

# Plagiarism, culture, the Middle East and Westernization: a mixed methods study

Julie Nash

Eastern Shore Community College, USA

## Abstract

Academic integrity is of great importance to insure a consistent determination of what constitutes plagiarism across regions of the world. Academic integrity research spans a global scale and regardless of where the researcher is from, they are building on a pool of research findings that have no physical boundaries. Basic agreed upon research standards and fundamentals must be established to ensure the validity and reliability of the body of academic research. Problematic to the situation are differences in cultural definitions of what constitutes plagiarism. Therefore, this study aimed to build the body of knowledge on the current condition of plagiarism levels as well as perform a sample comparison of some patterns in Eastern and Western culture. A document analysis was conducted for two universities, one in the USA and one in Saudi Arabia. In addition, a survey was conducted in an academic context in Saudi Arabia to investigate students' and faculty's understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. It was predicted that Saudi Arabia is shifting towards a Westernized definition of plagiarism; results partially supported this hypothesis.

تعتبر النزاهة الأكاديمية ذات أهمية كبيرة لضمان تحديد ثابت لما يشكل الانتحال عبر مناطق العالم. تمتد أبحاث النزاهة الأكاديمية على نطاق عالمي وبغض النظر عن المكان الذي ينتمي إليه الباحث، فهي تعتمد على مجموعة من نتائج الأبحاث التي لا توجد لها حدود مادية. يجب وضع المعايير الأساسية المتفق عليها والأساسيات لضمان صحة وموثوقية هيئة البحث الأكاديمي. الإشكالية في الموقف هي اختلافات في التعريفات الثقافية لما يشكل الانتحال. ولذلك، هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى بناء جسد المعرفة حول الحالة الراهنة لمستويات الانتحال وكذلك إجراء مقارنة نموذجية لبعض الأنماط في الثقافة الشرقية والغربية. تم إجراء تحليل للوثائق لجامعتين، واحدة في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وواحدة في المملكة العربية السعودية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أجريت دراسة استقصائية في سياق أكاديمي في المملكة العربية السعودية للتحقيق في فهم الطلاب وهيئة التدريس لما يشكل الانتحال. كان من المتوقع أن تتجه المملكة العربية السعودية نحو تعريف الغربيين للانتحال وقد دعمت النتائج هذه الفرضية جزئياً.

## Introduction

Plagiarism may be defined as “the act of using another’s words or ideas without giving credit to that person” (Plagiarism, 2016), and ‘to plagiarize’ as

using the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own words or ideas; to steal; to pass off as one’s own; to commit literary theft. (Plagiarize, 2016)

Plagiarism is most commonly reported in colleges and universities, including prestigious institutions such as Harvard University, and is much easier to commit with technology today than in the past (Cohen 2013; Farisi 2013; Ison 2014). Plagiarism is considered a very serious breach of integrity in academic writing (Roig 2015).

A central source of the global rate of plagiarism does not currently exist. Therefore, it is essential that the literature in this area be examined as an attempt to determine the prevalence of plagiarism today. A review of the literature does indicate that plagiarism is prevalent in academia (Hensley, Kirkpatrick & Burgoon, 2014; Hosny & Fatima, 2013; Menezes et al., 2014). One extensive study surveyed over 88,000 university students and found that over half of them (58%) reported that they had at some point committed an act of plagiarism in their academic career (Integrity 2016). Yardley, Rodriguez, Nelson and Bates (2009) surveyed 273 college graduates and found that 81.7% of the respondents reported engaging in some type of cheating as an undergraduate. However, it should be noted that the study included other cases of cheating, therefore, the results are not exclusively representative of plagiaristic behaviors.

Another study examined 368 past dissertations in terms of plagiarism (Ison 2014). They compared dissertations written by online students and students studying in a more traditional framework, and found that 57% of traditional students had committed plagiarism while 61% of online students had done the same (Ison, 2014). However, it should be noted that only 1% of the respondents in this study committed what is considered a high degree of plagiarism (Ison, 2014).

There appear to be no boundaries on plagiarism with regard to age or gender. Wangaard and Stephens (2011) surveyed over 3600 high school students in the Northeastern United States, of whom 95% reported cheating in at least one form in their high school careers. Admittedly the definition of cheating here included cheating on tests as well as assignments. Therefore, the term “cheating” included other forms of dishonesty besides plagiarism. Another study considered plagiarism across genders: Hensley et al. (2013) gathered data from 292 college students in the United States and found that 28.97% of male respondents and 14.61% of female respondents reported engaging in plagiarism.

