

Exploring Instructors' and Students' Perception of Plagiarism: The Case of Saint Mary's University

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Abstract

This research was conducted to explore the perceptions of students and instructors of Plagiarism. A phenomenological study was conducted to determine the causes of Plagiarism, whether students have a good command of the English language, whether they possess the required citation and research skills, whether students and instructors understand Plagiarism similarly or differently, and whether students plagiarize intentionally or unintentionally. Samples were taken from the Business Faculty of Saint Mary's University. Thirty students were selected using purposive sampling from both regular and extension students, and eight instructors were nominated purposively. Both primary and secondary sources were used while gathering data. Data were gathered through open-ended questionnaires comprising 12 items. The data were analyzed in narrative form and percentages. The findings revealed that students lacked proficient English language skills and research abilities, which hindered their ability to conduct independent research. As to knowledge, both students and instructors had a similar understanding of Plagiarism. According to respondents, students commit both intentional and unintentional types of Plagiarism. Student and instructor respondents identified different factors as causes of plagiarism. Laziness, fear of challenge, lack of experience in doing research, lack of creativity, lack of self-confidence and commitment, lack of preparation and time, lack of dedication to learn effectively, desire to get high grades through short cuts, poor English and research skills, failure to study diligently, lack of resources, dependency syndrome, carelessness, greed, being immoral, inappropriate teaching methods, advisors failure to check the work of students properly were the causes identified as causes for Plagiarism.

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Introduction

According to scholars, the roles of higher learning are to offer quality teaching, deliver community services, and conduct pertinent research. Research is one of the fundamental tasks of a university. Both instructors and students produce different research, as the role of higher learning is to protect, modify, discover, and invent "knowledge and science, of fact and principle, of inquiry and discovery" through persistent investigation (Newman, in Sheehan, 1995, p. 27).

In Ethiopia, research is primarily conducted in universities. Senior essays, senior projects, theses, and dissertations are the means to address problems in various fields related to home issues. The research caliber of students varies from person to person, as do their contributions to their field of study, influenced by factors such as personal research experience, reflection skills, observational level, reading and writing skills, and language proficiency, among others.

Research requires advanced critical thinking and language proficiency skills. Critical thinking skills, such as inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, analysis, evaluation, inference, and language skills, especially reading and writing, are essential for analyzing unfamiliar situations and solving various problems, going beyond mere knowledge acquisition. These skills have a positive relationship with research outputs. Student researchers should apply either a deductive or an inductive approach, or both, to inquire about their fields of study. They should also consult multiple sources and analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and organize what they have read to conduct either basic or applied research. They should write the components of research articles, utilising the correct type of discourse (explanation, description, narration, and argument) and applying correct citation and quotation styles.

Good academic writing, according to Burton (2007) in Gullifer and Graham (n.y, p.4), "is contingent on developing sound skills in both research and writing, critical reading, comprehending appropriate sources, careful note-taking, paraphrasing, judicious use of quotations and giving credit to authors for their ideas and writing." (*Bold in the original*) Possessing the above skills can make student researchers independent while conducting research.

In Ethiopia, things on the ground are frustrating since the critical skills and English proficiency are below the required level. According to Misganaw (2012, p.320), "...students joining HE are said to lack basic English language, reading, critical thinking, analysis, and writing skills, which are essential for their success in HE." For instance, research reports revealed that Ethiopian students have poor writing ability. Tewodros (2016, P.20) summarised the problems of Ethiopian university students' writing skills as follows:

Though few students try to compose a text, it is an observed fact that, when such students are ordered to write essays in different rhetorical modes, their attempts exhibit, among others, the following difficulties:

- (i) *There is a mismatch between the title and the text,*
- (ii) *Their paragraphs lack topic sentences, and their essays lack a thesis statement.*
- (iii) *they do not write based on the discourse type in question,*
- (iv) *Their writing lacks focus, details, and a sense of audience, and*
- (v) *There are numerous errors in the content, organization, grammar, diction, and mechanics, which hinder communication.*

