GET CAUGHT IT OUT: The Awareness of Plagiarism among International Postgraduate Students while Studying Buddhist Studies in Sri Lanka

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Abstract:

Plagiarism is believed as a behavioral problem of students in the field of academia and one of a centered question to both faculty and administration in universities and higher education institutions. Plagiarism directly influences the academic reputation of a higher education institution and equitable academic credit for their students. In recent years, several initiatives have been taken to control the reasons for involving academic dishonesty of students by the university authorities worldwide. Awareness of students in plagiarism is the foremost fact with regard to prevention. This study is conducted to determine the awareness about plagiarism of international students while they are studying in Sri Lanka. International students studying in the Post Graduate Institute of Pali & Buddhist Studies (PGIPBS), University of Kelaniya were selected as research pillars. PGIPBS is a leading institute for Buddhist Studies and a great number of international students are pursuing higher degrees annually and most of them are coming from Asian countries. The methodology adopted for the study is survey design and a self - administrated questionnaire was used to obtain data from Sixty-four (64) international students. Result shows that international research students are extremely immature regarding plagiarism and even thirty-five percent (35%) of them could not understand the meaning of the term 'plagiarism'. The result of the study indicates that plagiarism found in a thesis is responsible only for the student itself, but both supervisor of that particular thesis and student are responsible. All respondents agreed that they need to acquire comprehensive knowledge on plagiarism and they like to participate when the PGIPBS commence an awareness session for plagiarism. The present study is to be one of the first studies that examine the awareness of plagiarism of international students studying in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Academic misconduct, Academic dishonesty, Plagiarism, International students, Sri Lanka

Introduction

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International Students Studying Buddhism in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is famed for Theravada Buddhism and it has been recognized as one of the best destinations for academic excellence in Buddhist Studies. According to the statistics of the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka in 2019, it affirms that 657 number of foreign students came to pursue their studies in Sri Lanka. (p. 74) The University of Kelaniya is attracted by more international students for Buddhist Studies and Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies (PGIPBS) is foremost in this respect. According to records of student affairs of PGIPBS there were 508 foreign students registered for different courses for the year 2019.

The international student community who visits Sri Lanka to study Buddhism comprises Bangladesh, China, France, Indonesia, Korea, Mauritius, Nigeria, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, USA, Myanmar, UK, India, Malaysia etc. and most of them are monks and nuns. A great number of students are coming from Asian countries and the majority of them use their native languages. English is often their second or third language. Students find it difficult to communicate in English when they first arrive in Sri Lanka. International students follow study programs annually starting from diplomas up to PhD.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon in the field of academia. With the advancement of the technology, information is converted as an easily accessible entity which everyone can access from anywhere through the Internet. Ukpebor, & Ogbebor (2013) supposed that this particular situation makes the issue of plagiarism even more challenging to the academic corpus (e.g., teachers, lectures, tutors etc.) in the digital era.

According to Pechnick, (2001) plagiarism is one of the most serious crimes in academia. The availability of full text information sources in digital format increased recently. Then it fashioned the 'copy paste' culture in the field of academia and has become one of a major problem among students, researchers, writers, and journalists. This idea is concurred by Dye (2007) as, especially the digital environment generates plagiarizing content easier and that can make spotting poached pieces easier.

According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary (n.d), plagiarismis derived from Latin *plagiarius* that means 'kidnapper'. There are numerous definitions of plagiarism in the literature (Smolcic, & Bilic-Zulle, 2013; Karabag& Berggren, 2012; Bouville, 2008; Spiroski, 2016; Masic, 2014) By its definition, the Oxford Dictionary (2015) defines plagiarism as "to copy another person's ideas, words, or work and pretend that they are your own." (p.1169) Merriam-Webster describes the plagiarism further more as, steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own, use (another's production) without crediting the source, commit literary theft, present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source. However, Myers (1998)that there is pointed out no single recognized definition of plagiarism, and it exists in the form of institutional rules and regulations rather than as a law, such as copyright.

According to Murray et al. (2016), "One can copy numerous pages of someone else's work and properly cite the material; that is not plagiarism. However, the act of using a large amount of material, even while giving credit, can violate the fair use provision of copyright laws." (p. 6)

The Point of view of Ali et al. (2011) plagiarism can be classified into five categories; copy & paste plagiarism, word switch plagiarism, style plagiarism, metaphor plagiarism, and idea plagiarism.

Plagiarism in the Context of Higher Education

It is important for taking actions to avoid plagiarism in higher education due to two main reasons.

