

Scrutinizing Indonesian Students' Understanding and Perceptions toward Plagiarism

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating Indonesian students' understanding of plagiarism practice during their final writing project (thesis and dissertation). Further, it also seeks to know the connection between their understanding and their responses to some situations that required them to discriminate against cases of plagiarism. We used a questionnaire provided by Turnitin. It was distributed to 131 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students from various universities in Malang, Indonesia. The questionnaire was disseminated through Google Forms in the first week of April 2021. The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Our data analysis results showed that many of our participants present a great understanding of plagiarism. However, only less than the total participants have adequate skills in citing the work of other people. Also, interestingly, even in the lowest number, some of our participants have never heard of plagiarism checkers.

Many researchers and research-based institutions have established various different definitions of plagiarism, as it has become an essential issue demanding greater concern from society. Among those different definitions, they seem to agree that plagiarism is regarded as stealing someone's intellectual product, a form of academic fraud, intellectual breach, and an issue that obstructs innovation and creativity in education (Akbar & Picard, 2019; Curtis & Popal, 2011; Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015). Those terms indicate that plagiarism signifies a researcher's conscious act to use other people's intellectual work without crediting the real author. Thus, this act carries damages for the owner of that intellectual work and for the scientific world, generally. However, with the vast advancement of technology and information circulation, someone's ideas might have been affected by other people's thoughts. Therefore, in writing a research report, students have to possess the skills to process other people's opinions in their work. They have to interpret the information from external sources, summarize them using their own language, and quote authentic sources.

The inability to properly cite, interpret and summarize other people's findings result in the detection of a high number of plagiarized works submitted to universities' repositories and academic journals (Baždarić, Bilić-Zulle, Brumini, & Petrovečki, 2012; Mayer, 2010). In an attempt to reduce the plagiarism number, universities, and academic journals also have established detailed standards to prevent plagiarized work from being published (Halgamuge, 2017). They mainly require the work to have a lower than 15-20% similarity index to be published in their journal. Besides, countries also have enacted regulations. Those regulations commonly consist of plagiarism prevention and mitigation. In Indonesia, the Ministry of National Education Regulation Number 17, the Year 2010, has been issued, concerning the concept and context of plagiarism, along with its preventive and curative means for higher education ((Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia, 2010). The regulation specifically targets higher education levels since this level aims to train students to expand Indonesia's research and technology institutions. Consequently, their ability to conduct research and generate accurate research reports are highly essential.

However, massive cases of plagiarism are still observed in Indonesia (Adiningrum, 2015; Agustina & Raharjo, 2017). This may be influenced by students' positive motivation and attitudes toward using the Internet as their learning resource (Patak et al., 2020; Youmans, 2011). Consequently, they can easily copy and paste their assignments from the Internet. Besides, many students also perceive their final project as a mere administrative requirement for their graduation. Therefore, the opportunities for them to commit plagiarism to get wider. The minimum emphasis on academic ethics from the University has aggravated the situation. A study carried out by (Akbar & Picard, 2019) reveals that at the university level, the definition of plagiarism is too

broad, potentially creating misunderstanding, while its sanctions remain undefined. Thus, students may plagiarize other people's work because they do not understand plagiarism properly (Perkins, Gezgin, & Roe, 2020), or they have no fear of plagiarizing someone's scientific work. Thus, the identification of students' understanding of plagiarism remains crucial in the recent field of education.

Many studies related to plagiarism have been carried out seeking to detect plagiarism and formulate solutions to reduce the number of plagiarism. (Thompsett & Ahluwalia, 2010) conduct a study on the relationship between students' plagiarism and their ethnicity, age, and gender, meanwhile (Curtis & Popal, 2011) also investigated the rate of students' plagiarism, their understanding of plagiarism, perceived seriousness of plagiarism, and factors related to plagiarism. In addition, other studies have also analyzed the possible causes and solutions to reduce students' plagiarism (Foltýnek, Rybička, & Demoliou, 2014; Guraya & Guraya, 2017; Perkins et al., 2020). Those studies adopt surveys and questionnaires, in which the subjects are asked to complete the questionnaire based on their own experiences and their view on plagiarism. However, there has not been a study that investigated the relationship between their view of plagiarism and their ability to avoid plagiarism. Therefore, this study aims to analyze students' understanding and perception of plagiarism, along with their ability to detect and avoid plagiarism.

