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Perception of and Attitudes towards Plagiarism among Graduate Students in Ghana

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Perception of and Attitudes towards Plagiarism among Graduate Students in Ghana

ABSTRACT

This study investigated students' perception of plagiarism, sources of information on plagiarism, attitude towards plagiarism, reasons for acts of plagiarism and knowledge of the consequences of plagiarism. A quantitative approach was used. Data was gathered using survey from a sample size of 319 graduate students of University of Ghana, selected using the stratified sampling technique. The main data collection instrument was the questionnaire and the data were analysed descriptively. Findings showed a universal awareness of plagiarism with lecturers as their major source of information. Students generally had a basic understanding of the concept of plagiarism but have broadened the concept of plagiarism to encompass other forms of academic dishonesty. Although they believed they have control over plagiarism, they still plagiarized. Reasons for plagiarising included poor academic writing skills, laziness, lack of time management skills, poor understanding of plagiarism, ease of downloading other people's work from the Internet and pressure to succeed. The study creates awareness of plagiarism and its consequences, and facilitates increased knowledge, and understanding of the subject among students. It also adds to knowledge and serves as an additional source of reference to researchers and students in this area of study.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Attitudes, Perceptions, Graduate Students, University of Ghana, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism has gained research attention in recent times as a way of ensuring credible research. The academic community needs adequate, reliable and accurate information to function. Faculty and students need information for their research, studies, examination and report writing. The information age has provided information in different formats such as print, audio, video, image and electronic. Information in these different formats have become readily available and accessible to students, faculty members and researchers via the internet and other library platforms for their academic work. The proliferation of technology and the readily availability and easy accessibility of information has come with the rise in plagiarism (Tayan, 2016).

Plagiarism is defined as the acts of using other people's ideas without giving due credit or reference to the original source of the ideas (Helgesson, 2015; Pandey, 2015). Plagiarism therefore constitutes stealing in its fundamental terms. Research suggests that acts of plagiarism are rampant within the academic community globally, particularly among graduate students (Amiri, 2016). The alarming rates of plagiarism among students have led many institutions and policy makers to implement certain policies and measures to curb its occurrence ((Ek & Vaicharik, 2018)). In Ghana, where the current study was conducted for instance, universities are beginning to give the issue of plagiarism the needed policy attention it deserves. An example is the University of Ghana's Policy on Plagiarism which serves as a guide to both faculty, students and other staff. It defines what constitute plagiarism,

provides students and staff with the right format for citing sources, and spells out the necessary sanctions for plagiarism (University of Ghana, 2015).

University of Ghana's Plagiarism Policy (2015) recognizes two main forms namely: intentional and non-intentional. The intentional plagiarism occurs when a plagiarist consciously presents another person's work as his own. In other words, the plagiarist presents the sentences, phrases, paragraphs and pages belonging to another person word for word without citing the source. Non-intentional plagiarism on the other hand is not driven by the intention to deceive. This commonly occurs when the writer does not follow conventional standards for referencing. Intentional and non-intentional factors also occur for self-plagiarism. The purpose of all these policies is to inform stakeholders including graduate students about the issues of plagiarism and the consequences thereafter.

Problem Statement

Current studies on plagiarism among graduate students are lacking in some critical questions. Majority of these studies reveal that students understand plagiarism but do not fully appreciate the depth, width and breadth of current manifestations of the behaviour. Empirical studies have not focused on investigating the factors that contribute to this limited understanding, such as their perceptions of and attitudes towards plagiarism, sources of knowledge on the concept of plagiarism, factors that influence them to plagiarize. There is also limited studies in African context where majority of universities lack sophisticated software tools for checking plagiarism.

In Ghana, only one study (Adika, 2014) examined students' sources of information on plagiarism among graduate students. The study did not focus on the concept of plagiarism but rather students' knowledge and understanding of referencing. While referencing constitute key element of plagiarism, students' understanding of referencing cannot be equated with their understanding of plagiarism. There is thus a need for an in-depth study of students' plagiarism and the factors that influence them to plagiarize. The current study seeks to fill these gaps in our knowledge of plagiarism among graduate students by examining their perceptions and behaviours towards plagiarism at the University of Ghana.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perception of plagiarism, sources of information on plagiarism, attitude towards plagiarism and reasons for acts of plagiarism among graduate students of University of Ghana.

