THE AWARENESS OF INTERNET PLAGIARISM AMONG THE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism has long been a problem in educational settings and with the advent of the Internet revolution and highly user-friendly word processing software, plagiarism has become a widespread phenomenon. Internet exposed students to multitude of resources in their learning process. Ironically, these phenomena also brought tremendous opportunities for the plagiarism on cyberspace to take place. Students freely copied and pasted informations directly from Internet in the assignments and claimed the works as theirs. Very limited research had been done and there are no study had been conducted in secondary school students in Malaysia. This study aims to investigate the reasons behind the increased phenomena of the internet plagiarism among students in one of the secondary schools in Alor Setar, Kedah, Malaysia. Data collection and the subsequent analyses were guided by qualitative research methods with the theoretical backdrop of Rogers Model of Innovation-Decision Process (Rogers, 1962). In this research, researcher uses the term “awareness of the internet plagiarism” as the “innovation”. 4 themes emerged from this research, namely (1) lack and limited knowledge (2) lack and limited awareness and (3) normal phenomena (4) easy access to Internet. These themes are discussed with reference to the finding of other studies in plagiarism and the implication for the continuum of the education in Malaysia is pointed out.

Field of Research: Plagiarism, awareness, internet plagiarism

1.0 Introduction

Plagiarism has long been a problem in educational settings (Breen & Maassen, 2005), and with the advent of the Internet revolution and highly user-friendly word processing software, plagiarism has become a widespread phenomenon (Price & Price, 2005; Batane, 2010).

We are now living in the digital era of Internet age where knowledge can be found easily using this informations superhighway, internet. This cyberworld exposed students to multitude of resources in their learning process these phenomena and also brought tremendous opportunities for the plagiarism to be taken place (Brians, 2002; Howard, 2007)
Internet plagiarism is a term used to describe the illegal use of written work, photographs, or graphics from any online website without giving credit to the creator of the original content. The action involved taking, using, copying and pasting the work of others, photographs, graphics, artwork, website design from the internet without acknowledging the original author of the work. In most cases where written work is concerned, Internet plagiarism involves the act of copying and pasting information verbatim from an internet source, without rephrasing or citing the original creator. The online content are actually have the same right as the printed materials, which is protected by copyright infringement laws.

Study on Internet plagiarism had been done since mid 1990’s, when the used of Internet had been widely adopted and the awareness of cyber ethics become increasingly important (Peter, 1995; Austin, 1999; Klausman, 1999). Sisti (2007) conducted a study in US and found out that that 98% of high school students used Internet for homework and research paper, and 35% of them confess they directly copied and pasted materials into assignments, without citation. Research shows that several factors contribute to Internet plagiarism among college and middle schools students, namely peer culture, the nature of website, punishment that are not reinforced, pressure of achievement, nature of student wider internet used, languages problems and students understanding of plagiarism is limited (Lahur, 2004 Ma, Lu, Turner & Wan, 2007; Selwyn, 2008).

Although Internet plagiarism has been major problems in learning institutions (Scanlon & Neumann, 2001; Selwyn, 2008) and the numbers growing by thousand (Brians, 2002; Ma et al, 2007), only single study had been conducted in one of Malaysian University. Very limited research had been done and there are no study had been conducted among the secondary school students in Malaysia. This study wants to explore why upper secondary school students commit Internet plagiarism. It was conducted to answer the following questions; what is the students’ level of awareness towards Internet plagiarism and why do students commit Internet plagiarism?

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This study used Rogers, 1962 as the theoretical framework. Rogers, 1962 states innovation-decision process as the process through which the individual (or other decision-making unit) passes from gaining initial knowledge of an “innovation”, to forming an attitude toward the “innovation”, to making a decision to adopt or reject, to implementation of the new idea, and to confirmation of this decision. This research is based on Everett Rogers’ model of the diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 1962).

Rogers’ has comes out with five stages in the innovation decision process, known as Knowledge, Persuasion, Decision, Implementation, and Confirmation. This process occurs through a series of communication channels over a period of time, among the members of a similar social system. The “innovation” may be any new products, ideas or practices. In this research, researcher uses the term “awareness of the internet plagiarism” as the “innovation”. Using these stages, researcher will try to investigate the level of awareness towards internet plagiarism and why students still did not adopt the awareness.
This study will only focus on the first two stage of Rogers’ model which is Knowledge and Persuasion. For the Knowledge stage, the research will adapt three of Rogers’ construct in the Prior Conditions, which are previous practice, felt need and norm of the social system to match the research domain. The researcher will construct the items of qualitative questions based on students’ previous practice, their feeling and the influence they obtain from their friends or teachers (the social system around them) regarding the internet plagiarism. Using the theoretical timeframe of Rogers’ diffusion of innovation, this study will explore the level of student’s awareness, and why they engaged internet plagiarism.