- 1. To maintain the academic reputation of higher education institution
- 2. To award equitable academic credit for their students

1. Academic Reputation

According to Standler (2000) reputations in academia are generated with creating new knowledge: discoveries of new facts, new ways of looking at previously known facts and original analysis of old ideas. The ever-growing amount of information on the Internet and the rapid growth of book publishing facilitate students for plagiarizing the information and

submission of their theses and dissertations as their own work without exploring new knowledge or new facts. As Standler's (2000) opinion, above is a challenge to this phenomenon. Therefore, avoiding plagiarism is important in higher education due to academic reputation.

2. Equitable Academic Credit

Student plagiarism mostly occurs with intent for gaining academic credit. Plagiarism is not being identified by the authorities, which is a badly discriminated situation for other students and those who are morally dedicated for their studies. Therefore, avoiding plagiarism is important in higher education to award equitable academic credit for their students.

There are two types of plagiarism commonly done by students in the academic institutions; namely textual plagiarism and source code plagiarism (Ali et al., 2011). Textual plagiarism happens when the document is identical or typical to the original document while source code plagiarism occurs copying the whole or the parts of source code written by someone else as one's own.

As a solution, detection of plagiarism can be traced either manually by humans or automatically using some software available in the market or over the internet. But plagiarism detection soft-wares has limitations and cannot detect plagiarism totally at all. (Kiss, 2013)Introducing proper awareness of plagiarism can facilitate the limiting or reducing student plagiarism in higher education as an alternative prevention method.

Statement of Problem

Emergence of Technology has enhanced the way of accessible to information. The Internet is foremost in this regard. The Internet now makes it easy to find thousands of relevant sources in a few seconds by everyone from everywhere and which makes the issue of plagiarism even more challenging to the academic sector. Many students and researchers are turning to the Internet to find quick solutions and shortcuts for doing homework and writing, research papers and thesis. They grab the information from different works and it is assumed that some students and researchers due credit will not be given to the original authors of those works. Hence, at present plagiarism is quickly becoming an academic problem of global educational and research culture. Awareness is the best tool for prevention. This study explores the foreign students' level of awareness of plagiarism.

Significance of the Study

Understanding students' perspectives regarding plagiarism is worthwhile to develop successful strategies to promote academic integrity and prevention of plagiarism. Shahabuddin (2009) states that plagiarism is a serious academic abuse and it needs to be controlled for the future social and economic well-being of the world. Therefore, prevention of plagiarism in academia is essential. Therefore current study will offer an opportunity to identify the awareness of plagiarism of postgraduates and provide a chance to identify the untouched areas and further strengthen areas of awareness. The present study is anticipated to be one of the first studies that examine the awareness of plagiarism of international students specially studying Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Objectives of the study

The general aim of the study was an assessment on awareness of plagiarism of international students studying in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the specific research objectives were:

- To understand the awareness of term 'Plagiarism'
- To identify the reasons for doing plagiarism
- To detect the knowledge of responsibility and penalty of plagiarism
- To perceive the awareness of avoiding plagiarism
- To observe the awareness of plagiarism detection tools

Review of Literature

Plagiarism by students has become a widely discussed and researched topic in different perspectives. Though this paper concentrates on the international students studying in Sri Lanka, there is an extensive literature on awareness of international students' plagiarism in higher education from across the world. Several selected studies are presented below. Gullifer (2013) conducted a study for exploring the students' perceptions of plagiarism at Charles Sturt University in Australia by using a mixed method design (qualitative and quantitative) in psychological perspective. She has revealed six themes of perceptions of plagiarism as: confusion, fear, perceived sanctions, perceived seriousness, academic consequences and resentment. Accordingly, she examined the issues related to plagiarism in the qualitative phase and relationship between six themes and contextual variables in the quantitative phase. Further Gullifer creates a concept map to explore the validity of six themes and the relationship between them. Results of the study indicated that perceptions of seriousness ranked among the least serious of all behaviors, fear as medium level and perceived sanctions as moderate level of being accused of plagiarism.