THEORETICAL AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical background

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was adopted for this study. The TPB theory was developed by Ajzen (1991) to explain individuals' intentions for engaging in specific behaviors. The basic

assumption of the TPB is that intentions are the main motivational forces that shape human behaviour. Intentions forms the reasons of how hard people are willing to try and how much of an effort they exert into performing behaviour. The fundamental rule that underpins an individuals' intention is that, the strength of the intention to engage in behaviour, the more likely the individual will perform that action. According to Ajzen (1991), behaviors depend two underlying beliefs - normative beliefs (which are the main beliefs that make up subjective norms) and control beliefs (which are what individuals' beliefs in behavioral control). Therefore, when individuals perceive the outcome of executing behaviour as positive, they will have a positive attitude towards executing that behaviour and vice-versa. The TPB argues further that people perform certain behaviours only when they know significant others approve of that behaviour. Thus, the intention to perform behaviour is influenced by the product of the attitudes and subjective norm.

In applying the TPB to the current study, graduate students' act of plagiarism is influenced by their intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen concludes that an individual's intention, attitude, subjective norms as well as normative beliefs influence his or her behaviour. Therefore, change in behaviour are influenced by people's situation through standardized codes of conduct of colleges and classroom environments, and working to develop subjective norms that align with significant others. In conclusion, the propositions of Ajzen's Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB) is applicable to the behaviour of students on the issue of plagiarism.

Empirical Review

Students' Perception of Plagiarism

Empirical studies suggest that students' perception of what constitutes plagiarism is sketchy. Students tend to have a basic understanding of plagiarism but when it comes to complex issues of plagiarism, there is some confusion (Idiegbeyan-Ose et al., 2016). This situation cuts across students from different parts of the world and with different academic capabilities. Most of them fail to recognize when it goes beyond their basic understanding of what plagiarism entails. In Ghana, Appiah (2016) have reported among 278 students that their definitions of plagiarism were narrow and that they confused other forms of academic misconduct with plagiarism. Specifically, majority of the students (82.7%) thought that collusion should be considered plagiarism. However, 64% thought that "patchwriting", reproducing work by slightly altering words or grammatical structure, should not be considered as plagiarism. In a related study,

The situation is not any different in the university contexts in the advanced countries. For example, Gullifer and Tyson (2010) reported among university students in Australia that the students expressed a basic understanding of plagiarism together with some more detailed misunderstanding of plagiarism. Some of the participants thought that collusion should be considered as plagiarism and should be sanctioned appropriately. They also expressed some additional knowledge which does not

fall under plagiarism. For example, they indicated that paying someone to do an assignment was plagiarism. Childers and Bruton (2015) have also reported similar findings among university students in the United States of America that the students failed to recognize instances of inadequate citation as constituting plagiarism. Also, the case of reuse of concepts or ideas alone without citation did not constitute plagiarism according to the students.

Chien (2016), Ehrich, Howard, Mu and Bokosmaty (2016) have also tried to link academic performance of students to their understanding of plagiarism. The idea behind this line of research is that plagiarism within the academic community has both basic and technical meaning (Ehrich et al., 2016). Therefore, while the basic definition or understanding of plagiarism may be available to even average students, the technical meaning of plagiarism might only be understood by students with high academic achievement. This assertion has been tested among university students in Taiwan. Chien (2016) tested knowledge of plagiarism among high-performing and low-performing students. Findings showed that students in high achieving group have better understanding of plagiarism, particularly in the areas of quoting ideas without and uncritical paraphrasing.

Sources of Information

Few studies have examined sources of information of plagiarism among students. A study by Adika (2014) among graduate students in Ghana found that majority of them (83.2%) used the internet as their source of information for plagiarism. Other sources identified included journal articles, textbooks and sometimes lecture notes. Other studies conducted in other part of the world also show similar findings in line with Adika's (2014) study in Ghana. Chien (2016) reported in Taiwan that majority of the students (80.1%) indicated that they get most of their information on plagiarism from internet and lecturers, especially during lectures, with few indicating getting their knowledge from recommended reading and supplementary reading lists.

Doss et al., (2016) have also reported in a comparative study between male and female students that most of them (56.8% of the male students and 63.2% of female students) get their knowledge from lecturers. In addition to the lecturers, some of them reported other avenues such as internet sources (25.2%), journal article guidelines (21%), academic magazines (18.2%) and text books (12%). Even though studies on sources of information on plagiarism among students are very few, it is evident that lecturers constitute an important source of information for students. It is therefore imperative to understand how the various sources of information on plagiarism influence the plagiarism practices of students (Doss et al., 2016).