It is hard to reference an all-inclusive measure of the state of plagiarism today partly because there are so many different forms or types of academic dishonesty. There is plagiarism of ideas, of text, from one’s own previous work, distorted data, and invented data (Bakhtiyari et al., 2014; Menezes et al., 2014). Plagiarism may involve changing a few words in a sentence, paying someone else to write a paper, having a family member write a paper and/or ghost authorship (Bakhtiyari et al., 2014; Menezes et al., 2014).

Considering the multiple types of plagiarism, it is reasonable to conclude that there are equally multiple reasons for plagiarism. Research has found that reasons for plagiarism range from intentional to unintentional, ignorance, low faculty standards, pressure from family and peers, weak language skills, lack of preparation, lack of time, lack of moral conscience, laziness, career advancement, pressure to publish, lack of punishment and cultural differences (Adiningrum & Kutieleh, 2011; Al-Jarf, 2013; Chien, 2014; Farisi, 2013; Hosny & Fatima, 2014; Moten, 2014).

Some researchers suggest that cultural differences contribute a major effect with regard to understandings and reasons of plagiarism (Adiningrum & Kutieleh, 2011; Chien, 2014; Farisi, 2013; Moten, 2014; Muhamad, 2009; Razek 2014). Cultural values such as individualism or collectivism (Hofstede, 2011) may influence how such practices are perceived and used.

## **Literature review**

For purposes of this study we will define cultural context using the defining seminal terminology created by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (2011). Therefore, a portion of this literature review will begin with a review of their conceptual description.

### ***Different cultural perspectives***

Hall (1976) describes culture as a protective construct for humans to screen the world – a way to prevent sensory overload. Our culture sensitizes us to certain aspects of the world, distances us from others, and causes us to persist in certain beliefs and perspectives even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Hall identified Western thinking as ‘*low context*’ thinking in an *individualistic* type of society; he regards Western thinking as a shortcoming that neglects a great fraction of thinking ability and power. From this perspective, Western thought restricts itself to only one approach and therefore is too linear. Hall (1976) describes the Western type of thinking as delusional and based on

the institutionalized necessity to control “everything,” and the widely accepted notion that the bureaucrat knows what is best; never for a moment does he doubt the validity of the bureaucratic solution. (p. 11).

*High context* societies, on the other hand, also termed '*collectivist*' societies, give greater consideration and power to the extended family or other social groups (Hofstede 2011). Collectivist society members live a strong version of the 'shame and honor' society: if actions of a group member are shameful, they bring shame to the whole group, clan or family. In the individualistic society, on the other hand, each person is responsible for their own actions and therefore their behavior is no reflection on anyone else, i.e. shame is not felt by the other members of the group, clan or family (Hofstede 2011). However, the sentiment of the collectivist society works both ways: if one person brings honor, honor is attributed to the whole group. This pressure may lead to dishonest behavior with the aim of ensuring success at any cost. Therefore, plagiarism may be considered culturally excusable if it enables the individual to achieve success and avoid shaming the collective group. Plagiarism may also be accepted to some extent because ideas are considered as belonging to society rather than to an individual.

### ***Plagiarism and culture***

Chien (2014) argues that in collective cultures such as China, Japan and Korea, knowledge belongs to the society itself; therefore, it is considered less important to credit original sources. Furthermore, some Asian cultures believe it is disrespectful to change the words of a great scholar because they are an authority and it would be as if the writer is assuming they can say it better (Chien 2014). Adiningrum & Kutieleh (2011) studied Indonesian college students and found that students often did not acknowledge the sources of their ideas. The students reported that their culture was accustomed to storytelling without citing the source of the stories. They appeared to be used to rote memorization of implicitly authoritative material: they quoted exact wording without attempts to paraphrase or cite sources. The findings of this study, though they lend valuable insight into the perspective of these cultures on plagiarism, should be taken with caution. According to Adiningrum & Kutieleh (2011), different cultures do not include omitting citation of other's ideas as plagiarism. The problem with not citing others work and passing it off as your own ideas or findings causes a clogging of the system. The redundancy itself of publishing the same material or findings not only clogs the publication process but prevents new ideas from having the chance to surface as well as causes a false inflation of constructs and theories.

### ***Academic scholarship and plagiarism***

Professional academics are faced with the pressure to publish; therefore the market is flooded with research produced for publication; and the journals are becoming backlogged with a flood of articles to review (McNaught, 2015). Further, the market is experiencing an influx of fraudulent journals, which are not equal to a true academic journal in integrity and scientific rigor. These new publication sources are hard to detect and are flooding the market with bogus and unregulated research that may further confuse societies that are newly becoming aware of the real meaning of plagiarism (McNaught, 2015).