Wise et.al (2013) conducted a study related to Knowledge, Behaviors, and Attitudes towards Academic Integrity of undergraduate and graduate students in Thailand, Taiwan, and the United States. In this study six main variables; knowledge of plagiarism, academic dishonesty behavior, academic attitude, anti-plagiarism tools awareness, anti-plagiarism tools beliefs, and behavior in response to the use of anti-plagiarism tools have measured in respect of academic integrity of USA, Thailand and Taiwan. Accordingly, Wise and others (2013) found a significant difference among three countries and courses of study (undergraduate and graduate). The result of the study delineated a significant gap in knowledge of plagiarism and academic dishonesty between Taiwan and USA graduates. The researchers identified the cause for that as lack of knowledge about plagiarism. The variable academic attitude has not been significant for any country and the highest mean value of anti-plagiarism tools awareness scored by USA undergraduates. Further study reports that the pattern of response of anti-plagiarism tools behavior is slightly different than other variables.

Academic delinquency appears to be prevalent in each and every discipline with little variations due to the differences in influencing factors such as type of assessment task (Marsden, Carroll, Neill, 2005). In view of that, Gu & Brooks (2008) investigates postgraduate Chinese students' experiences and perceptions of plagiarism at a British university. Two rounds of semistructured interviews were carried out to explore the challenges facing them in their academic writing practice and perceptions of plagiarism. Gu & Brooks (2008) argue that change in perceptions of plagiarism is consequently unavoidable due to their individual educational backgrounds and experiences, the length of stay at the host country and the degree of their overall adaptation to the host culture. The researchers suggest that understanding the emotional tensions and socio-cultural values of students coming from differing academic cultures as important factors is beyond the accusation of plagiarism.

A study performed by Davis (2012) on International postgraduate students' experiences of plagiarism and it is established on the perspectives of student, tutor and expert at a UK university. The main objective of this study is to compare and contextualize the experiences of plagiarism of international students with their tutors, and selected experts in plagiarism education. Eight students, representing China, Japan, Sri Lanka and Algeria and eight tutors participated in the study. The experts were selected from the UK, Sweden, USA, and Australia. The four areas explored by Davis (2012) and the following result found against each area. 1. Views of the university definition on plagiarism; in this regard the response of students and tutors found hetero 2. Tutor requirements related to source use; the result illustrates that appears as very high. 3. Perceptions of learning and teaching related to plagiarism education; the result found a wide disparity between tutors and students 4. Associations between international students and plagiarism; the response of tutors proved that the probability of plagiarism among international students is beyond of measure. Although the Davis (2012) selected four experts for the study their contribution is not significantly highlighted and it seems as a deficiency of this study.

The prevalent literature revealed that the studies on Socio-cultural aspects of plagiarism have increased in recent years. Another study has been conducted by Introna et al. (2003) to identify cultural differences with regard to plagiarism. Data has been collected from four focus groups through interviews by nationality: UK (6), Asian (3), Chinese (4) and Greek (12) are studying at Lancaster University. Introna et al. (2003), conclude that the issue of plagiarism is not simply a matter of cheating or not cheating. It is an outcome of many diverse and complex influences and is fully embedded within a social, political, and cultural framework. Specially

functioning with international students, understanding their anxiety and sense of alienation is vital. The respondents have asserted that the requisite of a supportive institutional framework for dealing with plagiarism is an imperative component. According to the findings researchers believe that refraining from moralizing on the issue of plagiarism as important and developing the infrastructure to support students to attain the required skills is also essential.

Another study on plagiarism was performed by Turner(2008). The aim of this study is to identify the international students' knowledge and understanding of western defined concepts of plagiarism in an Australian university context. In addition to that, reasons for plagiarism are concerned. Accordingly, sixty-eight international students who were studying in two postgraduate units in Australian universities were taken as the research sample. The respondents were Asians, Africans, Europeans, and Arabians. Most respondents identified plagiarism as an action of morally wrong. Turnernotes (2008) that the students who are coming from different cultural backgrounds may have a different interpretation of plagiarism. The findings of the survey indicated that students tended to plagiarize for a range of reasons. Among them poor mastery of the Western academic writing and skill deficiencies were the key issues. Other factors were lack of time, the stress and tension of living and working in a foreign country, and a view that one should quote the foreign expert verbatim to show respect and honour.

Doss et al. (2016), examine the perceptions of plagiarism concerning domestic versus international students from a higher education institution in U.S. A. The survey is mainly based on three segments. The first segment of the survey queries the perceptions of respondents against the 'plagiarism is believed as a necessary evil'. The study found that both groups did not believe the notion that plagiarism was a necessary evil. The second segment is queried perceptions regarding 'plagiarism is deemed as unprofessional'. According to the findings both groups of respondents were discerned with the characteristics of unprofessionalism since inexperience and unfamiliarity. The third segment queried perceptions regarding 'plagiarism was deemed as illegal'. The respondents neither agree nor disagree with the characteristics of illegality.