Attitude towards Plagiarism

A study conducted by Smith et al., (2007) among undergraduate accounting students in Malaysian for instance have reported that students who believed in their ability of scholarly writing were less likely

to plagiarize. On the other hand, those who believe they have difficulty with academic writing reported plagiarizing often. Similar findings have also been reported among graduate students in three Australian universities (Ehrich, Howard, Mu & Bokosmaty, 2016). In terms of intentions, the theory of planned behaviour assumes that intentions are the best predictor of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, before individuals engage in any behaviour, they first of all develop intentions to do so.

However, within the context of plagiarism, the evidence has been mixed and inconsistent, regarding how intentions to plagiarize leads to actual plagiarism. For instance, in a study conducted by Gururajan and Roberts (2005) in Australian universities, they reported that students who had higher intentions towards plagiarism engaged in plagiarized more. However, in a related study, Smith et al., (2007) also reported that both students with high and low intentions to plagiarize all engaged in plagiarism behaviours. This means that some students plagiarize with the intentions to do so while others plagiarize with no intentions of doing so. The inconsistencies in the intentions-behaviour findings within the context of plagiarism lend support to the two forms of plagiarism (i.e. intentional plagiarism and unintentional plagiarism) which have been reported in the literature (Ehrich et al., 2016; Gururajan & Roberts, 2005; Smith et al., 2007).

Reasons for Students' act of Plagiarism

The literature is replete with various reasons why students engage in the acts of plagiarism. One of the reasons that emerge prominently is that students have poor academic writing knowledge and skills, including knowledge and skills involved in avoiding plagiarism. Chien's (2016) found 67% of students asserted that they lacked good academic writing skill. Appiah (2016) also found that 71.2% of a sample of 278 students attributed their plagiarism to their weak reading comprehension and academic writing skills. Other factors found included difficulty in find good sources (40.3%), paraphrase (33.1%), and understand referencing formats (17.3%), citation and referencing (9.4%). Wilkinson's (2009) study also revealed that 76% of 217 Australian nursing students attributed their cheating (plagiarism) to lack of understanding of the rules of referencing. Library staff attributed students' plagiarism to their poor understanding of the rules of referencing.

Batane (2010), however, reported findings that contradict the assertion that plagiarism stems from poor academic writing skills. The findings revealed that, only 6.7% of the 272 students from a Botswana university attributed their plagiarism to their poor academic writing skills. Poor academic writing knowledge and skills may arise from inadequate training of students. Appiah (2016) reported that among 278 students that participated in his study, only 23% of the students indicated that they had received training in academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues.

Limited opportunities to practice what has been learnt may also contribute to students' poor academic writing skills. Adika (2014) examined the Ghanaian graduate students' knowledge of documenting

and referencing using a sample of 125 students. Eighty-eight percent of the graduate students indicated that they had received training in the course of their undergraduate education on the different referencing styles. However, when asked about the referencing style they used in their undergraduate long essay, 95.2% of the graduate student did not know. Moreover, only 44% of the students stated that their lecturers gave them assignments requiring the use of referencing styles. Thus, their chances of putting to practice what they have learnt from trainings on referencing styles were stifled

The advent of the Internet has aided in making plagiarism easy, a situation that cuts across the world. In Ghana, an overwhelming majority of university students (89.9%) in Appiah's (2016) study asserted that ease of cut and paste from the Internet was responsible for plagiarism. Students from a university in Botswana also raised the issue of ease of access contributing to why students plagiarize (Batane, 2010). Among a sample of 217 Australians, 63% of students cited the ease of access to materials on the Internet as a reason why students might plagiarize (Wilkinson, 2009). Sixty-nine percent of a total of 48 staff shared the same reason as the students.

An additional reason for student plagiarism lies in time constraint and the amount of effort required in writing honest papers. Appiah's (2016) survey report indicated that 85.6% of the student sample agreed that time constraint influenced the decision to plagiarize. In addition, 77% and 65.5% stated that being unable to cope with workload and task being beyond one's ability (respectively) were reasons for plagiarism. Batane (2010) also found that 75% of the students reported that they plagiarize because of laziness and lack of enforcement. Appiah (2016) reported that 78.4% of students thought that the reason for plagiarism was that the lecturers did not care. Furthermore, only 36.7% of students thought that students caught in plagiarism incurred any penalties as prescribed by the school's policy on plagiarism.

