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THE COMPLEX CONCEPT OF PLAGIARISM: UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

ABSTRACT

The prevalence of plagiarism in university students' academic writing is well documented. Its complex and multifaceted nature has made it difficult to reduce or manage. The literature reveals a lack of significant understanding of plagiarism and related concepts to be due to a poor or an absence of education, and it advocates for extensive and explicit education in what constitutes plagiarism at higher education level. In this review article we explore the literature on undergraduate and postgraduate student perspectives of plagiarism and related concepts in a global context. These perspectives are discussed under the following themes: students' understanding of plagiarism and related literacy practices such as referencing, the reasons contributing to why students plagiarise intentionally or unintentionally, students' understandings and views of the seriousness of plagiarism and students' views on how to curb plagiarism. We believe that through a deeper understanding of students' perspectives of plagiarism, we could start to develop an all-encompassing strategy to deal with plagiarism at university level.

Keywords: *Plagiarism, referencing, perspective, undergraduate, postgraduate university students.*

1. INTRODUCTION: THE COMPLEXITY OF PLAGIARISM AND REFERENCING

Plagiarism is a complex subject and integrally connected to different intricate literacy practices, such as accurate referencing skills and academic reading and writing skills. Several scholars have attempted simple definitions (e.g. Lathrop & Foss, 2000; Neville, 2007). However, others have identified complications with these (Angelil-Carter, 2000; Hu & Lei, 2015; Neville, 2007). For example, Neville (2007) acknowledges the difficulty of defining plagiarism, as the elements of unintentional plagiarism are contextually complex. Hu and Lei (2015:234) state that "plagiarism is often associated with such judgmental labels as deception, cheating, academic crime, intellectual dishonesty, and moral failure". These terms suggest that plagiarism is a simple issue that has a clear-cut boundary and situates

students within the "binary of honest or dishonest", and "ethical or unethical". These simplified definitions do not address the issue of unintentional plagiarism which is connected to context or cultural variation among students. Angelil-Carter (2000) sees plagiarism as a difficult and complex concept: the notions of intentional and unintentional plagiarism make it subjective and even more difficult to explain.

Scholars such as Angelil-Carter (2000), Currie (1998), Handa and Power (2005), Pennycook (1996), Scollon (1995), Valentine (2006) and Vance (2009) share the views comparable of Hu and Lei (2015). They disagree with the simplistic notion of plagiarism and suggest it is a more complex, multidimensional phenomenon affected by a variety of issues, such as culture, politics, context, historical, social, ideological and language conditions. For example, from studies conducted in China and Hong Kong, Pennycook (1996) concludes that second language educational issues, the concept of author and authority in academic writing and cross-cultural relations that emerge in educational contexts need to be taken into consideration when dealing with cases of plagiarism.

Referencing has been highlighted as one of the key skills needed in order to avoid plagiarism. It is, however, a highly intricate skill to master. In most cases, referencing is simply defined as acknowledging others' work in one's writing. However, the deeper purpose and meaning of referencing is often poorly conveyed to students. For example, the importance of concepts related to the referencing process, such as citation, bibliography and academic reading and writing are seldom explained in detail. As a result, as the literature shows, students usually understand the more superficial definition of plagiarism and not the benefits of referencing and related concepts (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997; Greenwood, Walkem & Shearer, 2014). However, the deeper benefits of the referencing process encompass proper/exact citation and formulating an accurate reference list or bibliography in an integrated academic reading and writing process. Scholars such as Gilbert (1977), Hutchings (2013), Neville (2010) and Samraj (2013) identify several benefits of referencing often not grasped by students.

Hutchings (2013:312) mentions that "in referring certain ideas to certain sources the writer is equipped with the ability to distinguish voices of others, and therefore allow for the establishment of their voice". Thus, when reading vast amounts of information in preparation for academic writing, one needs to be able to create an argument using others' voices as well as one's own voice. This can be achieved by referring to others' texts and through practise. Using one's own voice is one of the crucial skills needed in academic discourse and referencing is a crucial part of this process.

