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**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON MUSLIM COUNSELOR EDUCATORS'
PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT PLAGIARISM***Kajian Penerokaan Persepsi Pendidik Kaunselor Islam terhadap Plagiarisme Pelajar*Dini Farhana Baharudin^a
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Abstract

With the advent of recent technology especially the Internet, there is a challenge in maintaining academic integrity among students. One of the most common issue is plagiarism. Previous studies have considered plagiarism from the perspective of teachers as well as students at school up until the university level. This study examined Muslim counselor educators' perceptions of students' plagiarism. Using a qualitative case study, a purposive sample of five counselor educators from a single university were interviewed. Data collected were analyzed using thematic approach. Findings show participants' attitude and behavior towards students' plagiarism, and strategies pursued to educate students to avoid plagiarism. Limitations of the study, implications, and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: academic integrity, plagiarism, student, counselor educator, qualitative case study.

Abstrak

Dengan perkembangan teknologi terkini khususnya Internet, terdapat cabaran memastikan integriti akademik yang tinggi wujud dalam kalangan pelajar. Salah satu isu yang sering berlaku adalah plagiarisme. Kajian lepas telah melihat tentang isu plagiarisme ini daripada perspektif guru dan pelajar di peringkat sekolah sehingga pengajian tinggi. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini mengkaji persepsi pendidik kaunselor Islam tentang plagiarisme pelajar. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif kajian kes, sampel bermatlamat dalam kalangan lima pendidik kaunselor daripada sebuah universiti awam ditemubual. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Dapatan melaporkan sikap dan tingkahlaku peserta terhadap isu plagiarisme pelajar serta strategi yang digunapakai untuk membantu pelajar mengelakkan plagiarisme. Batasan kajian serta implikasi dan cadangan kajian dibincangkan.

Kata kunci: integriti akademik, plagiarisme, pelajar, pendidik kaunselor, kajian kes kualitatif.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of recent technology especially the Internet, there is a challenge in maintaining academic integrity among students. One of the most common problem faced is plagiarism. Plagiarism is defined as the representation of ideas or words of others as one's own (Faigley,

2003; Glenn, 2006). Therefore, even though information is more accessible through the electronic media, it causes people to mistakenly think that information is free and ideas are without owners. Thus, compared to the past where text had to be retyped from printed articles or books, nowadays the Internet allows this to be easier and faster. These attributes of accessibility, ease and efficiency are reasons that influences incidents of plagiarism (Wilcox, 2005a).

Students in universities and colleges nowadays are mostly familiar with the Internet and other electronic technologies and gadgets. They tend to use the Internet as a primary mean for information gathering as well as communication. Their knowledge allows them to effortlessly include the information found in the Internet into their assignments. Moreover, with the emergence of organizations and institutions digitizing academic libraries, many resources would be able to be accessed electronically and this provide greater chances for students to plagiarize.

Some previous studies show that university systems lack effective strategies of addressing this issue especially in educating students the right way of citing information (Hansen, 2003). In addition to lack of knowledge and training in academic writing, students in universities and colleges also lack awareness on the necessity of citing resources in a proper manner (MacDonell, 2005; Walden & Peacock, 2006).

Many studies have looked at plagiarism from the perspective of students at school up until the university level. Most of the studies utilize quantitative methodology for exploring issues of students plagiarizing that may relate to their college major, achievement expectations, gender, and age (Bennett, 2005; Giorgio, 2005; Humes, Stiffler, & Malsed, 2003; Kock & Davison, 2003; Park, 2003) including contextual and situational reasons that influence academic integrity (McCabe et al., 2001; McCabe & Trevino, 2002). According to McCabe (2005), the faculty members especially lecturers, play an important role in making sure the culture of academic integrity is maintained.