3.0 Method

Data analysis in this study used phenomenological research and also described as explicitation of data, which is the investigation on the specific phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole (Hycner, 1999, p. 161 cited in Groenewald, 2004, p.17). The five phases of explicitation process are, (1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction (2) Delineating units of meaning (3) Clustering units of meaning to form themes (4) Summarising each interview, validating it and if necessary, modifying (5) Extracting general and unique themes or making a composite summary.

4.0 Participants

This study employed purposive sampling into choosing the participants. 5 male students, aged 15 years old and of the same class (can be regard as having the same cognitive level) had been chosen as samples. All of them have engaged plagiarism once or several times especially in doing homework and assignments for various subjects.

5.0 Procedure

The researcher requested participants from the observations and records of students in doing homework and assignments. Five male students who met the criteria were respectively sourced from
the same class. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants by the researcher.

6.0 Result and Discussion

The students were interviewed in counseling room. From the analysis of the interview, 4 themes were extrapolated. These themes surround the aspect of their lives as students and in doing homework and assignments. The 4 themes are:

**Limited and lack of knowledge**

The participants describe their limited and lack of knowledge in the meaning of plagiarism. They do not really know what the real definition of plagiarism is. Their knowledge’s are limited only to the problems of plagiarize in making movie (burning CD without permission- especially pornography CD) and printing books and magazine without permission. This finding support the statement, “we know it when we see it” that the understanding of the meaning of plagiarism that is commonly related to pornography (St. Onge, 1998, p.51 as cited in Marshall & Gary, 2005).

Throughout the interviews, the participants only discuss wrong side of plagiarism regarding the items that are widely promotes by the mass media. They cannot justify the act of plagiarism that they have done in doing assignments and homework. Several participants said that it should be no problem to plagiarize good things, such as in doing their homework.

One of the participants says:

“ It is a sin… if the things is not good, if good things, or may be for study it is not sin because he has good intention.”

The phenomena also support the findings that students are actually lack of understanding of the concept of plagiarism thus lead to unclear perception toward plagiarism (Marshall & Gary, 2005; Arief, Ahmad, Azmi, Mohd, & Nurazmallail, 2008 & Ma, Lu, Turner, & Wan, 2007). The respondents show that they do not have enough knowledge towards plagiarism that can encourage them not to adopt the act of plagiarism.

**Limited and lack of awareness**

Scanlon & Neumann (2002) reported that students who believed that plagiarism is wrong will not commit into doing it. Their research did found out that self reported plagiarism was highly linked with ethical view.

In the case of SMK Alor Janggus students, although they know that plagiarism is wrong, they don’t really understand or cannot make correlation between their mind framework about plagiarism and their act in committing plagiarism while doing assignments or homework. The participants similarly fail to grasp the idea that copying works from friends or internet is a plagiarism. All of them said that it is easy and fun to plagiarize things for assignments and homework because easy get high marks (due to the precise informations) and they also can finish up their assignments or homework faster. Some participants admit they copied different source of internet, and pasted the different parts of sentences to make a paragraph and happy because they got a lot of informations.

The experience of copied and pasted described by participant 2:

“Best, fun and easy (the act of plagiarism), but must take precaution steps, (weather the informations) right or wrong. Do not copied blindly... but merge with other website...
Other participant claimed:

“Look weather (the informations) right or not, ask opinion (from friends)… copy the word… paste at word (microsoft word)… print.”

When they are asked, what they felt in doing plagiarism in their assignments and homework, one of the participants said:

“Sometimes have the wrong feels, but also felt great because (plagiarism) can make (my) works easier. (Only) felt wrong if (I) plagiarize CD (movies).”

The other participants comment on the interview questions on did they feel that they take other’s idea when committing plagiarism, they claimed;

“did not felt (I) take other’s idea- (because) want to study.”

Another answer;

“(I) felt (take other’s idea), but because (I) want to do homework, did not know the answer, the solution is refer to internet, don’t be so arrogant.”

All the participants show that they do not really understand the moral underpinning the act of plagiarism. One of them tried to retype the informations but found it time consuming and thus prefer the act of copy and pasting.

This show limited and lack of awareness towards plagiarism, as the research done by Sisti (2007) that stated that only 46% of the respondents claimed Internet plagiarism as cheating. This phenomena also contribute to the plagiarism incidence among the medical school students in Croatia which reported 81% of the respondents did the plagiarism in doing their assignment, although had been strictly warned (Bilic-Zulle, Frkovic, Turk, Azman, Petrovecki, 2005).