Concerning students' writing lack of proficiency, Taddele (1990, n.p.) in Tewodros (2016) commented that "English in general and (Writing in English in particular), almost at all stages of learning, has been found below the required level." Meseret (2012) and Zeru (2007) also strengthened the above claim. Students at Ethiopian higher learning institutions take different writing courses, but have shown slight improvement in their writing/composition skills. Regarding Ethiopian students' reading comprehension ability, studies report that most Ethiopian primary school, high school, college, and university students lack proficiency in their comprehension skills (Atlabachew, 2017; Daniel, 2003; Genene, 1994; Mendida, 1998; Negatu, 1997). Students often lack effective writing and comprehension skills, and it is unlikely that they will develop advanced critical thinking skills, which, in turn, hinders their ability to conduct quality and original academic research independently —a skill essential for the country's development. In other words, students may be compelled to engage in Plagiarism, and excessive involvement in Plagiarism can erode the culture of academic honesty, dedication, and hard work, ultimately tarnishing the true meaning of universities and questioning the production of a knowledge workforce essential for development.

Studies show that Plagiarism is rampant in every discipline (Marsden et al, 2005). In Ethiopia, the issue is no exception, as academic dishonesty/plagiarism is increasing rapidly (Bachore, 2014; Buzayehu & Hailu, 2023). According to Tefera and Kinde (2009), as cited in Fedey (2017), the incidence of academic dishonesty among instructors at Addis Ababa University and Jimma University's School of Business and Economics and Education Faculty is high. The finding reported that only 7.2% of respondents claimed they had not encountered students engaged in academic dishonesty. However, more than 89% of the respondents informed the researchers that they had come across students involved in academic dishonesty in one way or another. In another study, Tefera and Kinde (2010) found that approximately 96.4% of students were involved in at least one form of assignment-related dishonesty, and 82.1% and 82.0% of students reported engaging in research and exam-related dishonesty, respectively, at least once.

As the above researchers' findings made apparent, the respondents acknowledged that they were engaged in a high level of assignment-related academic dishonesty, followed by research and exam-related academic dishonesty. All in all, Tefera and Kinde (2009, 2010) reported that the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty in Ethiopian universities is rated as high as 84% which shows the severity of the problem.

The present researcher, however, could not find research findings that have been conducted in both public and private universities, focusing on students' and instructors' perceptions of Plagiarism. Additionally, no research has been available that focuses solely on Senior Essays. Thus, this research was conducted to fill these gaps.

The Problem Statement

Academic knowledge has its own history, and it is assumed that every piece of knowledge has its own creator; however, some writers overlook the basic tenets when they deal with intellectual property. They fail to acknowledge and present others' work as their own, which cuts off the tie between the original author and the creation (Stearns, 1992). Real owners will be denied the benefits of receiving the credit they deserve for their creation. Stealing intellectual property and presenting someone else's work as one's own is known as Plagiarism.

The level of Plagiarism at Saint Mary's can be seen from two angles: unintentional and intentional. Some students plagiarise inadvertently by copying other authors' words and statements. Other students commit Plagiarism on purpose. They present someone's work as their own. This can be done by taking others' work from the Internet, taking Senior Essays from other universities that cannot be found online, or by making irresponsible 'intellectuals' do their papers through payment. Plagiarism has been exacerbated by Internet access, which makes cheating easier for students, as they can copy and paste others' work without properly acknowledging sources.

Nevertheless, both unintentional and intentional forms of Plagiarism are unacceptable at Saint Mary's, as the University believes in producing ethical professionals with the required skills and knowledge that its degrees award to its graduates. To avoid the negative repercussions of Plagiarism on knowledge extension and generation, and enable learners to report their own research findings honestly, Saint Mary's University has a senior research preparation and evaluation guideline that states the writing style and format of the paper, in addition to the two Senior Research courses it offers to its undergraduate students. It also organises lectures and training in research writing and research methods by inviting experienced local and international scholars for both students and academic staff.

Despite the above efforts, Plagiarism is a serious problem. This problem can be attributed to various factors, with the culture of the country's school system being the primary contributor. Unfortunately, the culture of the Ethiopian school system, especially at the primary and secondary school levels, has not been divorced from excessive didactic methods, repetition, memorization, and strict adherence to the teacher's convention. Of course, there are terms in our diction related to wisdom and research, such as *tibeb* (wisdom) and *mirmir* (research). They are, however, passive in our daily practical activities and lifestyles, as constructing knowledge through analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and reflection is not a well-developed learning style. Consequently, students do not usually try to critically and reflectively understand their learning experiences. This culture obstructs learners and instructors from doing original research. Students limit themselves to surface levels of learning, such as reproduction and memorisation.