### ***Saudi culture and plagiarism***

Saudi Arabia is a collectivist culture that has high levels of plagiarism; Saudi students feel pressure to excel and therefore feel pressure to lower academic standards (Razek, 2014). Razek analyzed data from a survey of 673 Middle Eastern college students studying in the US (501 Saudi and 172 from other Middle Eastern countries). They found large academic honesty differences between reported figures for Saudi students and US students (the latter as reported by Duke University); however, there was no significant difference between the other Middle Eastern Countries and the US (Razek, 2014). Saudi culture is largely defined by the religion of Islam; the students in Razek's study identified cheating and dishonesty as unacceptable in Islam, yet still reported academic dishonesty as relatively acceptable.

Research in this area is lacking. However, relatively recently one study analyzed plagiarism and the constructs of the Muslim faith (Moten, 2014). Using existing surveys, interviews and documentary sources, the study found that plagiarism is fairly high among Muslim students and Muslim faculty (Moten 2014). This research was a qualitative study which implied that Muslim students do not feel regret of plagiarism unless caught (Moten, 2014). Hosny and Fatima (2013) surveyed 115 Saudi female college students about plagiarism and found that 72.1% of the sample understood what plagiarism means. Over 11% of the respondents reported submitting someone else's work, over 32% reported replacing words without citing and 40% reported using exact words.

Al-Jarf (2013) surveyed and interviewed students, faculty and administrators at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia and found a significant number of students use others' ideas without citing the source (Al-Jarf 2013). As a result of the data from all three sources at the university, Al-Jarf (2013) recommends introducing stricter punishments and guidelines to Saudi Arabian higher education.

Corruption and dishonest practices are global concerns; corruption essentially is the dishonest act of government. In one study, Sharma and Sharma (2015) examined the concept of the Human Development Index (HDI) in relationship to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The CPI is based on 13 different measures of the occurrence of bribery, kickbacks, embezzlement, scandals, inefficiency and weaknesses of government (Sharma & Sharma, 2015); the higher the CPI, the lower the HDI. On the CPI of 2010, Saudi Arabia was reported to rank 55<sup>th</sup> in the world as compared to the United States, which ranked 4<sup>th</sup>, i.e. there was perceived to be considerably less corruption in the US (Sharma & Sharma, 2015). Perhaps this context is a contributing factor to dishonesty and behavior such as plagiarism at an individual level. However, today Saudi Arabia's position has slightly improved to 48<sup>th</sup> (Transparency International, 2016).

### ***Cultural differences in reasons for plagiarism***

Adiningrum & Kutieleh (2011) claim that different cultures, particularly Asian cultures, have (internally) legitimate reasons for plagiarism; one being that they define plagiarism differently. What academics in the West call plagiarism, in some cases, may be considered respect for a notable author (Adiningrum & Kutieleh, 2011). In other cases it is merely considered sharing, which is an acceptable practice in the collectivist society (Adiningrum & Kutieleh, 2011; Chien, 2014).

The literature suggests that US students have higher standards than other students with regard to the practice of plagiarism (Heitman & Litewka, 2011; Razek, 2014). However, plagiarism is still occurring in US institutions. Hensley, Kirkpatrick & Burgoon (2013) surveyed 292 undergraduates at a university in the US. They found that 28.7% of the male students in the sample reported committing acts of plagiarism and 14.61% of the female students in the sample reported committing acts of plagiarism. Among Hensley et al.'s US sample of plagiarizers, the reasons cited by students for engaging in plagiarism were: high achievement motivation without direction, multi-tasking interference, desire for immediate gratification, pressure to achieve and lower grades. Furthermore, in a book review of higher education, Brown (2011) describes both US and non-US students' reasons for plagiarism as a feeling that they are justified because they have paid a fee for the course and are entitled to the grade as if it were a purchased right.

Magnus, Polterovich, Danilov and Savvateev (2002) examined attitudes to cheating in academia across four different countries (Russia, United States, Israel and the Netherlands), and reported that reasons for cheating differed according to country. They attributed the differences to culture: for example, the US, being an individualistic society, valued competition between students; while Russian students seemed to see authority figures, including teachers, as the enemy. Magnus et al. postulate that it is socially easier to simply adhere to the norm of the society: if the collectivist society norm is to plagiarize and the majority is engaging in plagiarism, it could be more costly to abstain from the deceptive practice; the opposite would be true in a society that frowns on dishonesty.

Heitman and Litewka (2011) also found that plagiarism is more common in developing nations, a category in which Saudi Arabia could still be included. However, there is evidence of a possible turning of the tide, so to speak, in Saudi Arabia. As the nation develops it is becoming more open to the concept of Westernization (Ayub, Kassim, & Zain, 2014). Although many Saudi citizens welcome Westernization (Ayub et al., 2014), the Saudi government has been careful to allow modernizing changes to occur slowly, to avoid excessive Westernization. If KSA is becoming more like the West, this could imply that its culture is becoming more individualistic. The reasons that Saudi higher education students plagiarize would then be expected to become more like the reasons of the higher education students of the West for plagiarism and plagiarism might start to give way to other strategies.