METHOD

This study utilized a quantitative approach and a 20-item Turnitin-derived questionnaire. Twelve of these items assessed students' theoretical comprehension of plagiarism, while the remaining eight presented scenarios in which students were asked to determine how to avoid plagiarism. In the final section of the questionnaire, respondents were also asked to make recommendations for their universities to help them develop more effective anti-plagiarism procedures. Since Turnitin created and utilized the questionnaire, additional studies for validity and reliability were unnecessary. This was distributed via Google Forms. This study included 133 senior college students in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, who were completing their final projects and were selected at random from several colleges with specialized study programs. In addition, the educational levels of the participants varied, with 100, 21, and 12 undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students, respectively. The gathered data were examined using descriptive statistics on each questionnaire item in order to determine the respondents' theoretical grasp of plagiarism and their capacity to solve the problems presented in some items, which represented their ability to recognize and prevent plagiarism. Students' comprehension and ability were compared to determine whether their comprehension accurately mirrored their ability to avoid plagiarism.

RESULTS

Using a questionnaire, we gathered information about the participants' understanding of plagiarism, their sources for learning about plagiarism, their experience with the plagiarism checker tool, and their ability to cite sources properly. Table 1 displays the collected data on the participants' comprehension of plagiarism concepts. Meanwhile, participants' sources of learning plagiarism are illustrated in Figure 1. Our participants admitted that they learned to understand and avoid plagiarism from various sources, including classroom discussions, students' guidelines, and other sources.

Table 1. Summary of Participants' Conceptual Understanding of Plagiarism

No.	Category	Number	Percentage
1.	High understanding	100	75
2.	Moderate understanding	21	15.8
3.	Low understanding	12	9.5

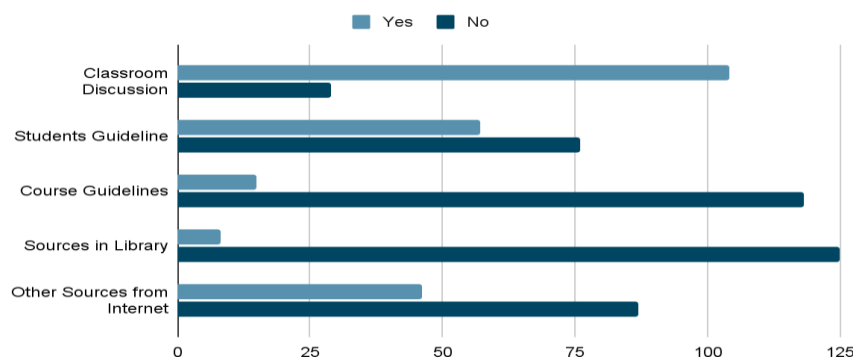


Figure 1. Students' Learning Sources

In addition, we also gathered information related to the participants' experience in operating plagiarism software checkers. Surprisingly, in this section, we uncovered that as many as 12 participants have no experience in using plagiarism checker software, while the majority of them, 121 participants, had ever operated the software. After that, we provided a series of examples and asked the participants to select the cases that could be categorized as plagiarism. In this section, 91 participants (68.5) gave the correct classification. In the last section, we gave eight cases and asked participants to give the best solution to avoid plagiarism. The analysis of student's answers in this section is listed in table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Participants' Answers to Scenarios Requiring Good Citation

No.	Description	Total	Percentage
1.	Correct answer	56	42
2.	Incorrect answer	77	58

DISCUSSION

The beginning part of the result illustrates the participants' confidence in their ability to detect and avoid plagiarism. The result shows most participants (75%) admit that they have a moderate understanding of plagiarism, while 15.8% and 3.8% state to have a strong and very strong understanding of plagiarism. This result is linear with the study from (Curtis & Vardanega, 2016) reporting that people have a better understanding of plagiarism in this recent decade. Participants' great understanding of plagiarism can be caused by the abundant availability of resources that facilitate them to learn the proper citation and avoid plagiarism. The majority of the participants (78.2%) stated that they had discussed the proper way to cite and refrain from plagiarism in their courses, while the remaining 21.8% of them had never had such a discussion. Lecturers present a great role in enhancing students' attitudes toward plagiarism as they have to observe any students' academic wrongdoings and guide them always to practice honest behavior (Patak et al., 2020).