Additionally, researchers have noted noticeable differences in the perception of Plagiarism among students, academic staff, and administrators (Klein et al., 2006; Pincus & Schmelkin, 2003). This also applies to Saint Mary's. There is a lack of consensus, especially between students and instructors, about the meaning of Plagiarism. Students do not give the same weight to plagiarism as instructors do, probably for different reasons.

As an educational researcher, the present researcher had the opportunity to teach Research Methods to students, and Plagiarism was a significant problem. The present researcher also heard instructors who offer the same course complaining about the degree of academic dishonesty/Plagiarism. Learners were expected to produce proposals for the course, and it was common for the researcher and other instructors to encounter Plagiarism being committed by students at a high level. After teaching the conventions of research writing and the consequences of Plagiarism, students could not stop submitting plagiarized proposals as their own, which forced the present researcher to examine the perception of students and instructors on Plagiarism, as the teaching- learning process could not bring behavioural change on the part of some students towards Plagiarism. Besides, it makes the teaching-learning process difficult for students, and instructors cannot perceive Plagiarism similarly.

The Research Purpose

The primary objective of the study was to investigate the perceptions of students and instructors regarding plagiarism. It attempted to determine whether students and instructors hold similar or different views on academic dishonesty. It also attempted to identify the causes of Plagiarism and whether students plagiarize intentionally or unintentionally.

The Research Questions

The research problems were approached from a qualitative angle. The following exploration questions were addressed:

1. Do students have a good command of the English language?
2. Do students have the required citations and research skills?
3. Do students and instructors understand Plagiarism similarly or differently?
4. Do students plagiarise intentionally or unintentionally?
5. What are the causes of Plagiarism at Saint Mary's?
6. Does Saint Mary's have an appropriate legal framework to mitigate Plagiarism?

Significance of the Study

Unless universities produce responsible citizens who can handle their academic careers truthfully, they will defile their mission and vision. Learners who possess academic integrity construct knowledge independently and are responsible for their actions, which has a direct link to knowledge generation and plagiarism. In this context, student researchers identify research problems and generate research findings by autonomously controlling the research direction and tasks. On the other hand, if academic communities are not ethical, they may engage in unethical decision-making, such as Plagiarism and receive high false grades without having the required skills and know-how, and further transfer immoral acts into their professional lives in the form of lying and corruption, and try to rationalise their inappropriate behaviour. Thus, there is a need to minimise Plagiarism, and universities should work hard to produce students with high character so that graduates will be responsible citizens. Students should generate knowledge but not simply reproduce it. The reality on the ground, however, is discouraging, as they are seriously involved in Plagiarism while working on their Senior Essays. As a result, instructors are highly dissatisfied with the quality of students' research outputs.

This study was therefore conducted to contribute its share to ensuring academic integrity in the university. It could also narrow the gap between students' and instructors' understanding of Plagiarism and assist in reaching a standard definition of the term. Instructors and students can also gain a better understanding of the causes of Plagiarism and the existing social norms associated with it at Saint Mary's.

At the national level, policymakers can also take legal action against irresponsible ghostwriters who provide ghostwriting services to graduating students. It is common to read advertisements at the gates of universities for offering ghostwriting services. Unless stakeholders take immediate action against such illicit acts, ghostwriting can soon become an acceptable social norm in our universities and colleges.

Delimitation of the Study

The study was limited to instructors from the Saint Mary's University Business Faculty and third-year students. It focused on the Business Faculty since instructors advise senior students and third-year students to write Senior Essays as part of the partial fulfillment of their B.A. degrees, and both instructors and students can encounter Plagiarism Issues when instructors advise students to write their papers.

Limitations of the Study

The study employed only a qualitative method, and the findings could not be generalised to all Business Faculty students. It also used only open-ended questionnaires to gather data, and the findings were not triangulated using other tools. Since the focus of phenomenology depends on audience experiences, it has its own drawbacks. Its accuracy relies on the respondents' perceptions of plagiarism, which requires caution when interpreting the findings.

