be exploitation and abuse of copyrights.

Two of the participants revealed that

“Abusing someone’s rights related to research and knowledge is plagiarism.”

“Taking someone else’s content and efforts and giving your name for publication purposes is the abuse.”

There is another type of plagiarism called plagiarism of ideas. In this type, an author takes someone else’s concept or idea and mentions it as their own without giving the due credit to the source. If the plagiarist is not mentioning the name of the original author, he is abusing his rights (Solarino, [2015](#); Juyal et al., [2015](#)).

Traditional Assignments

The majority of the participants were of the view that the assignments that were given to them promote copy-pasting because to prepare the assignments, students do not need to think and they do not have to search the authentic content. The instruction regarding assignments is not properly given, as a result, students just copy the material from any source and paste it into their graded assignments which may result in plagiarism.

Some of the participants professed that

“Cognitive domain is not involved, but we do only copy-paste.”

“We mostly receive copy-paste types of assignments.”

“We do not have to search for our assignments.”

The most prevailing reasons for plagiarism were weak writing skills, traditional assignments which promote copy-pasting, available data on the internet and insufficient digital literacy. The study recommended that courses on digital literacy, academic writing and preventing plagiarism should be taught to the students as prerequisites for the desired program (Sadruddin, [2021](#)).

Assignments with no Guidelines

According to most of the participants, they are not properly guided regarding the assignments. They are not trained to take ideas from the internet and how to cite in-text citations. Guidelines regarding quotation, paraphrasing and references are not given. They are only instructed whether the assignments should be

hand-written or typed. Sometimes students are guided only about the pages or font size but nothing else.

Few of the participants shared that

“No guidelines regarding assignments are provided.”

“We are only told by the teachers that your assignments should be hand-written or typed.”

“We are given guidelines regarding the assignments that how many pages and font size should be used.”

“If teachers provide guidelines regarding plagiarism and bound us to follow those guidelines, we may avoid plagiarism.”

Assignment deadlines, less interest in the given tasks and inappropriate guidelines from the faculty force students to commit plagiarism. They put less effort into such assignments and complete their assignments by plagiarizing the sources available (Doró, [2014](#); Abusafia et al., [2018](#)).

Acknowledgement and References

In the response to how to avoid plagiarism, the majority of the participants narrated that students take ideas from others’ works but never acknowledge the source. According to the correspondents, they should acknowledge the person and give credit when the credit is due. They further reported that students should never take the contents as the way it is but they should paraphrase the sources to avoid plagiarism. Some other participants responded that by providing simply the references and acknowledging the sources, students may avoid plagiarism.

Some of the participants recounted that

“If we take help from anyone, we should acknowledge that person. If there is any idea given in the article, we should explain that idea in our words. In this way, we may avoid plagiarism.”

“If I use anything belonging to you, I must acknowledge you.”

“By acknowledging and by giving references, we can avoid plagiarism.”

“We do not know how to give the reference, but we know that by giving reference we may avoid plagiarism.”

The results of one of the studies revealed that despite their understanding and awareness of plagiarism and its types, and how to avoid it, the students of pharmacy commit plagiarism at a high rate just due to a lack of citing, acknowledging and referencing skills (Farha, et al., 2020).

Training for Plagiarism

A host of the participants suggested that training session is the only source through which students may be able to gain knowledge regarding plagiarism; as a result, they will avoid plagiarizing the sources. Some other students requested seminars on plagiarism to learn various tricks to evade unauthentic sources. Most of the other participants confirmed that they do not know the ways to supply references; they must be provided guidelines to add authentic references. Teachers must make students bound to follow those guidelines of supplying references. Teachers must provide feedback on the assigned tasks so that students may know their errors.

Some of the participants recounted that

“A session on plagiarism should be conducted so that we may know about plagiarism... Seminars should be conducted at the university level. Students should be taught some tricks to avoid plagiarism.”

“If we watch videos related to plagiarism, we may avoid plagiarism.”

“Teachers should give us feedback if they reject our assignments.”

“Teachers should educate their students that plagiarism is as bad as taking money from somebody’s pocket...”

A workshop was organized to develop students’ understanding of plagiarism and academic misconduct. They were trained to avoid plagiarism through various strategies. When students and staff were asked for feedback on the workshop, they confirmed the

desperate need for the workshop (Brown & Janssen, 2017). Another study conducted plagiarism training. The results of the intervention indicated that the knowledge of students increased towards plagiarism, students learned different ways of preventing plagiarism and inculcating references in their writings (Du, 2019).

Hence, participants were not aware of avoiding plagiarism. They shared various strategies that were simply based on theory; they were not skilled to avoid plagiarism. In a real sense they did not know how to give an in-text citation, place quotations, acknowledge the sources and provide a proper reference. Some of the participants added that plagiarism cannot be avoided; however, a great deal of the participants shared their views, they said that plagiarism can be avoided if we as students start acknowledging the sources, paraphrasing the material and giving proper time to our assignments. Some other participants suggested that there should be sessions and seminars on plagiarism. Students must be taught about plagiarism. Teachers should provide proper guidelines and teach their students to avoid plagiarism. Teachers should offer feedback regarding plagiarism so that next time students may avoid plagiarism. Few of the participants narrated that they are overburdened with assignments, if the assignments are cut short, and students are given plenty of time then plagiarism may be avoided. Students should not copy-paste. Teachers should be polite and should not force students to prepare the assignments. Students should do self-study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Academic dishonesty especially plagiarism is widespread in the nursing field because nursing students commit plagiarism due to various reasons. They do not consider taking someone else’ material as plagiarism because they were not taught about plagiarism. The findings of the study showed that the participants did not have a clear understanding of plagiarism and they do not know how to avoid it. A formal course on preventing plagiarism should be designed and

added to the BS Nursing curriculum. The course should be taught to nursing students to enhance their understanding towards plagiarism. Training sessions should be arranged for nursing faculty members so that

they may be updated and guide their students about plagiarism. Nursing institutions must introduce strict policies against those who commit plagiarism to restrain plagiarism.

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