Samraj (2013) suggests that this intertextual interlinking (synthesising text from different sources) of the student's own voice with those of others in academic writing is the hardest part of constructing an academic text and that making a critical and credible connection between what a student did and what is already done by other writers is not an easy task; it requires an ability to look at "the bigger picture". This is a difficult skill to master and if students disregard the proper citation part of referencing, they miss an opportunity to learn how to cite, and how to use others' texts effectively in support of their own arguments/voices.

Gilbert (1977) explained the significance of referencing in scientific/academic writing. He considers a scientific/academic paper a "tool for persuasion". He explains this concept: scholars who conduct research believe their results are important; they have to persuade the scholars in the field of the importance of these by relating their findings to the current literature in their field to provide evidence or create a persuasive argument for the audience

(other scholars in the field) that their work has a level of validity and is theoretically based. Referencing forms a crucial part of this process. Similarly, Neville (2012) argues for the crucial role of referencing in the collective development and transmission of academic knowledge. Referring to the work of other scholars encourages a critical thinking approach through an intelligent selection of quality research findings, reviewing and analysing these findings and presenting them to support a chosen argument. Referencing is the practical manifestation of this engagement (Neville, 2012).

This article's argument is that a simplistic view of the problem of plagiarism held by higher education institutions and educators could form part of the problem. Universities and educators thus need to be mindful of the multifaceted and complex nature of plagiarism and its interlinking with other complex skills that need mastering, such as referencing and academic reading and writing. It is easy as educators to label learners as lazy, thieves or incompetent. Thus, we must begin to look at this field with more intensity and sensitivity and teach it in an in-depth way. This is not yet happening, as the norm persists for educators to assume that university students already possess the skills for avoiding plagiarism. We have purposefully chosen to include undergraduate and postgraduate students' perspectives of plagiarism in a global context as we see this as helping to create a more global, cross-cultural picture of students' perspectives. By including both perspectives, one can begin to see that the struggles are widespread, from students' early years of university and into postgraduate levels. With this in mind, it is important that we change how we view and how we address plagiarism education.

A review of the literature around perspectives on plagiarism represents an attempt to explore these perspectives under these topics: students' understanding of plagiarism and related literacy practices, reasons why students plagiarise intentionally or unintentionally, students' understandings of the seriousness of plagiarism and students' views on how to curb plagiarism.

The database used to select articles for inclusion in this literature review was Google Scholar. Articles published in scholarly, reliably peer-reviewed journals were included. Keywords used for searching include "undergraduate students", "postgraduate students", "plagiarism", "referencing" and "perspective". Most of the articles used focus on research done over the last 20 years or more in order to provide give a historic perspective of the persistence of the plagiarism problem over time. The articles were also from multiple contexts to highlight the complexity and the commonality of the problem. Forward and backward snowballing was used to obtain more relevant articles. Several articles address the issue of plagiarism in connection with other related concepts, such as referencing. This was in order to highlight the multidimensional issue of plagiarism.

2. STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF PLAGIARISM AND RELATED CONCEPTS

Scholars have shown that, except for verbatim parroting and simple definitions of plagiarism and referencing, undergraduate and postgraduate students lack clarity on what fully constitutes referencing and plagiarism (Ashworth *et al.*, 1997; Branch & Iran, 2013; Du, 2019; Greenwood *et al.*, 2014; Gu & Brooks, 2007; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Heckler & Forde, 2014; Lea & Street, 1998; Neville, 2009; Perry, 2010; Selemani, Chawinga & Dube, 2018; Sentleng & King, 2012; Theart & Smit, 2012). Different, but interlinked themes emerged regarding students' levels of understanding of plagiarism and related concepts. These themes include:

common trends of superficial understandings of plagiarism, struggles with referencing and its conventions, struggles with intertextuality or text borrowing, difficulty recognising the relevance of referencing when building an argument, difficulty identifying one's voice and others' voices in an argument, difficulty understanding the concept of ownership of ideas, difficulty recognising the relationship between plagiarism and referencing in academic writing and misunderstanding the purpose of literature when developing an argument.