Methods

The study aimed to understand and construct meaning from the perceptions of academic staff and students regarding academic Plagiarism. Hence, it employed a qualitative method, applying a phenomenology design. Phenomenological research directly examines an individual's interpretation of their experiences. This research aims to gain insight into the experiences and feelings of Business students in relation to the perceptions of Plagiarism. The perceptions and feelings are the reality in the respondents' eyes, as phenomenology emphasizes the "need to consider human beings' subjective interpretations, their perceptions of the world (their life-worlds) as [the] starting point in understanding phenomena" (Ernest, 1994, p. 25).

Participants

The participants of this study were Business Faculty instructors and students. Samples were taken using purposive sampling. Eight instructors who advised third-year undergraduate students were purposefully selected to complete the open-ended questionnaires. As to students, thirty students were taken from the Marketing and Accounting departments: 15 from the Accounting and 15 from the Marketing departments to fill out the open-ended questionnaires, giving equal quotas for high, moderate and low achievers based on the scores of the two Research Method courses, taking from each category five students to transfer the data to other similar context. Sample size determination is not a scientific method and is not as rigorous as a quantitative approach. The sample size, however, was determined for this study based on Mason's (2010) review of qualitative study sample size determination. Manson reviewed 560 PhD qualitative study sample size determinations and reported that the average sample size was 31, the median sample size was 28, and the largest sample size was 95. He also found that "the most common sample sizes were 20 and 30 (followed by 40, 10, and 25)" (Mason, 2010, p. 10). Accordingly, this study took 30 students as the sample size.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected through two types of questionnaires: one designed for students and the other for instructors. Each questionnaire consisted of 12 items, presented from both students' and instructors' perspectives. Otherwise, there was no significant difference in content between the students' and instructors' questionnaires.

The primary objective of the questionnaires was to gather data from students and instructors regarding their perceptions of Plagiarism, focusing on its prevalence, types, causes, and practices, as well as the English command, citation, and writing skills of senior undergraduate students. Some of the sample open-ended questions include the following: 1. Do you feel that you have an effective command of the English language? If not, why do you think? 2. Can you express yourself in writing effectively? If not, why do you think? 3. Can you effectively use referencing and citation styles such as APA, MLA, Chicago, and Harvard while writing proposals and Senior Essays? If not, why do you think? 4. Have you been involved in unintentional Plagiarism so far while writing proposals, reports, and Senior Essays? If yes, why have you been involved? 5. Have you been involved in intentional Plagiarism so far while writing proposals, reports, and Senior Essays? If yes, why have you been involved? 6. Do you know the Senior Essay's legal framework of the University? What does it say? 7. What should be done to minimise or avoid Plagiarism?

The questionnaires were distributed to both students and instructors cross-sectionally. Student respondents were given fifty minutes to complete the questionnaires. Instructors submitted the questionnaire at their convenience after completing it.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the first step was to read the data multiple times and identify texts that addressed the research questions, followed by assigning codes to the text segments. Key words such as command, poor, reading, habits, writing, citations, quotations, skills, perception, stealing, theft, Plagiarism, intentional, unintentional, causes, technologies, laziness, shortcuts, time, solutions, networking, responsibility, etc., were used to identify statements/data and create seven categories. The seven categories were formed from the codes, and two themes were identified for description: students' command of English and research writing skills (one) and students' and instructors' perceptions of Plagiarism (two).

Respondents were assigned numbers to maintain their anonymity, and their responses were presented using the corresponding numbers. Students were numbered from 001 to 0030, and instructors were coded using the initial of the word 'instructor', with numbers ranging from I001 to I008.

Credibility and Dependability

Credibility can be realised in different ways, but the present researcher applied member checking and peer debriefing. After writing the findings, the respondents were asked to check the description, and they commented that their responses were accurately represented. I also asked a senior researcher to review and provide feedback on the research process and findings, and the feedback received was positive.

Regarding dependability, the written responses were well-documented. The written script of the open-ended questionnaire was reviewed against the analysis by the senior researcher. He also went through all the steps of the research process and did not observe any gaps between the raw data and the findings.