Students' Knowledge of the Consequences of Plagiarism

Studies have shown that students are aware of professional and legal consequences of plagiarism. For example, majority of high-achieving and low-achieving Taiwanese students shared the view that plagiarism was an intellectual rights issue (Chien, 2016). In addition, they asserted that plagiarism could earn one a bad reputation in the academic circle. One student stated that, the academic audience may have believed in the results of a researcher's studies, but when it is found that the researcher plagiarized his or her good reputation will be destroyed and his work will lose credibility. A sample of 150 Australian students did not only express fear of academic sanctions but also a concern for the consequence on their careers (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). This was particularly the case of police officer trainees who expressed their fears in a focus group discussion. It was their fear that they will lose their jobs if they were caught to have plagiarized.

Even though some students have the awareness of the professional and legal consequences of plagiarism, others may not necessarily agree on the consequences. Three studies provide evidence to support the claim. Doss et al. (2016) examined the perception of students on plagiarism as issues of professionalism and legality (or illegality) among a sample of 178 students enrolled in the College of Business in South-eastern United States. The students were neutral in their responses to the questions on professionalism and illegality. Doss et al., (2016) also found among a sample of 178 full-time and part-time students in United States in the same institution that students neither agreed nor disagreed on plagiarism being an issue of unprofessionalism. The same result held for the same sample of full-time and part-time students on plagiarism being an issue of illegality (Doss et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Research Institution

The study was conducted at the University of Ghana, the oldest and largest university in Ghana. The University of Ghana was originally established as the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948 and was originally affiliated to the University of London. However, it attained the status of a full university in 1961, and now has nearly 40,000 full time students. Graduate students of the University are subsumed under the School of Research and Graduate Studies (University of Ghana, 2015).

Research Design

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. This design was used because it is the most economical way of collecting data from a large sample (Bryman, 2016). The design is also suitable for assessing perceptions, attitudes and behaviour in a large population. It helped in accessing the attitudes, perceptions and behaviours towards plagiarism among large sample of graduate students across different disciplines and levels of study (Nardi, 2015).

Target Population

The population of graduate students of University of Ghana for the 2018/2019 academic year was 3,927 (obtained from the university's Institutional Research and Planning Office). Table 1 gives the breakdown of the graduate student population of University of Ghana

Table 1: Graduate Programs and Number of Students

Graduate Programs	No. of Students
PhD	577
MA	378
M.Phil.	1163
MSc	486
MBA	1227
MPA	96

<i>Total</i>	3927
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Source: University of Ghana IRPO, 2016

Sample Size

For the current study, the sample size was 10% of the population. The 10% was based on Alvi (2016) proposition that when a population of interest is very large (more than 1000), the sample size should be 10% of the total population to get a representative sample. Bryman (2016) also mentions that because of the problems associated with survey designs (e.g. not returning questionnaire, filling questionnaire wrongly etc), sampling a minimum of 10% ensures that, after accounting for all the problems, the final sample used for the analysis would be more than 5% of the population. Based on the above propositions, for a population of 3,927 graduate students, a sample size of 10% is 392.7 graduate students. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Size Stratification Based on Program of Study

Graduate Programmes	No. of Students	Approximate
PhD	57.7	58
MA	37.8	38
M.Phil.	116.3	116
MSc	48.6	49
MBA	122.7	123
MPA	9.6	10
TOTAL	392.7	394

(Source: Researcher's Own Estimation, February, 2019)

Sampling Technique

Participants were selected using stratified random sampling technique. The sampling was done by first stratifying participants in the target population into groups based on their programs of study. The researcher then randomly selected proportionate number of study participants from each strata or programme by using the lottery or fishbowl technique as follows. First, the researcher took the list of students for each programme and assigned numbers to each student. For example, PHD students were assigned numbers 01 to 0577 on their list. The numbers were then written on pieces of papers which were then folded and placed in a bowl. After that, the researcher picked out 58 papers one at a time which was the sample for that stratum. Next, the researcher then ticked the students with those numbers on the list. This process was repeated for each programme till all the 394 students were randomly selected from each stratum

Data Gathering

The researcher sent SMS to all the participants who had been selected randomly to participate in the study. The respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study and were assured of their confidentiality. For the data administration and collection, students who were randomly selected by the researcher were then located and issued the questionnaires to fill. The questionnaires were administered at their lecture theatres, halls of residence and the research commons of the Balme library of University of Ghana. However, for students outside campus, the questionnaires were administered via e-mails. The researcher however, faced some difficulties in getting all the study participants. Through the use of e-mails, phone communication and WhatsApp messages the researcher collected all the completed questionnaires.