Ashworth *et al.* (1997) found that students demonstrated a lack of understanding of the concept of plagiarism. These students indicated that they battled with the concept of intertextuality and found the concept of ownership of ideas difficult. This could mean that they battled with differentiating their own voice from the voices of others. This could also mean that creating a new argument through the synthesis of texts and integrations of one's' authoritative voice, is not easy. These students were therefore concerned that they might plagiarise unintentionally. This trend of battling with intertextuality is evident in other studies. For example, undergraduate students in a study by Gullifer and Tyson (2010) had a superficial understanding of plagiarism: They understood that word-for-word copying of text without referencing was plagiarism. They were, however, confused about intertextuality and understanding the relevance of citation and attribution when developing an argument built on evidence from existing literature.

Similarly, students in Gu and Brooks' (2007) study misunderstood the purpose of previous literature in the development of their argument. One student said, "[w]riting English essays is really easy, one has their own idea, one gets someone really powerful to support your idea". This demonstrates that some students battle with the concept of intertextuality, trying to minimise its role. Another student in Gu and Brooks' (2007) study thought that referencing is a technical task that could be easily included at the end of the project and expected the lecturer to concentrate on the content rather than on the referencing conventions. Students in Gu and Brooks' study (2007) also acknowledged their confusion about distinctions between common knowledge, original sources and their own creativity.

Regarding the understanding of plagiarism and of referencing and its conventions (paraphrasing, summarising, use of quotation marks and proper citation), in most instances students considered that they fully understood these concepts. However, when they were later asked to explain or apply the concepts, they were unable to do so and battled with understanding the link between these concepts. For example, most of the students in Theart and Smit (2012) and Selemani *et al.*'s (2018) studies indicated that they knew what plagiarism was and demonstrated fairly good explanations. However, students in the Selemani *et al.* (2018) study thought that paraphrasing, summarising and acknowledging sources was a form of plagiarism. Some students in their study admitted to paraphrasing, summarising and using quotation marks without proper citation and acknowledgment. This trend is also evident in Heckler and Forde's (2014) study, where all students included knew how to define plagiarism and internet plagiarism in simple terms. For example, they knew that reproducing or including another's work into one's own without proper attribution was a form of plagiarism. However, in the same study, some students indicated that they did not know how to cite others. This suggests students in studies such as these may be unsure of what fully constitutes proper referencing conventions.

Concerning the issue of voice, students in the Lea and Street (1998) study did not feel that they were ready or capable to use their own voice in an authoritative text and were concerned

about textual borrowing practices. Gullifer and Tyson (2010) observed similar results. One student asked, "if I think it is my brilliant idea, do I have to actually go somewhere and check whether I have stolen it from someone else?" This clearly illustrates the confusion around the identification of the student's own voice and others' voices in a text. As a result of all this confusion, students appeared to be concerned that they might plagiarise unintentionally or accidentally because they lacked the skill of borrowing others' texts appropriately. The complexity of intertextuality is also highlighted in Du's (2019) study. After attending a six-hour instructional block training on referencing, over three consecutive weeks, students could recognise improper source use. Students significantly reduced blatant and subtle plagiarism. However, the students did not understand that textual synthesis without acknowledging the source was plagiarism and they relied heavily on the language of the original source. Also, in the case of Du (2019), due to language differences, the students felt they needed more time to master the skill of referencing.

Students of all levels (first-year to postgraduate) in Perry's (2010) study had plagiarised in some way. However, first-year undergraduate students were more likely to plagiarise than postgraduate students, with 71% of the first-year students not aware that word-for-word copying without acknowledging the author was plagiarism. Students at all levels seemed to have an issue with intertextuality and identification of voice, as well as a poor understanding of referencing conventions. For example, overall, students were unsure whether copying one or two sentences into their assignments without acknowledgment was acceptable. According to Perry (2010), undergraduate students were more likely to fabricate references (14%) compared with postgraduate students (4%).

Riasati and Rahimi (2013) identified a poor understanding of plagiarism as the leading reason why many Iranian postgraduate students plagiarise. Their study showed the crucial importance of students being well trained and groomed throughout their university years to develop these skills.