Reasons for plagiarism in Saudi Arabia vary. Hosny and Fatima (2014) found that Saudi students reported plagiarism for the following reasons: lack of preparedness for the exam, lack of study time and lack of punishment by instructors. According to Moten (2014), some Muslim countries, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iran, do not have specific policies against plagiarism, while in other Middle Eastern countries the policies exist but they are not enforced.

Razek (2014) reports that Saudi students feel pressure to excel, peer pressure, lack of faculty enforcement, desire to just obtain a degree whether knowledge is obtained or not, and financial pressure to retain scholarships. Al-Jarf (2013) found that Saudi students also cited the lack of punishment for the act of plagiarism as well as a lack of ethics training in schools. Students also reported that faculty do not demand any documentation or citation from the students when they write academic papers (Al-Jarf, 2013). Furthermore, it was found that Saudi female students feel that if they paid someone to write a paper, they become its owner/author, essentially 'buying' the rights (Hosny & Fatima, 2014).

Considering the scant literature available on Saudi populations of students and plagiarism, this study will investigate the issue of plagiarism to add to the body of research detailing conceptions of plagiarism, reasons for plagiarism, prevalence of plagiarism and policies in relation to plagiarism. Plagiarism in Saudi Arabia is high; however, it seems that the students are aware of right and wrong. It is also theorized that their reasons for plagiarism are becoming more aligned with that of an individualistic society rather than a collectivist society. Furthermore, in accordance with the literature, policies against plagiarism are in place; however, they may well not be strictly enforced.

## Methodology

As discussed above, Saudi Arabia has a high level of plagiarism and it is theorized that it is due in part to a lack of strict adherence to policy and punishment when caught. It is further theorized that the current generation of Saudi students are more closely aligned to the Western culture of Individualism than the collectivist culture of the East when it comes to reasons for committing acts of plagiarism. Therefore, the following hypotheses will guide this research.

### **Guiding hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were based on the literature reviewed above:

**Hypothesis 1:** An examination of the policies and procedures dealing with plagiarism in a sample of a Saudi University will reveal strict policies in place, in line with a US university standard.

**Hypothesis 2:** The majority of the survey participants will understand the meaning of plagiarism as it is understood in the Western culture.

**Hypothesis 3:** The majority of the survey participants will report the same reasons for plagiarism as students from the West.

**Hypothesis 4:** The majority of the survey participants will report committing plagiarism and suffering little to no consequences for it.

### ***Research context and participants***

The survey participants consisted of Saudi undergraduate college students attending Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU) in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, as well as some faculty. PMU is a research university and the courses are all taught in English; the professors come from all over the world. 400 students were solicited and 88 (80 female, 8 male) agreed to participate in the survey. An email was sent out to all faculty and eight (five female, three male) agreed to participate. 82 of the students identified themselves as being between the ages of 18 and 25 while six identified themselves as being aged between 26 and 35. The faculty all identified in the age group of 36 and over. 71 percent of the faculty reported being raised in Saudi Arabia, twenty percent reported being raised in the United States and ten percent reported other countries or did not report at all.

### ***Research design***

A mixed methods design was used, comprising a survey and document analysis.

The survey at PMU consisted of a combination of multiple choice questions with open ended questions to explore new topics that may not be currently represented in the literature. The survey also contained questions designed to explore the reasons for committing acts of plagiarism. Questions were also included to determine the self-reported level of plagiarism committed by the respondents.

In addition, policies pertaining to plagiarism at PMU were examined and compared to the plagiarism policies of a private university in the US, the University of Miami (UM).

### ***Data analysis***

Analysis was conducted on both quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to describe the quantitative data, while qualitative data was analyzed using a constant comparative method. Segments of data were compared with another and similarities as well as differences were identified. Coding and identification of themes allowed support of hypotheses and served to generate new theories.

Document analysis was conducted on records of PMU and UM policies that make reference to plagiarism and are made public on respective websites. Since the literature has determined that the US has stricter standards and less incidence of plagiarism than Saudi Arabia, the UM documentation will be coded first as the standard of comparison for the Saudi documents.

## **Results**

### ***Document analysis***

Document analysis was conducted to investigate hypothesis one: *An examination of the policies and procedures dealing with plagiarism in a sample of a Saudi University will reveal strict policies in place as compared to a US university standard.*

The number of publicly available documents referring to plagiarism from the two universities were counted and categorized. A search using the term 'plagiarism' on the UM and PMU websites yielded 577 documents for UM and 26 documents for PMU. Some of the documents were redundant for both universities. Three types of documents were identified: documents to educate students

specifically of what constitutes plagiarism; documents concerned with the consequences of plagiarism; and documents to inform all parties of procedures to follow in cases of plagiarism.