At the end of the data collection process, out of three hundred and ninety-four (394) questionnaires that were distributed, three hundred and fifty (350) questionnaires were returned. After screening through the returned questionnaires, thirty-nine (39) questionnaires were discarded for various reasons including incomplete questionnaires, unfilled questionnaires, respondents not providing demographic information, wrong responses to questionnaires etc. Therefore, at the end of the screening process, three hundred and nineteen (319) completed questionnaires were retained for data analysis giving a response rate of 81.4%.

The researcher adhered to the code of ethics in conducting research stipulated by the University of Ghana policy on research ethics. The nature and purpose of the study was first explained to participants who were approached for the study. The consent of participants was also sought. They were made aware of the voluntary nature of the study, their right to withdraw at any point in time without explanation or penalty and were assured of privacy and confidentiality.

Measures

Questionnaire was used to gather the data. The questionnaire had these sections - knowledge of plagiarism, sources of information on plagiarism, attitude towards plagiarism, reasons for plagiarism and awareness of consequences of plagiarism.

Data Analysis

The data was processed, and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, charts and graphs with the help of the SPSS software. The data was processed, and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, charts and graphs with the help of the SPSS software. The reliability of the scales too was established using Cronbach alpha. The results are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

As shown on Table 3, males constituted majority of the participants (61.6%) with females constituting 38.4%. The respondents' ages ranged between 20 - 43 years, with a mean age of 28.75 years. Majority of them master's students. Majority of the participants were in their first year (47.9%) and second year (43.8%).

Table 3: Demographic profiles of the participants

Variable	Category	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender	Male	195	61.6
	Female	124	38.4
Age	20-25 years	52	16.4
	26-30 years	162	50.7
	31-35 years	79	25.7
	36+ years	26	8.2
Course	M PHIL	96	30.1
	MA	26	8.2
	MBA	100	31.4
	MSC	40	12.5
	MPA	10	3.1
	PHD	47	14.7

Knowledge of Plagiarism

In assessing knowledge of plagiarism, participants were made to rate series of statements as either constituting plagiarism or not. The results are presented on Table 4. The findings indicated that generally the respondents are knowledgeable about what constitutes plagiarism. Majority of the respondents (80.9%) considered copying verbatim from another person's work without using quotation marks as an act of plagiarism. This was followed by actions that involve copying word for word from books or other printed materials without acknowledgements (68.7%). Only few respondents (5.2%) considered behaviours involving paraphrasing a text without acknowledgement as plagiarism.

Table 4: Respondents' views on Acts Constituting Plagiarism

Items	Yes Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Copying verbatim from another other people's research works without using quotation marks	258	80.9%

Copying word for word from a book or journal without acknowledgement	219	68.7%
Submitting a work as a group while it is written by an individual	206	63.97%
Not including reference in one's work	186	55.7%
Paying other people to write assignment or term paper	183	54.8%
Inventing or altering data or statistics in one's work	169	53.2%
Writing an assignment for a colleague	166	52.4%
Inventing references or bibliography	79	24.7%
Submitting an assignment written by someone in part or whole	71	22.3%
Summarizing a text without acknowledging the source	51	19.8%
Paraphrasing a text without acknowledging the source	39	16.8%
Copying and pasting from the Internet without citing the original source	16	5.2%

Sources of Information on Plagiarism

The sources of information on plagiarism are provided on Table 5 indicates their responses. The most popular sources revealed in the Table are: lecturers (37.8%) and personal studies (23.7%). Other sources include colleagues (12.8%), orientations for fresh students (11.5%) and university websites (10.9%). The results revealed that majority of the students got their sources from their lecturers. This could mean that students hardly read outside what is given to them by their lecturers. Thus, most students depend on the easiest way to obtain information for their academic work.

Table 5: Sources of information

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Lecturers	177	37.8%
Colleagues	60	12.8%
University website	51	10.9%
Orientation	54	11.5%
Personal	111	23.7%
Other	15	3.2%

Attitudes towards Plagiarism among the Participants

Table 6 below provides a presentation of attitudes towards plagiarism. Findings indicated that respondents have very mild attitude towards plagiarism. This is reflected in the fact that they considered plagiarism acts on humanitarian grounds. For instance, some of the respondents (44.3%) indicated that self-plagiarism should not be regarded as plagiarism. Others (29.3%) for instance disagree with the names of authors who plagiarize being made public.