However, there is a lack of studies that looked at this matter. Only a few researchers study faculty members' view on plagiarism (Flint, Clegg, & Macdonald, 2006; Robinson-Zanartu, Pena, Cook-Morales, Pena, Afshani, & Nguyen, 2005). McCabe et al. (2001) stated that academic dishonesty incidences are usually handled individually with reluctance in reporting following institutional policy procedures. Additionally, there are also qualitative studies that looked at actions taken by faculty members when facing academic dishonesty incidences and factors that influences those

According to Moten (2014), relatively very little research on the issue of plagiarism at universities in the Muslim world. Islam has certain guidelines and its own view on knowledge and its relation to plagiarism. For an instance, al-Suyuti (1998) has endorsed that plagiarism is an act of academic theft. In his *The Difference between the author and the thief*, the word "thief" is used to indicate the meaning of plagiarism whereby someone involves in the act of stealing somebody's idea, text or the entire work without a permission or an acknowledgement. Trustworthiness or *amānah* is the value that Islam has put much concern on it. It entangles fundamentally with Muslim's spiritual and physical life. In view of plagiarism, it has been the concern of the academics in universities to see this as transgressing the ethics (*adāb*) of a Muslim learner who has been approached by the *amānah* (trustworthy) from Allah. It should be regarded as a serious misconduct and an act of academic dishonesty that have been given serious attention by the authority of the university particularly to the students. Stiff actions have been held in order to terminate this misconduct.

Islam prescribes certain *adab* or ethical guidelines especially to acknowledge the original source or the right authorship. This is also one of the important *adab* in reviewing one's integrity and trustworthiness. When dealing with ethics, al-Makki (1997) responded that it implies the character of humans. The aim of this life, for all human beings, is no more than to know Allah SWT and that it implies *ma'rifah*. (Sharifah Basirah & Che Zarina, 2015). Seeking knowledge is highly advisable in Islam. Yet, it must be adhered with particular ethical values. Therefore, many scholars have attempted to define the term plagiarism. Amanullah (2006) recognizes trustworthiness as a quality that most people have lost it. Plagiarism, can never be tolerated and as it fundamentally deals with the ethic of trustworthiness. It is deemed as a disgraceful act in Islam. There are several indecent acts of plagiarism which have been highlighted by the scholars which have unfortunately become "the order of the day" such as cheating, harming, deceiving, neglecting the right of others (Amanullah, 2006, p.1). The debates among scholars have yet to show that this phenomenon is not necessarily harassing the students in universities, but its prevalence is also obvious among the academics, who prone to teach and write. Due to this, it is a holistic action to develop the awareness of this serious misconduct from time to time.

In Malaysia, only a few studies on this matter were conducted (Law et al., 2013; Mohd Shokri et al., 2015; Wan Hanna Melini Wan Mohtar et al., 2016). Most of these studies used quantitative approach focusing on students, none however investigated from the view of Muslim counselor educator.

Therefore, this paper aims to examine Muslim counselor educators' perceptions of plagiarism in promoting academic integrity among students. It focuses on gaining greater insight on how counselor educators perceive issues of plagiarism in their classes. Gaining a better understanding of the issue of plagiarism is important to assist faculty and university management in maintaining high level of academic integrity among students. Two research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. What are Muslim counselor educators' perception when they encounter acts of student plagiarism in their classrooms?
2. How do Muslim counselor educators address plagiarism in their teaching and learning process?

METHODS & MATERIALS

The purpose of this study was to describe counselor educators' perceptions of student plagiarism. Since plagiarism is a socially constructed phenomenon (Ashworth, Freewood & Macdonald, 2003), a qualitative case-study design was chosen as the most appropriate choice for this study to further understand the issue within its social context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Case-study allows plagiarism to be studied from a single entity (Merriam, 1998), particularly a specific university which was chosen in this present study. By doing this, social influences such as the university environment, policies, rules and regulations that affect how plagiarism is perceived can be studied. Additionally, it is hoped that by focusing to only the counselor educators at one university, knowledge about how the counselor educators affect and are affected by student plagiarism can be enhanced.