Content analysis was conducted using a constant comparison method for constructing categories and subcategories. The following five main categories were identified: Teaching/Educating, Punishment/Consequences, Responsibilities, Resources, and Integrity/Ethical Conduct (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Percentage of occurrences for main categories.**

	UM (total 287 codings)	PMU (total 102 codings)
<b>Teaching/Education</b>	28%	43%
<b>Responsibility</b>	28%	28%
<b>Integrity/Ethical</b>	19%	20%
<b>Punishment</b>	15%	8%
<b>Resources</b>	10%	1%

Due to the large number of documents addressing plagiarism available on the UM website, it was decided to select a random sample of 25 documents to analyze. PMU had 26 documents that referenced plagiarism. The total number of codes assigned to the UM documents was 287, and 102 for the PMU documents. For comparison purposes the raw counts were converted to the percentage of the total number of codes obtained from all documents by institution (see Table 1). Thus, it appears that PMU focuses more of its total documentation about plagiarism than UM on *Teaching and Education*. On the other hand, UM dedicates almost double the proportion (15%) of coded documentation of plagiarism to explaining the *Punishments* or consequences as compared with PMU (8%).

PMU and UM devote a similar percentage (28%) of their documents on plagiarism to explaining individual *Responsibility* of the parties involved. However, different sub-categories for responsibilities emerged and there were clear differences between the institutions. Six sub-categories were identified within Responsibilities: *Student, Research Leaders, Faculty, International Community, All* and *Institution* (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Percentage of occurrences for main and sub-categories** (sub-category percentages indicate proportions of the relevant main category).

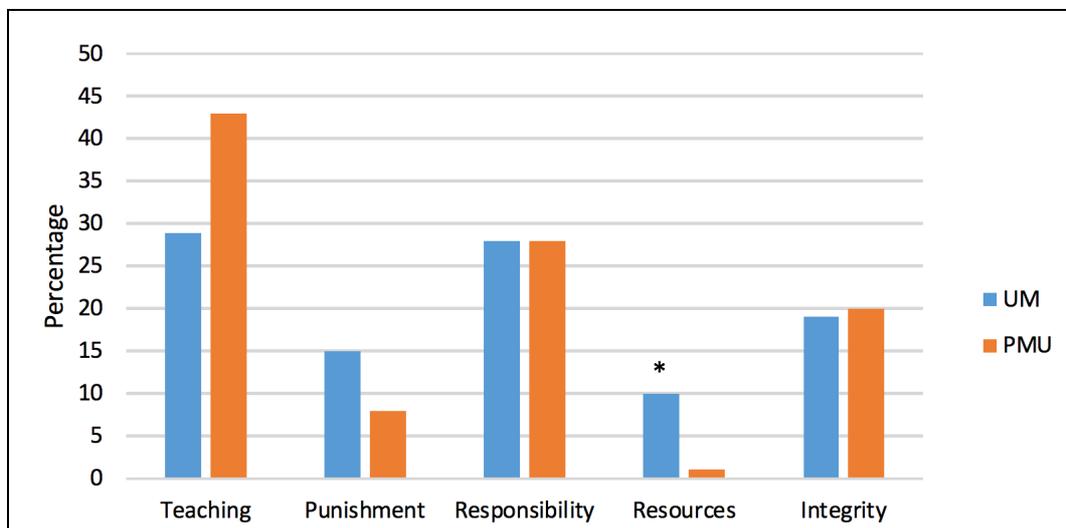
	Sub-categories	UM (% of total)	PMU (% of total)
<b>Teaching/Education:</b>		<b>28%</b>	<b>43%</b>
	Definition	14%	16%
<b>Punishment</b>		<b>15%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Responsibility:</b>		<b>28%</b>	<b>28%</b>
	Students	5%	3%
	Research Leaders	5%	5%
	Faculty	2%	15%
	International Community	1%	-
	All	1%	3%
	Institution	13%	1%
<b>Resources</b>		<b>10%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Integrity/Ethical:</b>		<b>19%</b>	<b>20%</b>
	<b>... and Non-US Nations (total)</b>	72%	-
	Lower Levels	28%	-
	Justifications/Excuses	17%	-
	High Rates	9%	-
	Less Knowledge	19%	-

From the data of the sub-categories it is shown that the two universities differ in where they place emphasis for responsibility of plagiarism (see Table 2). The PMU documents reviewed placed the majority of responsibility on the faculty while UM's placed the majority of responsibility on the institution.