Table g: Attitude towards Plagiarism

Item	SA	A	S	D	SD
Sometimes one cannot avoid using other people's words without citing the source, because there are only so many ways to describe something.	31 (9.7%)	47 (14.7%)	75 (23.5%)	60 (18.8%)	106 (33.2%)
It is justified to use previous descriptions of a method, because the method itself remains the same	29 (9.1%)	104 (32.6%)	78 (23.5%)	57 (17.9%)	51 (16.0%)
Self-plagiarism is not punishable because it is not harmful	60 (18.8%)	48 (15.0%)	85 (26.6%)	52 (16.3%)	74 (23.2%)
Plagiarized parts of a paper may be ignored if the paper is of great scientific value.	55 (17.2%)	17 (5.3%)	39 (12.2%)	95 (29.8%)	113 (35.4%)
Self-plagiarism should not be punishable in the same way as plagiarism is.	59 (18.5%)	59 (18.5%)	87 (27.3%)	57 (17.9%)	57 (17.9%)
Young researchers who are just learning the ropes should receive milder punishment for plagiarism.	44 (13.8%)	65 (20.4%)	57 (17.9%)	100 (31.3%)	53 (16.6%)
If one cannot write well in a foreign language (eg, English), it is justified to copy parts of a similar paper already published in that language.	34 (10.7%)	18 (5.6%)	66 (20.7%)	72 (22.6%)	129 (40.4%)
I could not write a scientific paper without plagiarizing	36 (11.3%)	47 (14.7%)	71 (22.3%)	60 (18.8%)	105 (32.9%)
Short deadlines give me the right to plagiarize a bit	40 (15.5%)	28 (8.8%)	55 (17.2%)	87 (27.3%)	109 (34.2%)
When I do not know what to write, I translate a part of a paper from a foreign language	23 (7.2%)	27 (8.5%)	81 (25.4%)	80 (25.1%)	108 (33.9%)
It is justified to use one's own previously published work without providing citation in order to complete the current work	44 (13.8%)	44 (13.8%)	67 (21.0%)	74 (23.2%)	90 (28.2%)
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	35 (11.0%)	44 (13.8%)	44 (13.8%)	91 (28.5%)	105 (32.9%)
Plagiarists do not belong in the scientific community	71 (22.3%)	33 (10.3%)	70 (21.9%)	78 (24.5%)	67 (21.0%)
The names of the authors who plagiarize should be disclosed to the scientific community.	36 (11.3%)	43 (13.5%)	79 (24.8%)	68 (21.3%)	93 (29.2%)
In times of moral and ethical decline, it is important to discuss issues like plagiarism and self-plagiarism	35 (11.0%)	47 (14.7%)	67 (21.0%)	68 (21.3%)	102 (32.0%)
Plagiarism impoverishes the investigative spirit	34 (10.7%)	23 (7.2%)	81 (25.4%)	67 (21.0%)	114 (35.7%)

A plagiarized paper does not harm science	39 (12.2%)	26 (8.2%)	40 (12.5%)	94 (29.5%)	120 (37.6%)
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Reasons for Engaging in Plagiarism

Respondents were asked to rate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with some statement that assesses reasons for plagiarism. The results from the responses are summarized on Table 8. Findings from the study indicated that majority of the respondents (48.0%) indicated they have been involved in plagiarism because they believe that everybody is engaged in it. This is followed by respondents (47.0%) who also indicated that they plagiarize because they believe that plagiarism is not a big deal. Other respondents (38.9%) also indicated not knowing how to cite sources as being reason for their cheating. Other reasons given included lecturers not complaining about it (32.2%), ease of downloading other people's work online (39.2%), pressure to succeed (27.0%), for better grades (30.7%).