The setting

The university chosen was a public university located at Negeri Sembilan. It was chosen because it is a teaching-and-learning-focused university that integrates Islamic revealed knowledge (*naqli*) with conventional (*'aqli*) approaches. More importantly, it offers counseling

programs at the undergraduate and post-graduate level which requires students to have the ability in academic writing especially for assignments, project paper, and thesis. Therefore, a group of counselor educators can be found at this university and they are all working under the same university environment, policies, rules and regulations. Plagiarism at the case-study university are occasionally found in undergraduate assignments and project papers.

The sample

As qualitative study does not aim to generalize its findings, this study utilizes purposive sampling in which interviews were conducted with five selected counselor educators from the counseling department who have experienced the phenomena being studied. All the participants chosen were Muslims with a mix of different gender, working at the university full-time and ranged from junior to senior lecturer. Another criterion in the selection of sample is that the counselor educator was currently supervising at post-graduate level in academic writing in addition to the usual class assignments. All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol and was audio-taped. It was then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, comparing the similarities and differences in the data.

The procedure

Data were collected via face-to-face interviews with the participants in the study for approximately one to one and a half hours. All participants were interviewed at a location on campus chosen by the participants themselves. Even though there were fieldnotes taken, the main data in this study was from the interviews. All participants signed consent forms and was told that they can withdraw at any time throughout the study process. To ensure confidentiality, numbers such as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 were given to the participants in this study for the purpose of identification throughout the data collection and analysis process. Recorded interviews were then transcribed and further analyzed. All data were analyzed by the researchers personally. After the analysis, member checks took place where participants were given the chance to review the analysis and give their approval.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

There were five participants in this study; three men and two women. Participants' ages ranged from 30 to 45 years old. All participants are Muslims, Malay, working at the selected university, and met the selection criteria. Participants were recruited through personal contact. The sample was not intended to be generalized but was selected to gather multiple perspectives regarding the topic studied. Demographic of the participants' profile are reported in Table 1.

Table1: Demographic of the participants

Participant number	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Educational Background	Teaching experiences
P1	Female	39	Malay	PhD (Psychology)	4 years
P2	Male	34	Malay	PhD (Counseling)	4 years
P3	Male	31	Malay	PhD (Counseling)	3 years
P4	Female	31	Malay	PhD (Counseling)	4 years
P5	Male	44	Malay	Masters (Counseling)	4 years

Four core themes emerged from the data, three themes answered the first research question: (i) meaning of plagiarism, (ii) relation to morality and ethics, (iii) attitude and behavior towards plagiarism, and the theme 'strategies utilized for academic integrity' answered the second research question:

Theme 1: Meaning of plagiarism

All participants were asked their definitions of plagiarism. All five expressed that plagiarism refers to someone else's words, ideas, or works as one's own work without citations and references.

"Claiming that it's your work but actually copying other resources such as books, internet, or photos without giving credit or acknowledgment to the resources correctly". (P1)

"Using another person's work in the academic world without acknowledgment or citation." (P5)

In this study, participants seem to know and understand what plagiarism is. They talked about acts that constitute plagiarism. This includes copying, not giving credit etc. The importance of having academic integrity appeared to be linked to the participants' attachment of meaning and understanding of plagiarism.

Theme 2: Relation to morality and ethics

Additionally, when explaining their understanding of plagiarism, another theme that emerged was the relation of plagiarism with morality and ethics. Two participants in the study described plagiarism as "*cheating*" (P2, P5), two used "*copying*" (P1, P4), while another used "*stealing*" (P3). These can be tied to the act of unethical conduct or academic misconduct.

Three participants relate plagiarism as contradicting Islamic moral values of "*justice and fairness*" (P1), and "*honesty and sincerity*" (P3, P5). Two participants emphasized on the "*Islamic etiquette of seeking knowledge i.e. respect for scholars, writings, and books*" (P3, P5) while one participant associate the act of plagiarism to "*committing a sin*" (P2).