There was a large disparity between institutions with regard to providing additional resources for clarity and education of plagiarism. UM had 29 occurrences (10%) in the Resources category; PMU had one occurrence (<1%) in the Resources category (see Table 1).

The two institutions were similar in the category of Integrity/Ethical. UM had 54 occurrences (19%) in the Integrity/Ethical Conduct category. PMU had 20 occurrences (20%) in the same category (see Table 1). However, a particular sub-category emerged under Integrity/Ethical for the US institution alone, termed *Non-US Institution*. UM had several references to the capacity of institutions outside of the US to measure or meet ethical standards set in the US. Within this sub-category there emerged four further divisions, indicating mainly negative perspectives: *Lower levels* of ethics in non-US institutions; *Justification* or excuses made by other nations for high rates of plagiarism; *High rates* of plagiarism in non-US institutions; and *Less knowledge* of what constitutes plagiarism by non-US students and personnel (see Table 2). PMU acknowledged no such category, nor did it reference standards of other countries; the focus of PMU was mainly on ethics in general without a focus on what defines those ethics.

A chi square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between institution and the five coded categories. The relationship between these variables was significant,  $\chi^2 (4, N=200) = 12.69, p < .05$ . Subsequent z-tests were conducted to determine which categories were significantly different from each other within each university's sample documents. The z-tests revealed that there were significant such differences across the five categories. UM's documentation was significantly more focused on Education and defining what plagiarism is than on raising awareness of consequences and resources.



**Figure 1: Coding frequency for main categories by institution.** (\* = significant difference between institutions)

PMU's documents, like UM's, focused significantly more on education and defining what plagiarism is rather than on resources.

Between the universities, the only significant difference was on the factor of Resources (see Figure 1). UM and PMU were not significantly different in the main category of referring to Responsibility; however, they were significantly different when the category was broken down into six sub-categories according to the locus of responsibility highlighted: Students, Research Leaders, Faculty, International Community, All or Institutional (see Figure 2). UM's documents focus significantly more

on the institution’s responsibilities regarding plagiarism, while PMU’s documents focus significantly more on the faculty’s responsibilities. The two institution’s documents were also significantly different on the Responsibility sub-categories of International Community and All.

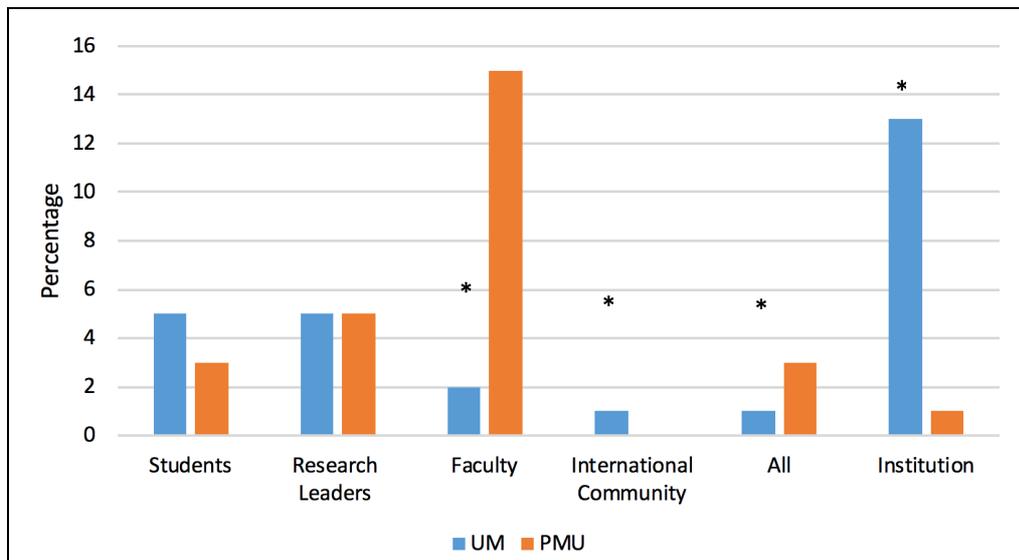
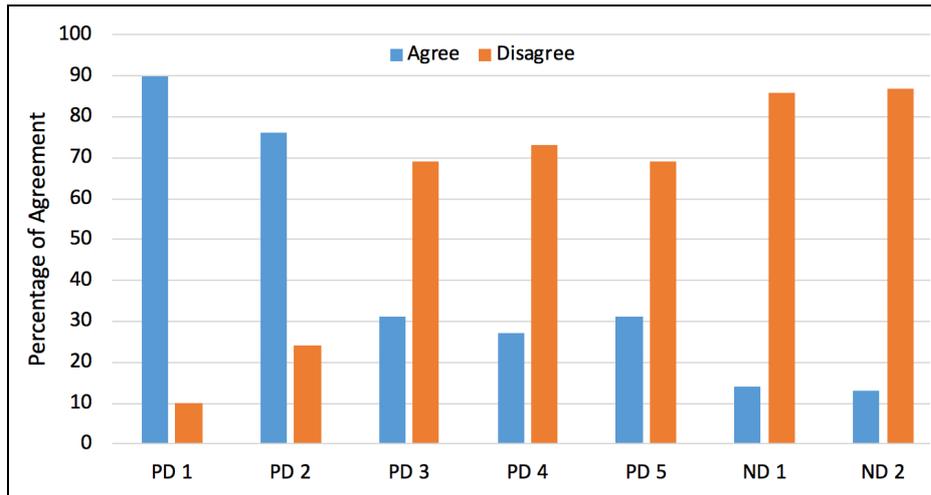