3. POSSIBLE REASONS WHY STUDENTS PLAGIARISE INTENTIONALLY OR UNINTENTIONALLY

The reasons for plagiarism are shown to be exceptionally broad and multidimensional. Some of the reasons show intentional plagiarism, while others are unintentional. The table below illustrates themes identified from the literature regarding reasons for intentional and unintentional plagiarism. They are discussed further below.

Table 1:   Reasons for plagiarism

Discrepancies in the way plagiarism is taught	Lack of formal training in plagiarism related concepts.
	Provision of plagiarism and referencing documents without explanation.
	Lack of guidance and support by the educators.
	Unrealistic expectations by educators that university students will read and understand plagiarism documents and quickly transform themselves into good academic writers without explicit guidance.
	Students' heavy workloads.
	Use of legalistic, threatening and authoritative techniques to deter students from plagiarising.
	The assessment methods used (e.g. assignments not clear or heavy or difficult, group assignments and easily duplicatable assignments).
	Inconsistencies among educators: some interested in addressing plagiarism, others ignoring it.
Poor underlying/ supporting skill	Poor language proficiency.
	Poor writing skills.
	The inability to manage large amounts of text (intertextuality).
Lack of Institutional guidelines	Lack of transparent and explicit guidelines and strategies on what to do if a student plagiarises.
	Non-existent or overly demanding monitoring systems.
Lack of Institutional support	Classes being too large for an academic staff member to handle effectively.
	Heavy workloads for students and academics.
Lack of student efforts/ commitment	Students' lack of interest in a specific topic
	The need for immediate gratification (competition, convenience and good grades).
Other factors	Financial issues.
	External pressures (family or society, diverse cultural and educational backgrounds).
	Time management issues.

In Sentleng and King's (2012) study, students' reasons for unintentionally plagiarising included: poor writing skills, lack of referencing skills and never having been taught how to reference properly. These are similar to those identified in Perry's (2010) study, where students' reasons were: lack of understanding what constitutes academic misconduct; some undergraduate and postgraduate students did not recall being taught about referencing or plagiarism. These reasons seem to suggest that if these students had been afforded an opportunity to learn and acquire the skill, they would be less likely to plagiarise. Students in the Heckler and Forde (2014) study blamed their faculty: the faculty did not explain the assignments clearly enough, faculty's expectations were too high; the classes were too big, resulting in monitoring systems being difficult or non-existent. Some students felt the professors did not care about this issue, thus providing the freedom for students to continue

plagiarising. They also blamed lecturers' lack of effective strategies when dealing with plagiarism within departments.

Ashworth *et al.* (1997) identified various reasons for plagiarism: heavy workload, poor understanding of the content and students paying little attention to content they felt would not benefit them in the future. Students identified some of the institutional factors they thought contributed to plagiarism. These included a lack of guidelines from the university regarding what plagiarism entails and vague consequences and penalty guidelines. Students also felt that collaborative work encouraged plagiarism as students could easily collude and steal others' work.

According to students in Gullifer and Tyson's (2010) study, they were given no formal introduction to, or training in, the scholarship of academic writing when they entered university. They felt that when they first entered the university they were bombarded with information on plagiarism and related academic concepts and given no time to absorb the information. They believed that simply providing online access to the plagiarism documents was not enough, as it did not promote an in-depth understanding of academic writing and plagiarism concepts or how to apply these in practice. Exposing students to documents that merely warn them about the consequences of plagiarism might not be beneficial for novice students who have not yet begun to understand why referencing is important for them personally. Undergraduate students who are new to the academic culture of reading and writing would not necessarily be aware of the seriousness of plagiarism and referencing unless someone takes time to induct them into these discourses in a supportive learning environment. According to Gullifer and Tyson (2010), students also need time to absorb and process new information and put it into practice without being subject to threatening behaviour from the institution. Students felt that the university was not doing enough to make all aspects of plagiarism more explicit.