Table 8: Reasons for Plagiarism

Item	SA	A	S	D	SD
Find it difficult to paraphrase or summarize	65 (20.4%)	91 (28.5%)	66 (20.7%)	84 (26.3%)	13 (4.1%)
Nobody checks cheating and those who do it never get caught	26 (8.2%)	51 (16.0%)	102 (33.2%)	106 (33.2%)	34 (10.7%)
It appears most lecturers I know ignore cheating	24 (7.5%)	36 (11.3%)	94 (29.5%)	126 (39.5%)	39 (12.2%)
Laziness and lack of time management	82 (25.7%)	112 (35.1%)	59 (18.5%)	45 (14%)	21 (6.6%)
Some of the assignments are difficult	40 (12.5%)	107 (33.5%)	94 (29.5%)	44 (13.8%)	34 (10.7%)
It is easy to download assignment from the Internet free of charge	40 (12.5%)	125 (39.2%)	97 (30.4%)	43 (13.5%)	14 (4.4%)
It is easy to plagiarize a paper without my lecturer knowing about it	29 (9.1%)	52 (16.3%)	123 (38.6%)	76 (23.8%)	39 (12.2%)
Do not know how to cite the sources	36 (11.3%)	68 (21.3%)	56 (17.6%)	124 (38.9%)	35 (11.0%)
Pressure to succeed	68 (21.3%)	77 (24.1%)	86 (27.0%)	67 (21.0%)	21 (6.6%)
Most lecturers never complain about it	31 (9.7%)	32 (10.7%)	103 (32.3%)	116 (36.4%)	35 (11.0%)
Those who cheat get better grades	44 (13.8%)	86 (27.0%)	98 (30.7%)	70 (21.9%)	21 (6.6%)
Everybody is doing it	21 (6.6%)	40 (12.5%)	153 (48.0%)	63 (19.7%)	42 (13.2%)
Poor understanding of plagiarism	58 (18.2%)	121 (37.9%)	76 (23.8%)	47 (14.7%)	17 (5.3%)
Plagiarism is not a big deal	29 (9.1%)	36 (11.3%)	61 (19.1%)	150 (47.0%)	43 (13.5%)

DISCUSSION

Knowledge of Plagiarism

The findings showed that the respondents' correctly identified acts that passes as plagiarism but also other acts of academic dishonesty as constituting plagiarism. For instance, in terms of correctly identifying acts of plagiarism, the analyses revealed that most of the respondents considered copying verbatim from another person's work as constituting plagiarism. This was followed by actions that involve copying word for word from books or other printed materials without acknowledgements.

Only few respondents considered behaviours involving paraphrasing a text without acknowledgement and summarizing a text without acknowledgment respectively as plagiarism. Others also considered submitting an assignment written by someone in part or whole writing an assignment for a colleague, submitting a work as a group while it is written by an individual and paying somebody to write assignment or term paper as constituting plagiarism. Nonetheless, only few respondents believed copying and pasting from the Internet without citing the original source constituted plagiarism. This analysis clearly shows that most of the students had the basic understanding of what constituted plagiarism as majority of the respondents knew what exactly constituted plagiarism. This is consistent with literature with several authors including Appiah (2016), Guffer and Tyson (2010), Chien (2016) and Childers and Bruton (2015) of the view that students express a basic understanding of what constitute plagiarism.

Nevertheless, quite a significant number of the graduate students wrongfully identified certain acts of academic dishonesty as constituting plagiarism. Most of the students failed to recognise that plagiarism goes beyond their basic understanding, while others also confused other forms of academic misconduct with plagiarism. For example, some students believe submitting an assignment written by someone in part or whole, writing an assignment for a colleague, submitting a work as a group while it is written by an individual and paying somebody to write assignment or term paper constituted plagiarism. On the contrary, less than half of the respondents considered paraphrasing a text without acknowledgement, summarizing a text without acknowledgment and copying and pasting from the Internet without citing the original source as constituting plagiarism.

These findings have shown that the universal awareness of plagiarism among the students have not necessary translated into in-depth understanding of the concept of plagiarism. This could be ascribed to the current campaign against plagiarism by the University of Ghana. It is probable that there is more emphasis on awareness as compared to focusing on the fundamental understanding of the concept of plagiarism. The students therefore do not appreciate the bread and width of the concept. It is therefore imperative that the drive for awareness of plagiarism must also emphasise on what constitute plagiarism and what does not.

Sources of Information

The study further reveals different sources of information on plagiarism among respondents. The most popular sources of information on plagiarism were from lecturers and personal studies. Other sources included their colleagues, orientations for fresh students, university websites and other sources. The findings of lecturers as a source of information on plagiarism is consistent with those of Doss et al., (2016) and Chien (2016) who reported that majority of students get their sources of information from their lectures, followed by internet sources and then personal readings. Adika (2014), on the hand however, reported that majority of students get their sources of information from the internet before other sources. It is evident from the study that plagiarism is not an abstract term to graduate students of University of Ghana. However, the low percentage of respondents who indicated orientation as their source of information implies that the issue of plagiarism should be highlighted more during orientation for graduate students.

Attitude towards Plagiarism

The study also examined how attitude towards plagiarism affects students' plagiarism behaviours. This was examined because several studies (e.g. Guo, 2011; Smith, Ghazali & Fatimah Noor Minhad, 2007) have reported that students sometimes hold inconsistent attitudes towards plagiarism which makes the fight against plagiarism very difficult. Therefore, in order to understand the factors that influence students' tendencies to plagiarise, there was a need to assess the attitude towards plagiarism. Different components of attitudes were assessed. Specifically, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, intentions to plagiarize and actual plagiarism behaviours were assessed. In terms of subjective norms, which is attitudes that are developed as a result of knowing that relevant others (i.e. lecturers, librarians and researchers) approve of the behaviour or indulge in the behaviour.