Figure 2: Document analysis: sub-categories of Responsibility. (\* = significant difference between institutions)

### Survey results

The survey was conducted to investigate the remaining hypotheses. Hypothesis 2 referred to participants understanding the meaning of plagiarism as it is understood in Western academic culture. To determine whether this hypothesis was supported, survey participants were asked to identify all cases of plagiarism from a list of seven choices, of which five were examples of plagiarism within a Western academic view. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported; the results are presented as percentages (see Figure 3).

The first definition (PD1) was *Copying part or all of a text without giving credit to the source*; 90% of the survey participants correctly identified this as plagiarism. The second definition (PD2), *Using an idea in whole or in part or with minor modifications without giving credit to its originator*, was correctly identified as plagiarism by 76% of the survey participants. The third definition (PD3), *Taking portions of one or more sources, only changing one or two words and giving the author credit*, was correctly identified by only 31% of respondents. Definition four (PD4), *Taking portions of one or more sources, and simply rearranging the order or the tense of the words and giving the author credit*, was correctly identified by 27% of respondents. The final definition of plagiarism (PD5), *Using your own previous work from prior publications a second time without citing yourself as the author*, was correctly identified by 31% of respondents.



**Figure 3: Respondents identifying definitions of plagiarism.**

In addition, two non-definitions of plagiarism were randomly placed among the real definitions of plagiarism; some participants incorrectly identified them as definitions of plagiarism. Non-definition 1 (ND1), *Summarizing someone else’s work, idea, findings or text into your own words and giving the author credit*, was incorrectly identified as plagiarism by 14% of respondents. Non-definition 2 (ND2), *Paraphrasing or summarizing other’s work but still producing the exact meaning of the author’s intention but using your own words and giving the author credit*, was incorrectly identified by 13% of respondents.

The third hypothesis stated that the majority of participants would report the same reasons for plagiarism as students from the West. To test this hypothesis, we asked participants an open-ended question as to students’ reasons were for committing plagiarism if they ever had. Our hypothesis was supported. We compared their answers to the reasons supplied most often in the literature review of Western students. We counted the frequencies of how often Saudi students’ answers matched with categories from the Western students. 35% of the survey respondents offered reasons for plagiarism. The largest proportion of these explanations (35%) cited “time” as the reason for plagiarizing. The rest of the reasons were spread out over categories such as *laziness, lack of ideas, didn’t know it was plagiarism, lack of sources, lax instructor, no plagiarism checker, author’s words are better, to get a better grade, lack of sources and the information was too difficult or technical*. Despite similar reasons given, a conclusive comparison could not be drawn due to participant numbers in each category (smaller or equal to 3), with the exception of the category, “time” (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Reasons given for plagiarizing.**

Reason	Frequency
Laziness	2
Lack of ideas	3
Time	14
Didn’t know	4
Borrowing from unpublished friend	1
Lack of sources	1
Lax instructor	1
No plagiarism checker	3
Author’s words are better	2
To get a better grade	2
Information is too difficult/technical	3

The fourth hypothesis (committing plagiarism without suffering severe consequences) was partially supported. To check the first part of the hypothesis, participants were asked if they had ever committed an act of plagiarism. Only 20% of the participants admitted to this; 58% said they had not committed plagiarism during their time as undergraduate students; and the remaining 22% said that they didn't know if they had committed plagiarism.

To answer the second part of the hypothesis, participants were asked what consequences they had suffered if caught plagiarizing. Conflicting results were found, since some of the respondents who claimed they had not committed plagiarism, offered consequences for their behavior of committing plagiarism. The hypothesis was supported in that very few consequences for plagiarism were reported. 71% of the participants who said they had committed acts of plagiarism reported not having faced any consequences for their behavior. Seven of the respondents who reported not committing acts of plagiarism or said that they didn't know if they had plagiarized, did report consequences for plagiarism; combining these respondents with those that admitted plagiarizing, we found that 25% said that they received lower grades. Seven percent reported that they were given the chance to resubmit the assignment.