Branch and Iran (2013) identified several reasons for plagiarism. Their students mentioned poor writing skills, poor language competencies, difficulty and heaviness of assignments and projects, convenience, external pressures from family and society and financial reasons. One could argue that, out of all these reasons, only three could lead to unintentional plagiarism. The rest of the reasons are influenced by students' choice. For example, students found it convenient to bypass the time and effort involved in learning to synthesise vast amounts of information and learning to identify their own authoritative voice and the voices of others. Students chose to plagiarise as they felt technology made it easy for them and thus one could argue that these students were looking for the immediate gratification of getting good grades with no future benefits in mind resulting from their academic writing development.

Some students in Heckler and Forde's (2014) study took responsibility and accountability for their unacceptable intentional plagiarising. They sometimes plagiarised because of poor time management or they wanted good grades or the immediate gratification from obtaining good grades. In this 2014 study, intentional plagiarism was also attributed to USA cultural value systems. Students identified the two highest contributory values to plagiarism: individualism and freedom. The notion of individualism was made clear by one student: "Our culture tells us to do whatever it takes to be successful even if it means cheating" (Heckler & Forde, 2014:68). Another student mentioned the culture of intense competitiveness to achieve individual success at all costs; a culture that influences the criteria by which one's academic performance is judged:

> There is a stronger emphasis on making sure that you are one step ahead of everyone else; hard work and self-knowledge has taken a back burner. Instead of valuing the process by which an education is obtained, and information learned through the process, our culture value of individual achievements means that rewards are based only on grades (Heckler & Forde, 2014:68).

The notion of freedom was also reported as one to be valued. The students felt that, being no longer under the control of their parents, provided freedom to do whatever they liked. It is, however, surprising to see that the same values contributing to cheating and plagiarism for some students were seen as counter-productive by other students. For example, the freedom to make a morally responsible choice was valued by some students. Individualism was also seen as a negative and harmful value by some students, who criticised those students who emphasised and valued individual merit. Based on the students' views, Heckler and Forde (2014) suggested that:

> …current emphasis on faculty grantsmanship, research, and publication should be balanced with teaching function responsibilities that include faculty vigilance on academic dishonesty issues. The challenge of doing this is significant as institutions opt for larger classes, more online instructions, and use of non-tenure-track contract instructors to carry heavy enrolment loads (Heckler & Forde, 2014:70).

Other students who took some responsibility for intentional plagiarism were those surveyed by Sentleng and King (2012) in South Africa. These students acknowledged that some of them lost track of where the information came from. This deficit could be improved when students understand the purpose and benefits of referencing and practise the skill.

Diverse cultural and educational background factors have also been identified as a possible contributing factor to plagiarism and poor referencing conventions. For example, Chinese students interviewed by Gu and Brooks (2007) felt that the British university they were at concentrated excessively on citation and referencing relative to the focus on this in their background education, which focused mainly on profound collective knowledge a student presented in an essay. Guo (2011) also mentions that a limited command of English could trap students from different language backgrounds into plagiarising.

Lea and Street (1998) argued that top down authoritative behaviour towards students by tutors or academic staff when trying to reinforce or enforce plagiarism does not yield the desired results. Their study illustrates how authoritative behaviour, used without proper guidelines, took away from the beneficial teaching and learning aspects that take place between tutors and students. The students were not happy with unclear and intimidating ways of enforcing referencing and required explicit teaching in exactly what constitutes plagiarism.

McKenna (2010) shares similar views and suggestions to those of Lea and Street (1998). She argues that, as teaching academics in higher education, we should position ourselves with our students in the periphery, where they are relegated by the institution and with those students who do not understand the value of referencing or a particular literacy skill and make explicit to them the value of the academic literacy skill. Other scholars, such as Gravett and Kinchin (2018), who examined the challenges experienced by students when developing referencing skills, reported that undergraduate students felt that the use of scare tactics or threatening speech about what could happen to them if they plagiarise was terrifying and paralysing. The emphasis on punishment and on authoritative speech made the research development journey a difficult one for students and failed to take into account the foundation

of good academic practice. This stress is not beneficial to students, especially when lecturing staff are in the process of trying to initiate students into university life. Gravett and Kinchin (2018) add that the focus on punishment and penalties puts the lecturer in a non-beneficial position of power over these students who are trying to adapt to a new environment and become accustomed to new and unfamiliar academic conventions.