Results

Students' Command of English and Research Writing Skills

A. Students' Command of English

Students' knowledge and command of English is poor. Most respondents (80%) pointed out that they did not have a good command of the English language. While answering the question whether they had good command of the English language, most of them said, "I wish I had good command", "I do not think so.", "I do not have the command." In relation to this, a respondent had this to say:

I did not have the interest to learn the language when I was in elementary and high school, since my English teachers used to teach grammar too much. Besides, they themselves were not good at the language. Most of them used to worry about our grammar and communication, which is why I do not have a command of the language. (0012(5))

Respondents listed many causes for their poor command of the English language. Poor teaching method, poor reading habit, the excessive use of Amharic by English teachers while teaching English, lack of English command by English teachers, poor foundation, bad learning experience, which led to the formation of a negative attitude to English, were some of the factors identified by the respondents for their poor command of the English language.

The present researcher asked whether graduating students could express themselves effectively in writing. Student respondents reported that they struggled to express themselves effectively in writing due to their limited writing skills background.

Similarly, summarising, paraphrasing, and evaluating academic materials, which are assumed to be the daily activities of higher learning students, were difficult for the respondents. On the other hand, a few respondents (20%) stated that summarizing, paraphrasing, and evaluating academic materials were not difficult, as they had been taught to do so from lower levels up to tertiary levels.

B. Citations and Research Skills of Respondents

Borrowing one's ideas is not a crime, but stealing. As a writer of research articles, it is essential to be familiar with various citation and referencing styles to demonstrate scholarly indebtedness to the original authors. Accordingly, respondents were asked if they knew and could use appropriate referencing and citation styles, such as APA, MLA, Chicago, and Harvard, when writing Senior Essays or projects. Almost all respondents reported that they had learnt while taking Senior Research Methods. They said, "I have learnt about it in Senior Research", or "I learnt how to cite sources in Senior Research Methods".

As to the use, they had mixed answers. 25% of the respondents claimed that they could use referencing and citation styles without any problem. Nearly half of the respondents (45%) claimed that since they did not have much practical research writing experience, they lacked the confidence in using referencing and citation styles, which implies that the respondents are unable to transfer their knowledge of citations and referencing into writing a review of related literature to adapt and alternate the ideas of other writers to their own ends. The rest said that they could not use referencing and citation styles. A respondent summed up the depth of the problem as follows:

I learnt at a public school. It is private schools that excel in presentation skills. It is here that I learned about presentation and research skills. Learning is not the same as practice.

When my lecturers give me proposal assignments, I get depressed since I do not have the skills to do research. I usually ask myself where I shall start. (0018(5))

Students' and Instructors' Perception of Plagiarism

1. High School and Preparatory Schools' Knowledge of Plagiarism

Respondents were asked if they had learnt anything about Plagiarism when they were high school and preparatory school students. Most of them replied that they did not learn anything about Plagiarism during their stay in high schools and preparatory schools. A few respondents, however, reacted that they had learnt about it:

003(6): "When I was in grades 9 and 10, I learnt about it.

003(7): "I was told that plagiarism is a dishonest practice, and it is unacceptable."

007(6): "Yes."

007(7): "One of my teachers told us that plagiarism makes someone insecure, and it is bad for the development of our country."

008(6): "Yes, I was taught."

008(7): "It is not good to get grades based on someone's work."

0011(6): "Yes, I did learn."

0011(7): "I was taught that taking others' work is immoral."

0027(6): "Yes, I learnt."

0027(7): "We were told that cheating on an exam and copying others' work were examples of plagiarism."

2. University-Level Knowledge of Plagiarism

Respondents made clear that they learnt about Plagiarism and research writing in Research Methods courses. Based on students' responses, it is possible to conclude that students have an awareness of the what aspect of Plagiarism. For them, Plagiarism means the following:

002(5): "Plagiarism is a copy and paste...."

003(5): "Plagiarism is owning others' work without proper acknowledgement."

004(5): "Plagiarism refers to copying somebody's work without acknowledging."

005(5): "It is presenting/submitting the work of others as if it were done by oneself."

007(5): "Plagiarism means cheating or stealing somebody's ideas."