It was interesting to observe how the participants connect their understanding of plagiarism with their identity as professional worker as well as their identity as a Muslim. As professional worker in the field of academics, all of them were aware of the actions and behaviors that contradict their work ethics. Additionally, their opinions are also cognizant of the Islamic point of view on knowledge/education.

Theme 3: Attitude and behavior towards plagiarism

Findings show that all the participants see plagiarism as a serious offence. This was reflected in the use of words such as "*academic crime*" (P3, P4), "*negative impact*" (P4, P5), and "*being strict*" (P3).

However, three participants (P1, P2, P5) stated that students may not have adequate knowledge or awareness on how to avoid plagiarism nor the existing policies on plagiarism. Therefore, they also emphasized the importance of being fair by first teaching ways to write and cite, as well as ensuring policy enforcement

In terms of behavior, all the participants act both in preventive and reactive ways when dealing with plagiarism. Preventive ways include: "Providing guidelines at the beginning of class" (P1, P5) and "informing the consequences on the first day of class" (P1, P5).

On the other hand, reactive ways are such as “*request student to re-do the assignments*” (P1, P2, P4, P5), and “*give advice*” (P3, P4).

This theme shows how plagiarism is viewed negatively by the participants. However, even though the attitude towards plagiarism is negative, in terms of behavior, most of the participants still act on the basis of fairness by giving opportunity for the students to become aware of the related policies and increase their knowledge by learning the correct way to write.

Theme 4: Strategies utilized for academic integrity

To achieve academic integrity, participants listed three strategies: (1) having specific instructional approaches, (2) utilization of anti-plagiarism software, and (3) plagiarism policies. A range of practices were shared by the participants. Most of the participants prefer teaching students, showing examples, and giving hands-on exercises (P1, P2, P3, P4). Additionally, two participants (P3, P5) talked about giving reflections, case-study, or project-based assignments which in their opinion lowered the probability to plagiarize. The participants also demonstrated their determination in ensuring academic integrity by using anti-plagiarism software to check for similarity.

Findings show that even though institution policies and rules existed, the extent to which it was disseminated and enforced was questionable. Two participants expressed that they lack understanding of the university policy governing plagiarism. For instance, P3 said: “*I’m not sure whether the policy we have regarding plagiarism is clear enough*”. The other three participants expressed some understanding that there were institutional policies and rules: “*I know that students need to show a similarity index report for their writings*” (P4).

CONCLUSION

The findings show that Muslim counselor educators in this study have a pretty good sense of what plagiarism is and its relation to academic integrity. The counselor educators’ understanding of plagiarism was influenced by both their professional identity and Islamic religious background. These were reflected in their responses that can be corroborated with the ACA Code of Ethics 2014 (American Counseling Association, 2014). Section G.5.b of the Code states that “counselors do not plagiarize; that is, they do not present another person’s work as their own”. Additionally, Section G.5.c mentioned about the need for counselors to acknowledge and give recognition to previous work on the topic by others or self in publications and presentations. Muslim counselor educators in this study see plagiarism as a violation of one’s character, principles, or Islamic values. Moreover, attribution is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition especially in compilation of *hadith* (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). From the data, the participants in this study did not mention ‘copyright’ or ‘intellectual property’ implied that their beliefs on morality and ethics were more influenced by the Islamic conceptualization of knowledge which emphasizes on truth compared to the Western perspective that treats knowledge as material which have financial benefit (i.e. property rights and originality) (Stearns, 1999).

This study also supports Moten (2014) who stated that Malaysian approach the problem of plagiarism as a matter of morality and crime. Amanullah (2006) states that in Islam, even though, learning is highly advisable, trustworthiness seems as one among the lost ethical attributes of people of late. Therefore, in Islam, plagiarism is very much reprehensible and could not be negotiated. This is due “as plagiarism is the theft of someone’s ideas or language, and is a form of cheating which is morally and ethically unacceptable” (Moten, 2014, pp. 167).