The literature also shows the evidence of the use of intimidation in institutional documents such as study guides, notice boards and assessment marking rubrics. For example, in Lea and Street's (1998) study, such institutional documents used to caution students against plagiarism focused mainly on the legal consequences and disciplinary actions and were couched in "legalistic discourse". This mode of delivery of plagiarism information is not unique to the Lea and Street (1998) study.

According to Manathunga and Goozee (2007), there appears to be an unspoken, "common sense" assumption amongst lecturers and tutors that undergraduate graduates can transform themselves magically into independent critical thinkers and academic writers with minimal pedagogical input or support. However, studies mentioned in this review have found that students need to be introduced to any new discourse gradually and be fully supported. The alternative is that unsupported students will not have a full grasp or a uniform in-depth understanding of or the ability to apply the concepts of academic writing and critical thinking in their own writing.

Hamilton (2016) argues that academic staff should not expect first-year students to have acquired high referencing and citation conventions from the first semester. Using the threshold conceptual framework, Hamilton (2016) argues that students need to be given enough time to acquire the skill of referencing. Kiley and Wisker (2009) describe crossing the conceptual threshold as involving a transformation from old understanding of a concept to the new way of thinking. Without this transformative, non-linear, and, what authorities might see as, messy process, students cannot progress to advanced levels of understanding and insight about a discipline. Hamilton (2016) sees attribution as a conceptual gateway that new students need to be given time to cross. Once they cross this, "they may change from experiencing confusion over why the acknowledgment of sources is given so much emphasis in assessments of their writing, to understanding the fundamental role of attribution and referencing in academic writing" (Hamilton, 2016:44).

Hamilton (2016) and Manathunga and Goozee's (2007) arguments are similar. However, Hamilton was referring to first year undergraduate students ("novice" academic writers) and Manathunga and Goozee (2007) were referring to graduate students proceeding into the postgraduate level of education and doing research. Both studies suggest that the attribution and referencing skill may take time to master and that students need to be realistically awarded this time, taking into consideration their individual backgrounds. Furthermore, in some cases, Master's students and PhD students are referred to as novice writers, implying that they too are in the process of mastering attribution and referencing skills. For example, a survey conducted by Adika (2014) of 125 Master's students attending graduate programmes at the University of Ghana, showed that although the majority of the students declared themselves to have a substantial level of training in referencing styles, the researcher identified a gap in their practical knowledge of the referencing format. Furthermore, these students indicated that while some lecturers required them to reference, others did not require them to explicitly

acknowledge their use of source material to develop their own argument. These inconsistencies among lecturers send mixed messages to students regarding the importance of referencing.

4. THE SERIOUSNESS OF PLAGIARISM

Contradictory views were found in the literature regarding students' perspectives about the seriousness of plagiarism. While some students thought penalties for plagiarism should be implemented, others felt these were too severe or disproportionly severe, and some felt they were simply vague and not transparent enough. Some complained plagiarism practices were not monitored effectively in their faculties while others did not care about students plagiarising. Some students felt plagiarism was unacceptable, others that it was acceptable in some instances. For example, some students who do their best to follow the right procedures might find it unfair when others plagiarise and pass with no effort and no consequences.

In the Ashworth *et al*. (1997) study, students felt that plagiarism was unfair, wrong and bad practice. However, some thought plagiarism was unfair only if it impacted their peers' work, but then again, felt that if plagiarising was from a book, it was not as bad, as the individuals who wrote the book were not on the same academic level or status as the student (Ashworth *et al.,* 1997). This sentiment is in itself an indication of the extent to which students are not aware of, or are confused about, the benefits of grasping the referencing/plagiarism concept and able to use this skill in their academic writing and critical thinking for their own benefit. Students in the Ashworth *et al.* (1997) study also felt that premeditated cheating in an examination was the most serious offence, while plagiarism from course work assignments was less serious. This kind of thinking demonstrates how a lack of understanding of referencing and plagiarism could hinder student development in academic writing. In other words, if students are not referencing and are plagiarising, how can they improve the skills of intertextuality or understand the concept of the ownership of ideas?