A very recent concept paper has been written by Adhikari (2018) for helping international students to avoid plagiarism. The author asserts that teachers are the best accountable party to address plagiarism and discusses why teachers should shift focus from traditional views about cultural difference toward a multidimensional understanding of plagiarism by making a number of pedagogical recommendations. Adhikari (2018) greatly believes that the root cause for plagiarism is educational and not cultural.

Methodology

The population of this study was foreign students who were studying Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the year 2019 - 2020. The stratified random sampling method was utilized to select the subjects for the study. Survey method is used to collect primary data and a self - administrated questionnaire was prepared and distributed itin person among 75 research students in PGIPBS including three categories of postgraduate students; MA, M.Phil. and Ph.D. A total number of 64 filled questionnaires were found. Secondary data were collected from available printed and electronic sources. Statistical Products Services and Solutions (SPSS) software was assisted to tabulate data to draw useful conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Demographic Information of Participants

All the students participating for the study were engaged in Master of Buddhist Studies, Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy. The following countries were represented by participants; China, Myanmar, Indonesia, Korea, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Nepal and Singapore. Regarding the course enrollment, ten (29.4%) respondents have initiated their studies in 2018 and eight (23.5%) respondents from 2017 - 2016. Nine (26.5%) respondents enrolled in the course from 2015-2014 while seven respondents (20.6%) indicated that they have commenced their studies before 2013. The participants were predominated by males. Table 1 presents the breakdown of participants by course of study, country, duration of course enrolment, and gender in detail.

Demographic	Information	Frequency (n)	Percent
	Master	36	56.2%
Course of Study	M.Phil.	7	10.9%
	Ph.D.	21	32.8%
	China	12	18.7%
	Myanmar	29	45.3%
	Indonesia	2	3.1%
	Korea	1	1.5%
	Vietnam	10	15.6%
	Bangladesh	1	1.5%
Country	Hong Kong	1	1.5%
	India	1	1.5%
	Nepal	5	7.5%
	Singapore	1	1.5%
	Thailand	1	1.5%
	Male	41	64.1%
Gender	Female	23	35.9%
Duration of	Duration of Less than six months		56.2%
Course 1 - 2 Years		8	12.5%
Enrollment	2-3 Years	9	14.1%
	3-4 years	11	17.2%

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

2. AWARENESS OF PLAGIARISM

2.1 Awareness of Term Plagiarism

The participants have revealed the awareness of the term 'plagiarism'. Only 65.6% (n=42) students indicated that they know the term and 34.4% (n=22) of respondents said that they do not know the term 'plagiarism'. Among respondents who do not know, 28.1% (n=18) by Masters and 6.3% (n=4) by M.Phil. The students also specified that the knowledge they obtained about plagiarism came from a variety of modes. Forty-two participants who know the term 'plagiarism', 9.5% got it from participating educational sessions in their home country. Majority of respondents (76.2%) found it through the internet. An equal percentage (7.1%) of students said that they found the term through senior students and their supervisors. The figure 1 shows the breakdown of modes of awareness of the term 'plagiarism'.

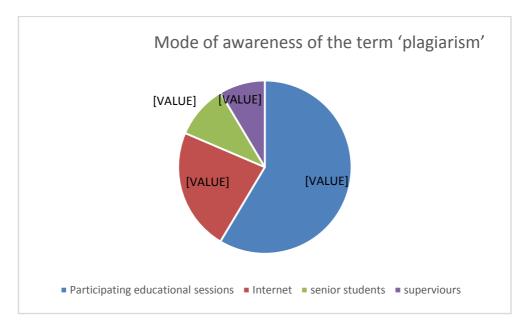


Figure 1: Modes of awareness of the term 'plagiarism'.

2.2 Reasons for Doing Plagiarism

In this section it was aimed to identify the reasons for plagiarism from the point of view of participants. Accordingly, they were asked to indicate their level of awareness with each reason on a five-point scale. International students' more favorably agreed reasons were; Impossible deadline of thesis (100%), Cut-and-Paste culture (96.9%) and English as the study language (98.5%).

2.3 Awareness of Responsibility and Penalty

When respondents were assessed on their understanding of responsibility that plagiarism found in a thesis. The result of the study indicated that 100% of students believe that plagiarism found in a thesis is responsible only for the student itself. but the accepted method is that both student and supervisor of that particular thesis are responsible in case of plagiarism.