Aside from direct plagiarism-related classroom discussions, our participants disclosed that they also learned through the resources provided by their universities. The majority of our participants (42.9%) revealed that they learned the proper citation from their students' guidelines, while 11.3 and 6 % of them learned from their course guidelines and the sources provided in their university libraries, respectively. The remaining 34.6% of participants mentioned that they learned the means to avoid plagiarism through other sources, such as the Internet. This finding illustrates that our participants have extensive and great access to the sources of excellent citation procedures. Accordingly, most of the participants (69.2%) categorized that their universities had provided sufficient access for the resources to help them avoid plagiarism, while 30.8% of them stated that the provided resources were not sufficient. In the case of plagiarism in college, University has a substantially significant role in providing the required facilities to help students avoid the act of plagiarism (Walker & White, 2014). As students have been sufficiently exposed to the knowledge and information associated with plagiarism, they present satisfactory knowledge of the ethicality and definition of plagiarism. Most of the participants (81%) gave the correct definition of plagiarism, while 97% of them also agreed that plagiarism is unethical in the field of education.

In addition to their great knowledge, the majority of our participants also report their experience in using plagiarism checker applications. Their experiences should demonstrate their familiarity with the programs and understanding of the crucial aspect of avoiding plagiarism. Linearly, a study reported that students score a lower plagiarism rate once they are told that their work will be checked using a plagiarism checker (Batane, 2010; Moniz, Fine, & Bliss, 2008). Interestingly, some of our participants (9%) have never heard of the plagiarism checker application. Even if this number is relatively low, this finding should be concerning as they are in their final year. In their four years of academic life, these participants should have produced a great number of academic papers and essays. However, with their zero experience in using plagiarism checkers, there is no assurance of the authenticity and originality of their works. A previous study investigating the effect of a specific teaching method on students' functional understanding of plagiarism showed that the different teaching methods result in no significantly different functional understanding among students, but they rather need more hands-on practice (Moniz et al., 2008). Besides, the participants' minimum experience in using plagiarism checkers reflects their low concern about the practice of avoiding plagiarized work (Elmunsyah, Suswanto, Asfani, & Hidayat, 2018). Even if their number is minimum, these students require special attention from the universities.

After examining the participants' knowledge background on plagiarism, we also evaluated their practical knowledge through a number of statements depicting the practice of plagiarism in the questionnaire. In completing the questionnaire, the participants were asked to judge whether the given statements could be categorized as an act of plagiarism. Besides, we also gave a complicated situation where the participants should propose the correct way to cite and avoid plagiarism. On average, 68.4% of participants can correctly differentiate which should be categorized as an act of plagiarism.

Interestingly, in contrast to their great theoretical understanding, when asked to propose the best way to cite previous work, only 41.8% of participants cited properly, while the majority of them gave incorrect citations. This low ability to properly cite other people's work is concerning, as it reflects high plagiarism practices among the participants. This result is consistent with a previous study conducted (Pickard, 2006) that most university students still practice plagiarism. Besides, a study conducted by (Risquez, O'Dwyer, & Ledwith, 2013) also confirmed that students' self-reported means are not a strong predictor of their ability to avoid plagiarism. Therefore, an examination of students' knowledge of plagiarism is not sufficient to identify their ability to avoid plagiarism.

As our data analysis results showed that students' great understanding of knowledge related to plagiarism avoidance does not reflect their ability to avoid plagiarism, we suggest that the universities and lecturers develop more comprehensive strategies to reduce plagiarism, such as by providing more hands-on practice using plagiarism checker application (Moniz et al., 2008), along with enhancing students' writing skills (Dias & Bastos, 2014) and development of students' academic integrity (Curtis & Popal, 2011). Besides, the English for Academic Purposes course combined with academic misconduct education has also been reported to lower the rate of plagiarism (Perkins et al., 2020). Lastly, lecturers and universities may also introduce a paraphrasing strategy to aid students in reducing the plagiarism rate in their works (Hagaman & Casey, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Our data analysis results showed that most of our participants presented an excellent understanding of the definition and example of the plagiarism act. They also expressed that their universities have provided sufficient infrastructure and facilities for the avoidance of plagiarism, as they admitted that they learn definitions and examples of plagiarism through course discussions, course guidelines, university guidelines, and sources in the university library. However, we still found several students who have never used a plagiarism checker application. Further, we also found that less than half of our participants can practice the best way to cite other people's works. Thus, we concluded that students' great understanding of plagiarism does not represent their skills in avoiding plagiarism. Accordingly, we suggest future studies utilize practice-based methods in examining students' ability to avoid plagiarism.

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