In a study by Greenwood *et al.* (2014), most of the students felt that referencing was important. However, they were not fully confident about referencing and felt inadequately prepared for the required academic writing standards. Therefore, it seems that, for the students in this study, plagiarism was caused by a lack of skill, rather than unwilling attitudes. Gravett and Kinchin's (2018) study further demonstrated students' awareness of the importance of referencing. For example, students in this study were very anxious about academic referencing skills and scared they might fail due to unintentional plagiarism. As a result, some of these students enquired about the skill from individuals such as lecturers and librarians.

Students in Gullifer and Tyson's study (2010) perceived intentional plagiarism as serious. However, they felt that for unintentional plagiarism, penalties the university imposed were disproportionly severe. Similarly, some students in Theart and Smit's (2012) study considered punishment for plagiarism unfair, while some did not care if others plagiarised. The majority also indicated that they would not report plagiarism incidences. Most of the students thought that severe punishment for plagiarism and the introduction of a code of conduct was needed to prevent students from plagiarising.

It could therefore be argued that, in general some students do not see the long-term benefits of referencing; instead they value the immediate gratification of high marks. Sentleng and King's (2012) South African study investigating plagiarism among 139 undergraduates found that 41% of the students felt plagiarism was to be taken seriously. However, plagiarism was still evident amongst students within the department under study. Some students in the

Gullifer and Tyson (2010) study felt that the penalties for unintentional plagiarism were too severe. However, while the students in this study were aware that plagiarism is a serious offence, unfair and unethical as a practice in terms of acknowledging other scholars' work, they chose to plagiarise in spite of this view.

5.   STUDENT VIEWS TO CURB PLAGIARISM

The literature regarding undergraduate and postgraduate perspectives of plagiarism and related concepts indicates resolving issues of plagiarism and improper referencing in academic writing to be a daunting task requiring a variety of strategies. Various studies have raised a considerable number of concerns from students and university staff. The recommendations below represent a combination of suggestions from students and researchers from the various studies reviewed.

To address the issue of lack of training, Guo (2011) recommends the inclusion of a module in the curriculum design that addresses plagiarism, referencing and academic writing conventions in all accounting departments. It is, however, clear – from the various studies – that this suggestion could benefit all faculties in a university. Students in the Selemani *et al*. (2018) study advocated for advanced training in information literacy to be offered to postgraduate students. Guo (2011) proposes new students should be integrated thoroughly and in a variety of practical and experiential ways into their new academic life. Selemani *et al*. (2018) suggest that academic literacy training for postgraduates should include advanced academic writing skills, paraphrasing, summarising, synthesising of texts as well as referencing skills. This kind of training would also be beneficial to undergraduate students.

Branch and Iran (2013) suggest that academic lecturers inform students about plagiarism and the severe punishments incurred. However, several other scholars see the use of intimidating and authoritative punishment messages of punishment by lectures and in institutional documents as creating unnecessary anxiety: students need explicit teaching in what constitutes plagiarism and related concepts. Gullifer and Tyson (2010) and McKenna (2010) also suggest that information regarding plagiarism and other literacy practices need to be made explicit in an environment that promotes learning and that lecturers' common sense assumption that students access the information on plagiarism on their own is unfounded. Guo (2011) points out that students who perceive themselves to be poorly integrated into academic life are more likely to engage in plagiarism and hence appropriate integration is important. Guo (2011) mentions that raising students' awareness of plagiarism and its implications is important for preventing the incidence of plagiarism. This suggests the importance of formal training and continuous awareness campaigns.

Concerning poor writing skills, Selemani *et al*. (2018) and Branch and Iran (2013) suggest that academic staff strengthen students' writing and research skills. They advocate for students to be taught how to summarise, paraphrase and synthesise information as well as how to cite articles. Students also felt that papers must be planned and written in a step-by-step way under the supervision of an academic member of staff. Branch and Iran (2013) also suggest students be thoroughly informed about the use of software and search engines that can detect plagiarism. Land *et al*. (2005), cited in Hamilton (2016), recommend a supportive liminal space where it is acknowledged that transformation needs time, as it is a period of uncertainty during which individual novice academic writers move to become more experienced writers.