Further, in this study try to find out the awareness of penalties regarding plagiarism. The result indicated only 20.6% (Mean: 2.68, Median: 3.00, Std. Deviation: .475) respondents think that the university will reject their thesis

while 8.8% think that as expulsion from university. None of the respondents did not agree that plagiarism is a case punishable by Law Courts.

2.4 Awareness of AvoidingPlagiarism

The respondents mentioned their views towards the steps they follow for avoiding plagiarism. Most respondents (17) put down the footnote correctly while 02 respondents behave with proper awareness of plagiarism. The following table illustrates the statistics on the awareness of avoiding plagiarism. (Only 34 responses received.)

					Use of	Following
				Proper	proper	strict
		Put down	Including	awareness	note-	research and
		the footnote	quotation	of	taking	ethical
		correctly	marks	plagiarism	techniques	guidelines
Ν	Valid	34	34	34	34	34
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Frequency		17	11	02	01	03
Mean		2.12	2.71	2.88	2.12	2.59
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Std. Deviation		1.008	.719	.478	.000	.500

Table 2: The Awareness of Avoiding Plagiarism

2.5 Awareness of Plagiarism Detection Tools

Though the purpose of plagiarism detection tools is to help researchers in detecting any possibility of plagiarism, the current study found that only 11.8% (Mean: 1.94, Std. Deviation: .239) students were familiar with the detection software while 88.2% were not familiar. The following table (3) shows the breakdown of the awareness of detection tools according to the country of respondents. (Only 34 responses received.) The students from Bangladesh, Hongkong, Nepal, and Singapore were aware of the plagiarism detection software.

Table 3: Awareness of Plagiarism Detection Tools by Country wise of Respondents

			plagiarism detection software tools			
			YES	NO	Total	
Country	China	Count	0	8	8	
		% within Country	.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Myanmar	Count	0	9	9	
		% within Country	.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Induneesia	Count	0	2	2	
		% within Country	.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Korea	Count	0	1	1	
		% within Country	.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Vietnam	Count	0	5	5	
		% within Country	.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Bangalasesh	Count	1	0	1	
		% within Country	100.0%	.0%	100.0%	
	Honkong	Count	1	0	1	
		% within Country	100.0%	.0%	100.0%	
	India	Count	0	1	1	
		% within Country	.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Nepal	Count	1	3	4	
		% within Country	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%	
	Other	Count	0	1	1	
		% within Country	.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Singapore	Count	1	0	1	
		% within Country	100.0%	.0%	100.0%	
Total		Count	4	30	34	
		% within Country	11.8%	88.2%	100.0%	

Country * plagiarism detection software tools Crosstabulation

Conclusion and Recommendations

The main focus of the study was an assessment on awareness of plagiarism of international students studying in Sri Lanka. The demographics exhibited a variety of international origins representing the respondents. It needs to be noted that the results of the current study indicate that many respondents do not have a comprehensive understanding of plagiarism. This result is also consistent with (Murray et al., 2016; Razera(2011) previous researches. Therefore, different methods need to be developed to inform the students as it is an important area in higher studies. As per the point of view of participants, the major reason for plagiarism was impossible deadline of the thesis. The findings demonstrate that putting down the footnote correctly as the best way to avoid plagiarism. Respondents know the penalty of plagiarism. But moreover, they do not agree it is a case punishable by Law courts. The great majority of respondents were not familiar with the detection software and only 04 students from Bangladesh, Hongkong, Nepal, and Singapore were aware of the plagiarism detection software.

Depending on the results, it is recommended to introduce a comprehensive policy regarding plagiarism for students of PGIPBS. It is the responsibility of authorities to take such steps for incoming international students to better understanding of plagiarism. It is an urgent need to arrange regular workshops with the aim of developing the honest behavior of students for their studies.

Before the internet era, plagiarizing something was a tiresome effort because copy text by hand from a book, an encyclopedia, newspaper etc. With the development of the internet this hard work is now simplified by two simple commands "copy and paste" (Razera, 2011). Hence it is a duty and responsibility of authorities of universities to protect students from plagiarism.

The population used in this study was limited to postgraduates who visited to PGIPBS, University of Kelaniaya. Further this study could be carried out using foreign students studying in other Universities in Sri Lanka and which will help to understand the awareness of plagiarism in a broad sense. As per the view of eminent researchers, (Sulaiman, 2018; Elshafei, 2020) the issue of plagiarism will be associated with the factors such as degree of study, student attitudes, time factor, subject knowledge, lack of interest of study, language of study and many more. Consequently, it is worthy to conduct more studies keeping in mind the above factors.

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