Moten, when explaining the meaning of this term, explores that it come from a Latin word “*plagiarius*”, literally defines as “kidnapper” or “plunderer” (Moten, 2014; Harper, 2014).

Several Muslim scholars in the past have shed light on the importance of learning and elaborated in great detail the meaning of knowledge. This is due as the meaning and purposes of knowledge are entangled with the values and essence of learning. To attain *ma'rifah* is due to the spiritual experience with Allah SWT and one's devotion. Therefore, the process of learning and knowing in Islam will undeniably make oneself aware of the virtuous deeds and piety. al-Ghazali (n.d., p.54) has underlined several salient features of being successful in knowledge that one has honed his spiritual ability against his own anger, rancor, arrogance, hatred and so on so forth.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that even though Muslim counselor educators admit that plagiarism is a serious offense, their attitude is to be fair before punishment is given by making sure that proper steps had been taken. Being a Muslim may cause them to be more cautious before taking actions as Islam emphasizes on rights and responsibilities towards self and others. Amanullah (2006) is of the view that plagiarism deals with the value of trust. Trust is something that is missing when someone involves in this misbehavior. In fact, it is the value that determined all Muslim actions.

It is also possible that the environment of the institution which emphasized on the integration of *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge somehow influences the attitude and behaviors of the counselor educators in this study. This supports McCabe (2001): institutions set the atmosphere of integrity through academic instructional approaches, programs, and policies that promote integrity and discourage plagiarism. Every university has to clearly pay serious attention on plagiarism so that students will not transgress this *amānah*. Islam deals with plagiarism in a very strict manner. Everything that violates someone's right is upheld in great concern. Even, it is a conduct that befits *zulm*. The Qur'an mentions that “as for the man who is a thief and the woman who is a thief cut off their hands in requital for what they have reaped and as exemplary punishment of God.” (Holy Qur'an, 5:38).

In fact, the values of being honest, truthful, responsible, comply by the rules and the ethical codes of university are taken into the oath of students before embarking on the academic journey. Moten, for instance, highlights the International Islamic University Malaysia's Students' Discipline Rules 2004, which explains plagiarism as “any idea or intellectual property expressed in material form, writing or data, of another person and claimed that the work, writing, data or invention is the result of his/her own findings or invention or any intellectual property right” (Moten, 2014: 171).

The study shows the need for more attention in the enforcement of policies, rules and regulation related to plagiarism in promoting academic integrity. Despite the fact that many tools such as the “electronic plagiarism detection services” which have been created to control this phenomenon, it has unfortunately created another problem that this tool has been used extensively to certify the absence of plagiarism (Amanullah, 2006). No reported case of plagiarism does not mean that students do not engage in such activity. This study proves that students do commit plagiarism but as lecturers are still lenient while policies, rules and regulations are still not in place, students may get away with it and do not take it seriously.

The findings also found that to reduce plagiarism and achieve academic integrity, having a positive outlook (*husnuz zhan*) is essential. Engaging in classroom practices which include assignments that discourage plagiarism can be helpful in protecting and maintaining academic integrity. These support previous studies that highlighted practices regarding instructional

design. Undertaking these practices assist both the counselor educator and students to attain a peaceful mind and respond better to the teaching and learning process.

In conclusion, this study has increased the understanding on critical issues to consider in the promotion of academic integrity within the group being studied even though the findings are limited in terms of generalization. In summary, Muslim counselor educators are influenced by their principles of ethics, morality, and values when dealing with the issue of plagiarism. Additionally, institutions need to rethink policies and procedures, the academic community needs to re-examine teaching methods to ensure a more holistic and comprehensive approach that encourages positive growth and development of students.

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