008(5): "It is a kind of corruption where students benefit unfairly."

009(5): "Plagiarism is the violation of copyright."

0010(5): "Plagiarism is cheating ideas from writers due to laziness."

0011(5): "Copying the whole or partial works of others without permission and presenting as one's own."

0012(5): "Plagiarism is copying."

0013(5): "It is cheating and copying someone's ideas."

0014(5): "I feel that it is stealing."

0015(5): "Plagiarism is theft."

0017(5): "Plagiarism is copying others' work and presenting it as one's own."

0018(5): "...stealing ideas."

0019(5): "Plagiarism refers to taking someone's ideas and claiming them by stealing."

0020(5): "It refers to stealing others' private materials."

0021(5): "It is using someone's work as one's own."

0022(5): "It is copying, and it is a bad habit."

0023(5): "It is copying somebody's work from the Internet and other sources, and presenting it by changing the names of writers."

0024(5): "It is presenting others' work."

0026(5): "...taking somebody's ideas."

0027(5): "Plagiarism is a writing that was copied from someone and presented as one's own."

0028(5): "Copying others' work and publishing as one's own."

0029(5): "Plagiarism is presenting others' work as one's own."

0030(5): "Plagiarism is copying directly from others' work from books, magazines, and research without getting permission from the writers. It is taking somebody's work without putting it in quotation marks."

There is, nevertheless, a tendency to view copyright and Plagiarism similarly by a respondent. Of course, Plagiarism and copyright violation are not similar: Copyright violation involves legal issues, but idea theft is not governed by law.

3. Types of Plagiarism Committed by Respondents

Student respondents were asked whether they had intentionally or unintentionally plagiarized someone else's ideas. 25% of the respondents reported that they were not engaged in either intentional or unintentional Plagiarism. On the other hand, 75% of the respondents made clear that they were involved in intentional Plagiarism while doing assignments and research. They said that they plagiarised intentionally to save time, energy, and money. In fact, what made the above finding surprising was that the university, according to the respondent, viewed plagiarism as a serious academic violation, and it took serious measures such as withholding grades, requiring rework, and academic dismissal. Knowing these serious measures that could be taken against them for committing academic misconduct, respondents were involved in intentional Plagiarism.

4. Causes and Remedies of Plagiarism

Student respondents identified different factors as causes of plagiarism. Laziness, fear of challenge, lack of experience in doing research, lack of creativity, self-confidence and commitment, lack of preparation and time, lack of dedication to learn effectively, desire to get high grades through short cuts, poor English and research skills, failure to study diligently, lack of resources, dependency syndrome, carelessness, greed, being immoral, inappropriate teaching methods, advisors failure to check the work of students properly were the causes identified by respondents as causes for Plagiarism. One of the respondents explained that "Lack of confidence, lack of proper monitoring of students' work by instructors, whether the research is his/her own, lack of commitment to work, budgeting one's time and energy are the major sources of plagiarism" (0010(9)). Another student respondent felt that there were two major causes for Plagiarism:

The first one is group work. Few students actually work on the task; others write their names on the paper without doing anything. They shy away from shouldering shared responsibilities. They pass from one academic year to another without completing their papers, and when an individual assignment is given, they plagiarize. I dislike group work because my friends are reluctant to share the responsibilities of writing papers. They asked me to write their names on the cover page after I had done the paper. There are also individuals

outside the university who write papers for a fee. They write the entire paper for graduating students, and without doing any work, these students achieve high grades. (0019(9)).

To curtail the above problems, respondents proposed various solutions. Improving the quality of the teaching learning process, working hard on the part of students, creating ethical students, making students skilled on how to do research, designing a technology to curb Plagiarism, controlling and monitoring students' paper strictly, enacting the rules and regulations of Plagiarism effectively, developing the love of reading, teaching how to quote sources, offering intensive writing skills were the solutions suggested by the respondents to avoid Plagiarism.

5. Instructors' Perception of Plagiarism

There is not much difference between the student and instructor respondents' understanding of Plagiarism. Instructor respondents, as expected, provided a more elaborate definition of Plagiarism, explaining the factors that lead to its intensification. They linked it with academic irresponsibility and academic dishonesty. Most instructor respondents believed that students should be truth seekers. Ethical academic norms should guide their actions and thought processes.