Heckler and Forde (2014) suggest that imbalances in academic staff workloads such as overloaded classes or high teaching load, for example, could be contributing to the following factors: poor and shorter referencing training, handing out of referencing and plagiarism documents without proper guidelines to the students, inconsistencies in terms of some lecturers enforcing referencing skill and others not enforcing referencing and poor feedback or lack of feedback. Therefore, they propose that support of academic staff play a crucial role and should not be taken lightly in developing the students' referencing skills.

Students in Perry's (2010) study recommended the annual design of new assignments that have fewer generic solutions available on the internet, challenging students suspected of plagiarism and giving out positive messages about accurate referencing for solid future scholarship. Furthermore, students in Branch and Iran's (2013) study contributed valuable suggestions and views on allocated assignments. They felt that, firstly, academic staff should select reasonably challenging topics that students are knowledgeable about and interested in. Secondly, academic staff should employ and encourage students in time management techniques and give them realistic time frames to manage an assignment. Thirdly, the students felt academic staff should familiarise the students with plagiarism prevention techniques. However, as mentioned earlier, this kind of support required by the students from the academic staff would put pressure on lecturers and academic staff would need institutional assistance. Recommendations or studies on how academic staff can be supported to deliver more efficiently, without burnout, would be beneficial to their students.

Guo (2011) recommends the issue of cultural diversity should be considered. Cultural and educational backgrounds can give rise to a variety of issues, including language incompetency and a complete lack of prior exposure to expected academic literacies when students come to the university.

6. CONCLUSION

This literature review revealed undergraduate and postgraduate students' lack of an in-depth understanding of plagiarism and related concepts. Although many students were found to be able to define plagiarism and referencing, most were unable to see the multidimensional nature of these conventions. The reasons provided for plagiarism in this literature were mostly related to an absence or lack of in-depth education, of support from the institution and educators, of understanding of the value and relevance of these conventions and lack of appropriate training provided for educators who in many cases are also postgraduate students, inadequate amounts of time for students to transition and build the required academic literacy skills in a gradual and incremental way. Lack of understanding and of pre-university education could be part of the reason why some students do not take plagiarism and related concepts seriously.

Based on these conclusions we advocate for the following to be addressed by universities and educators: universities should refrain from providing shorthand training to the students. We support the views of Gu (2012) on the inclusion of a course that encompasses all of the literacy practices highlighted in this literature. Each year of study, especially at the undergraduate level, should include a course that addresses literacy practices in-depth and in practical ways. When such a course is developed, it should undergo a rigorous process to ensure that it has covered the kind of in-depth knowledge suited for that level of study. We consider this process to be crucial to the development of this academic writing conventions course. Furthermore, this process would ensure that during department quality audits this

course is assessed in terms of its appropriateness, comprehensiveness and its delivery and assessment methods. Additionally, the importance given by undergraduate and postgraduate students to the need for the extensive involvement of teachers/academic staff concerning the solution to the problem of plagiarism should be taken seriously. For this suggestion to be put into practice, a university would need to play a significant, active and ongoing role in equipping and supporting academic staff. We would hope that the institution comes to realise that educators are also part of the system that has failed to educate students in the nature and implications of plagiarism and that it behoves the institution to train students and educators more appropriately and thoroughly in this area.

We have argued that the educator's role be a mindful one, that they do not take the simplistic route when educating learners or merely issue instructions about plagiarism and related concepts and the penalties for plagiarising. They need to gauge the extent of students' prior knowledge before making assumptions about their understanding. Educators should also create a positive learning environment, one that encourages students to share their concerns about plagiarism and related concepts, one where they can be supported to incrementally build the skills they need to become competent writers of academic discourse. Ideally an educator would guide the student into an understanding of the complex and interlinking nature of plagiarism, referencing and academic writing. University educators also need to acknowledge that lack of understanding of plagiarism and related concepts is not a first-year student problem but one that runs across all years and levels of study. This acknowledgment is particularly important in the South African context where language diversity and educational inequalities further complicate the issue, undermining the confidence and the futures of our students.

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