## **Discussion**

### ***Document analysis***

A private university in the United States (UM) was used as an example of standards and definition of plagiarism with which to compare those in a Middle Eastern private university (PMU). It was hypothesized that, due to increasing Westernization of the East, examination of the website documentation of plagiarism would reveal that PMU would have standards similar to UM's. They were found to be similar in that both websites dedicated most of their plagiarism material to teaching and educating on what constitutes plagiarism. Both institutions gave a high priority to responsibility. However, they differed in where the greatest responsibility lies: UM emphasized the responsibility of the institution for plagiarism, while PMU emphasized the faculty as having the greatest responsibility.

In our literature review we found that students in Saudi Arabia reported faculty not enforcing consequences when plagiarism was committed and discovered (Al-Jarf 2013). Perhaps administrators are aware that the faculty is not training students and encouraging students to adhere to standards in order to curb plagiarism; therefore, they place a higher emphasis on the responsibility of the faculty. On the other hand it may be argued that the institution itself should be responsible for the conduct of the faculty and if they are not enforcing policy properly then the institution is to blame. This may be why UM emphasizes the institutional responsibility more. However, there are many other possibilities for why different universities have different numbers and kinds of documents related to plagiarism. Certainly it is not possible to say that faculty are to blame. Stephens and Wangaard (2013) conclude after conducting a three-year study on increasing the integrity of students, that faculty cannot succeed in this endeavor without strong backing from the administration.

Both institutions placed the least emphasis on the resources available for dealing with plagiarism; while UM dedicated significantly more web resources than PMU to the punishments and consequences of plagiarism. Again, this supports earlier findings that students in Saudi Arabia may not suffer consequences for the act of plagiarism. Finally, the document analysis revealed that the US institution considered non-US institutions to have lower ethical standards, higher rates of plagiarism and improper definitions of plagiarism by both the faculty and the students. PMU did not reference other institutions at all. This relates to Eastern perspectives mentioned in the literature review that the US is trying to spread their views on plagiarism unilaterally in other parts of the world (Adiningrum & Kutieleh, 2011).

## **Survey analysis**

Survey responses revealed that Western concepts of plagiarism may be becoming a part of Saudi student culture. The majority of survey respondents did think that copying any part of someone else's work, be it text or ideas, and not giving credit to the source is plagiarism. However, the majority did not think it is plagiarism if you just change a few words or change the order of the sentence as long as you give credit to the author. In the US that would still constitute plagiarism: a writer must summarize or rewrite the findings or ideas in their own words as well as cite the author.

The survey participants did not offer culturally specific reasons for plagiarizing. According to our literature review, pressures from the family to succeed would be one of the main reasons for plagiarizing in a collectivist society (Hofstede, 2011). The reasons the survey respondents gave, as we hypothesized, were more in line with reasons we would expect of an individualistic society like the US, such as lack of time. The number of responses in each category were too small to draw any conclusions, indicating a need for more investigation.

Enforcement of penalties appear to be lacking, as many respondents reported having no consequences for acts of plagiarism. When there was a consequence reported, it mainly referred to deducting points off final scores. Only one respondent reported getting zero points for a plagiarized assignment. Some of the students reported getting a second chance to resubmit the assignment.

The limitations of this study were that the sample size was fairly small. To learn more about the reasons and consequences of plagiarism, a much larger sample size is necessary to get enough data from people who do commit plagiarism. Our survey consisted of 96 respondents, of whom only 21 reported committing plagiarism.

The results do indicate that the definition of plagiarism may be evolving towards a more Westernized understanding that is necessary for the published academic database to be consistent. Plagiarism causes reporting the same data more than once, which in turn contributes to slowing down the publication process. Results that take a long time to get published cause many of the sources in these publications to be out of date and lower the quality of the research database that is available to scholars. Academic integrity is not simply a Western(ized) ideal but a necessity for the research community to ensure that the data published is new, building on past research and not just restating it for publication purposes.

In conclusion, we find that there is a significant amount of plagiarism in student practice globally, but probably no one country holds a majority of it. Further research is needed in the US on the amount of plagiarism in practice. Furthermore, responsibility may need to be applied earlier than the college and professional years. The focus of further research should probably examine the ethical standards that are being taught and upheld in the high school community as well as an examination of parental values and teachings in the home. From my own experience as a professor in Saudi Arabia and the US and I conclude that we have no reason to assume plagiarism is higher in the East or the West: I perceived a similar level of plagiarism in Saudi Arabia as I do in the US. Students tend to use similar strategies regardless of location and culture; the real question is how to minimize its effects on academia.

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