Nevertheless, according to respondents, several factors contributed to students engaging in Plagiarism, which is contrary to academic integrity. Almost all respondents claimed that the degree of Plagiarism was very high. While expressing the pervasiveness of Plagiarism, an instructor says that "It has become an addiction." Another says, "Some students are immersed in it." Most respondents used the following expressions: "The level of plagiarism is high."

When asked about the type of Plagiarism, most respondents stated that students plagiarize intentionally.

I002: "I think they plagiarise deliberately to fill the gaps that they have in their language skills."

I003: "They plagiarise intentionally. I think I remember one student. He submitted someone's work, making minor modifications. Moreover, it is common to encounter such students."

I004: "They are involved in both intentional and unintentional plagiarism, but more of intentional, I think."

Another respondent said, "I think they do it unintentionally. The problem is students' lack of language skills. They cannot paraphrase others' ideas using their own words without altering the author's main ideas, so they copy and paste. Secondly, they know about Plagiarism, but a lack of competence forces them to engage in plagiarism" (I005).

Respondents attributed the prevalence of Plagiarism to various factors. According to a respondent, "The sources of plagiarism are different. Laziness, time pressure, technology access, high expectations for grades, moral decay are sources of plagiarism." (I001). Another respondent argued that "There is no well-organised database of Senior Essay papers of different universities, which makes it very difficult for instructors to control plagiarism" (I008). Failure to cite sources properly, lack of time, lack of self-confidence and knowledge, absence of adequate and practical research experience, and lack of dedication, among other factors, were listed as causes of plagiarism. Instructor respondents do not differ from student respondents regarding the causes of Plagiarism; they differ in their attitudes and academic integrity.

Students, according to respondents, lacked dependable writing and research skills. A respondent said, "Students do not have the desired writing and research skills. These are the reasons for them to engage in plagiarism." (I003). Another instructor pointed out that "In most of the cases, they have theoretical know-how, but they fail to be effective and efficient in doing research due to lack of exposure." (I005). Still another instructor noted that the issue of Plagiarism is not directly related to the teaching and learning process at Saint Mary's University. For him, "...the university offers a chance to work on different projects, and students are expected to present their findings. The problem emanates from their poor educational background in primary and high schools." (I005).

When students were involved in intentional Plagiarism, respondents said that they would apply the university's legal framework. First, they would advise about the negative impact of Plagiarism. Then, they emphasized that they would require them to rework the plagiarized part. Doing this, if students persisted in plagiarizing, they would receive an "F".

While explaining the implications of intentional Plagiarism, respondents put forward the following remarks:

I001: "Everybody steals. Students are the reflections of our nations. I usually ask myself this: How can we expect students not to steal when everybody steals? I believe universities should be places where rational thinking and morally acceptable actions prevail. I also believe that universities have a direct impact on the real world. I mean, virtue cannot come out of nowhere."

I002: "The students who plagiarise are unethical and irresponsible, who do not want to work hard."

I003: "It indicates a lack of quality. It is an immoral and unethical act."

I004: "It tells about the poor quality of students. It also tells about the poor quality of the teaching learning process of the country."

I005: "Our culture does not encourage independent thinking and inquiry learning. Copying and rote memorisation are styles of learning. That is why they do not see Plagiarism as a serious problem."

I007: "In simple words, as a nation, we are failing."

I008: "It tells me that students are acting irresponsibly."

The above quotations showed the level of respondents' frustrations. They related Plagiarism to academic dishonesty and students' failure to take academic responsibility truthfully.

To reduce Plagiarism, respondents suggested the following points. Creating awareness, enlarging responsibility among students and instructors, taking severe measures, teaching and training students on Plagiarism, and controlling and inspecting students' work were some of the solutions suggested by respondents to curb the problem. A respondent, for instance, stressed the significance of digital networking, saying, "Higher institutions should be networked, and they should release students' Senior Essays online. This will enable advisors to check easily whether the paper is original or plagiarized. In this way, it is possible to avoid Plagiarism." (I007). Another respondent pointed out that "Papers should be submitted in soft-copy, and we instructors must use a plagiarism checker before assessing and giving grades to graduating students." (I008).

Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore students' English language command, referencing and recitation skills, as well as their perception of types of causes and remedies for plagiarism at Saint Mary's University. In Ethiopia, English is the medium of instruction at high school, preparatory, college, and university levels (Bachore, 2014; Eshetie, 2010). University students are expected to produce proposals, reports, research, and make presentations in English. Despite the above high expectations from students in the English language proficiency, respondents reported that they did not have a good command of the English language. The above findings support the claim made by Bachore (2014). He says that Ethiopian students struggle to communicate in English both orally and in writing.

Regarding knowledge of Plagiarism, respondents demonstrated a good understanding of the Concept. This happened because respondents took two Research Methods courses, in which case, there was a portion of coverage on Plagiarism. Unlike high school and preparatory levels experiences, where they did not learn about Plagiarism, almost all university students had a good understanding of the term. They viewed it as taking someone's work without acknowledging them. They associated it with academic misdemeanour, which was corroborated by the findings of Sharma (2007) and Anny and Mosha (2015). They reported that respondents had a good understanding of Plagiarism despite their high involvement in Plagiarism.

Saint Mary's University students' knowledge of Plagiarism, like other findings such as Sharma (2007), Eret and Gokmenoglu (2010), and Anny and Mosha (2015), did not enable them to develop a negative attitude towards Plagiarism and to make ethical decision-making. Hence, they failed to be ethical because they did not stop engaging in intentional Plagiarism. This reality clashes with the preexisting theory of education: students who possess the required knowledge of Plagiarism are expected to form a negative attitude towards it and make an ethical decision while undertaking research. The behaviour of students is expected to be ethical, who "commit themselves to the pursuit of truth" (McCabe & Pavela, 2004, p. 12), which was not the case for the respondents. Failing to do so and being involved in intentional and unintentional Plagiarism means having a favourable attitude toward Plagiarism and making a decision in an immoral manner. Hence, knowledge of Plagiarism does not necessarily lead to a negative attitude or unethical decision-making when conducting research.

Both instructors and students claimed that the reasons for learners to engage in Plagiarism stemmed from access to technology, a lack of English skills, inadequate research skills, insufficient time, inappropriate teaching methods, a lack of follow-up, and a desire to achieve high grades through shortcuts, among others. These multidimensional factors are supported by the findings of other researchers (Angwaomaodoko, 2025; Anny & Mosha, 2015; Eret & Gokmenoglu, 2010; Sharma, 2007).

Conclusions and Implications

Student and instructor respondents had a similar understanding of Plagiarism. Both groups of respondents also acknowledged that students lacked good English command and research skills, which became hurdles to conducting research independently. The difference between the two parties lay in the type of attitude they had towards Plagiarism. They also differed in their mental makeup, which is instrumental to the practical action that they undertake towards Plagiarism. Instructor respondents had a negative attitude towards

Plagiarism, and they expressed their view vehemently that students would develop a negative attitude towards Plagiarism. They also expected learners to be truthful. Despite student respondents' good knowledge of Plagiarism, most of them were involved in intentional plagiarism, as they had probably not developed an unfavorable attitude towards plagiarism and did not believe in integrity due to various reasons. Hence, the university should exert its relentless effort to develop in the minds of students a negative attitude towards Plagiarism so that they would refrain from plagiarizing. Policy makers should give weight to academic integrity by incorporating it into the academic curriculum of schools from the foundation to the tertiary levels. They should also ensure the realisation of quality education at all levels to benefit all stakeholders from the investment in education. In relation to this, the late President of Tanzania- Nerere at one time commented on the quality of education wisely as follows: "The education provided must encourage the development in each citizen three things: an enquiring mind, and ability to learn from what others do, and reject or adapt it to his own needs; and a basic confidence in his own position as a free and equal member of society, who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not for what he obtains".

As discussed in the limitations section, this article employed an open-ended questionnaire without triangulation with other tools, utilizing a qualitative method. There is thus a need to conduct large-scale research using quantitative or mixed methods, covering both public and private universities, with a large sample size to generalize the findings at the national level. Interested researchers can use this study as a springboard for further research.

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