The findings suggested that the students believe that plagiarism is common among academic researchers. Majority of the students indicated that they believe many researchers plagiarize more than they would admit. Smith et al., (2007) have reported similar findings among students in Malaysia. The implications of these findings are that students do not feel obliged to discipline themselves not to plagiarize because they believe that others do it without admitting it. In other words, they perceive hypocrisy among the scientific community and therefore might not feel the need to avoid plagiarism.

Reasons for Acts of Plagiarism

The reasons for which they engaged in plagiarism were also assessed. Findings showed that majority of the respondents engaged in plagiarism because of poor academic writing skills, which include inability to cite sources and some students finding it difficult to paraphrase or summarize. Others engaged in acts of plagiarism due to laziness and lack of time management. This was followed by poor understanding of plagiarism, ease of downloading other people's work and pressure to succeed.

The respondents engaged in plagiarism due to poor academic writing skills. This is similar to the findings of Appiah (2006) and Wilkinson (2009) who reported that poor academic writing skills, lack of understanding of the rules of referencing as well as weak reading skills contributed to acts of plagiarism. Batane (2010), however, reported findings that contradict the assertion that plagiarism stems from poor academic writing skills. Another factor discovered by the study is time constraint and the amount of effort required to write honest papers. The findings are similar to Appiah's (2016) survey report which indicated that majority of the student sample agreed that time constraint influenced the decision to plagiarize.

Contrary to the literature, the current study discovered that close to half of the graduate students disagreed to the statements that most lecturers never complain and nobody checks cheating and those who do it are never caught as was reported in the works of Appiah (2016) and Batane (2010) which reported that most of the students thought that the reason for plagiarism was that the lecturers did not care. Furthermore, few of the students thought that students caught in plagiarism incurred any penalties as prescribed by the school's policy on plagiarism. Thus, the findings from the reasons why students engage in plagiarism show that there are high levels of unintentional plagiarism among the students. This is explained by self-reported students' weakness in academic writing. This provides support on the earlier argument for the need to incorporate capacity building in anti-plagiarism campaigns among students. This will help increase the perceived behavioural control of students over plagiarism.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the study show that information literacy is critical in curbing plagiarism behaviours among graduate students. The current study shows that, students' understanding of plagiarism is very weak and are also less proactive in searching for information. There is therefore the need for information literacy to be taught to students to provide in-depth understanding of plagiarism and how to avoid it. In order to deepen understanding of plagiarism among graduate students, there is a need for the concept of plagiarism to be given much attention at the undergraduate level so as to avoid issues of misconception of the concept at the graduate level.

There is also the need to ensure that much emphasis is placed on plagiarism during orientations for fresh graduate students. These programs must emphasize on the various avenues where students can enhance their knowledge of plagiarism. That way, students would be proactive in seeking knowledge on plagiarism so they can improve their research and writing skills. Therefore, in order to curb or reduce plagiarism, lecturers and the university authorities must give the issue of educating and orienting students on the constituent of plagiarism a high priority.

Limitations and Future Studies

The present study was limited in scope to only main campus of University of Ghana. Further studies should be undertaken in other universities in Ghana to ascertain the perception of students towards plagiarism so that the issue of plagiarism can be minimized if not totally eradicated. Furthermore, there is the need to conduct further research in the present study area using different research methods for instance the qualitative and mixed research methods. Further studies on plagiarism should also be carried out at the undergraduate levels to improve students' perception and their behaviour towards plagiarism and how it can influence their behaviour at the graduate level.

Conclusion

The issue of plagiarism has become a great concern to most institutions of higher learning, threatening the foundations and principles upon which those institutions were established. Studies by most institutions of higher learning across the globe have focused on the devastating nature of plagiarism with the aim to curb it or reduce it to provide a conducive and favourable environment for teaching and learning (Ford & Hughes, 2012; Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Hu & Lei, 2012). However, the literature and the findings of this study indicate that students' understanding or perceptions of what constitute plagiarism is very limited. Majority of them understand plagiarism but do not fully appreciate the depth, width and breadth of plagiarism. This creates a situation where they sometimes plagiarize because they perceive such acts as not constituting plagiarism.

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