Normal Phenomenon

Participants also describe that the act of plagiarizing is a normal phenomena among themselves. It usually happens when they do not finish homework at the right timeframe given by the teachers. They will plagiarize other’s work just for the sake of finishing the works. They also doing plagiarism in writing essay (plagiarize others’ idea) and they add up with their own idea so they get higher marks than the others. Participants also admit did plagiarizing in Science report and folio and in finishing History folio.

The phenomena supported by one of the participants that claimed:

“Doing homework- Mathematics. Copied from friend – it’s a normal thing.”

This finding aligned with the social cognitive theory, which explains how people acquire and maintain certain behavioral pattern (Singhal, Cody, Rogers & Sabido, 2004 as cited in Batane, 2010). Batane (2010) also done a research in University of Botswana and found out that the concurrent cases of Internet plagiarism among the students was because they often see most of their collages did the cheating. This finding also supported results of researches that had been done in the Unites Sates that stated school students engaged to Internet plagiarism because of the effect from peer culture and they claimed everybody else doing the plagiarism (Sisti, 2007; & Ma, et. all, 2007).

All the finding aligned with Rogers’ prior conditions in Innovation-Decision Process, showed that
norm of the social system contributed to the adoption or rejection of innovation. In this research, the Internet plagiarism as the innovation and the norm of social system around SMK Alor Janggus’s students contributed to its adoption.

**Easy access to Internet**

The participants also interviewed why they do plagiarism, and another theme emerged from the analysis, which is the Internet facilities that is so easy to access. They explained that Internet can give them informations easily. This situation brought tremendous opportunities for the plagiarism to take place. Sisti (2007) reported that 98% of the high schools students in the United States use Internet in doing their homework and doing projects.

Malaysia, as one of the developing countries, also provides good computer and internet facilities. The emergence of Smart Schools and enhancement of e-learning among the Malaysian school students exposed them to the usage of Internet, widely. A research conducted in Malaysia found that high majority (90%) of the respondents, who were 60 secondary schools students in Klang Valley, Selangor has Internet excess from homes, 6.3% from their friends’ house, 50% from cyber café, 20% from public libraries, 17% from parents’ office and 7% from community centre and schools (Abrizah & Zainab, 2004).

Simultaneously, findings of this study do shows that students of SMK Alor Janggus, Kedah prefer committing Internet plagiarism rather than searching informations in the library or have to make trip to the source of informations (the factory, museum or meet the person).

One of the participants explained why he commits Internet Plagiarism;

“Lazy, doing works at ease, in hurry, (can get) more informations and precise too, easy to get – all (students) have internet at home.. or go to cyber café.. lots of facilities (Internet).”

One of the interview questions asked what they do if they do not practice Internet plagiarism, the participants answer;

“If not copied and pasted – have to do myself – have to ask – (have) to go to the place that I want (in order to search informations manually).”

The descriptions of the participant’s experience in using Internet accord with their act of Internet plagiarism. Students prefer using Internet for the fastest and less time consuming in finishing their works compared to other tedious and hard ways of finding informations. Furthermore, they can easily excess Internet either from home, cyber café or even at schools.

The finding parallel with a research that had been done by Batane in 2010 that found 75% students claimed they commit into Internet Plagiarism because of laziness, and had been agreed by 80% of the lecturers who took part in the survey. The online informations are also very easy to obtain and thus making plagiarizing becomes hard to abide (Selwyn, 2008 & John, 2010). The students want to finish their work in a short and easy way, and the super corridor is there for them – Internet access!

### 7.0 Conclusion

This study confirms the awareness of secondary school students that engaging the internet plagiarism. Inline with Roger’s model of decision-innovation process that had been used as the theoretical
framework, the finding revealed that these students still adopt the plagiarism because of lack of knowledge and persuasion. The students still confuse what is plagiarism all about as their surrounding did not support their understanding of this phenomenon, as they regard plagiarism as a normal thing around them. The role of Internet as “superhighway” of informations also became the reason on why they easily commit into plagiarism. These factors contribute to students lack and limited awareness to plagiarism.

It is hoped that this researched will contribute to an understanding of the awareness of Internet plagiarism, especially among the Secondary Schools students. In the emergence of School Based Assessments in Malaysia, the finding of this research hopefully can serve as a guide for schools, State Department of Education and Ministry of Education to formulate strategies and policies to address Internet plagiarism.

Reference


