Original Research

Usage of Plagiarism Softwares by Postgraduate Students at Ambo University: Second-Year Students in Focus

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Abstract	Article Information
The familiarity and reasons of plagiarism among postgraduate students reveal their grasp of academic integrity and attitudes about originality in scholarly work. This study examines Ambo University postgraduate students' plagiarism awareness and reasons. The 2024 survey included 219 second-year postgraduates. Descriptive research was utilized to examine plagiarism familiarity and causes among Ambo University postgraduate second-year students. A questionnaire and interview were employed to collect study data. Data were examined quantitatively and subjectively. Data was examined quantitatively using SPSS 25 and qualitatively using interviews. The survey found low plagiarism awareness among Ambo University postgraduates. They also didn't know Ambo University's plagiarism policies. This study also found that students plagiarize due to a lack of awareness, accessibility, digital environment, pressure to meet deadlines, academic anxiety, time constraints, lack of plagiarism training, skill, load, and advisor contact. Thus, ethics and plagiarism courses, seminars, and workshops should teach students about plagiarism and fair publishing. All responsible bodies should endeavor to reduce postgraduate student plagiarism. Finally, Ethiopian universities and research institutions should eliminate plagiarism.	 *Corresponding Author: Habtamu Walga Aadaba E-mail: habtamuwalga3@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Academic institutions across the world are concerned about issues of academic dishonesty. According to Davis (2023), plagiarism is one of the major challenges to the quality of education at different levels across the world. It is also of great concern to Ethiopian higher institutions these days since universities or colleges are considered sources of honesty and truth (Chala, 2021). It is a place where students are shaped academically and morally (Rafati*et al*., 2020). Academic honesty is part of the scientific enterprise and scientific writing. Good academic writing must be clear, concise, and accurate in what is being reported. However, researchers have observed that there is a growing of plagiarism among postgraduate students at Ambo University when conducting their theses or submitting their assignments. Therefore, this study is aimed at studying Ambo University

postgraduate students' familiarity and causes of plagiarism while conducting their theses.

The consequences of plagiarism can be personal, professional, ethical, and legal, and it could erase all one's chances of building a successful career (Tolley, 2016). For instance, Ambo University Legislation (2019) Article 109, Sub-Articles 9 and 10, clearly states, ''a thesis or dissertation shall be rejected if... the work is judged as plagiarized by the examining board, or the work has already been used to confer a degree from this or another university. Furthermore, the academic committee shall decide on the dismissal or suspension of a candidate whose thesis or dissertation has been rejected due to plagiarism or may impose other disciplinary measures.'' Because of plagiarizing, many lost their jobs, degrees, and academic reputations. On the contrary, many world plagiarists are still unpunished (Waltzer & Dahl, 2021).

Objectives of the Study

1. *Investigate if the postgraduate students are familiar with the issue of plagiarism.*
2. *Find out the common forms of plagiarism reported by postgraduate students.*
3. *Find out why postgraduate students commit plagiarism.*

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study deals with how certain research may benefit the development of the field of study and society. The findings of this study may benefit postgraduate students at Ambo University by explaining how and why plagiarism occurs in conducting their theses. The study is also helpful for instructors to understand the common forms of plagiarism reported by postgraduate students. Ambo University may also use the findings of this study to develop strategies to detect plagiarism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
   Study Design

This study is descriptive to address the familiarity and causes of plagiarism among postgraduate second-year students at Ambo University. By using a descriptive research design, the researchers of this study describe and explore the existing problems (Saunders et al., 2023). According to Siedlecki (2020), descriptive research design is used to explore people's familiarity with certain things in their natural setting. Descriptive design in this study is used to describe three things: postgraduate students' familiarity with the issue of plagiarism. Next are the reasons why postgraduate students commit plagiarism and the common forms of plagiarism reported by postgraduate students.

Sampling and Sampling Techniques

Ambo University was selected for the study using a convenient sampling technique, so the researcher could easily select participants based on their relative ease of access. This means the university's geographical nearness and accessibility for the study (Herman, 2023). This university is located in Ambo, where the researcher works. There are four campuses and satellites of Ambo University (Ambo, Mamo Mazmir, Hachalu Hundessa Institute of Technology, and Walliso branches). The former three campuses were selected because of their convenience to the researcher. On each campus, 50% of the postgraduate

students filled out the research questionnaires. There were 219 second-year postgraduate students in 2024 who were studying for their second degree. For the interview, three students from each campus were included. Furthermore, postgraduate students were selected hoping that researching the issues of plagiarism could be an effective area of study for their future research works and later in their career developments.

Data Collection Instruments
Questionnaires

A questionnaire was used as the main instrument of data collection in this study. Questionnaires are cost-effective and versatile (Herman, 2023). By using a questionnaire, the researcher collected useful data about students' familiarity with the issue of plagiarism. By using it, data on the common forms of plagiarism informed by postgraduate students and the reasons why postgraduate students commit plagiarism were collected. Open-ended and closed-ended types were prepared and distributed to the participants of the study. The questionnaires' reliability was checked using SPSS version 25. Questionnaires were also given to two PhD holders at Ambo University to check their validity.

Interview

Interviews were used to cross-check questionnaire results. Besides, if there are possibilities of missing relevant information with the closed-ended questionnaires, the subsequent interviews in the study can manage it (Hansen & Świderska, 2023). Interviews allow respondents to freely share their familiarity with plagiarism. It also helped the researchers identify the most common plagiarism they commit and the reasons why the respondents do it. Two PhD holders also checked the interview's validity.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data for this study were collected using both quantitative and qualitative instruments to achieve the purpose of this study. SPSS version 25 is used to analyze data and check the reliability of questionnaires. Qualitative data were analyzed based on their themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of the students (83.3%) responded that they were only somewhat familiar with the concepts of plagiarism. The rest (8.6%), 1%, and 2.4% responded as familiar, adequately familiar, and very familiar, respectively. This implies that postgraduate students at Ambo University had a low awareness of plagiarism. A low level of awareness is not suitable for postgraduate students in the academic arena.

Table 1

Students' familiarity with the concept of plagiarism

How familiar are you with the concept of plagiarism?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Somewhat familiar	175	83.3	83.3	83.3
Familiar	18	8.6	8.6	91.9
Adequately Familiar	2	1.0	1.0	92.9
Very familiar	5	2.4	2.4	95.2

Postgraduate students Familiarity with forms of plagiarism

Table 2 presents data on the postgraduate students' familiarity with forms of plagiarism. They ranked their answers according to plagiarism (1), not plagiarism (2), and not sure (3). Therefore, mean values approach 1 represent plagiarism, and 2 represent not plagiarism. Accordingly, the mean score for item 1 is 1.93, which indicates no plagiarism. This means the students assumed that by adding, removing, or rearranging words, changing the tense or numerals, or rearranging sentences, content that was nearly verbatim replicated was not considered plagiarism.

Table 2

Postgraduate students Familiarity with forms of plagiarism

S.no	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	By adding, removing, or rearranging words, changing the tense or numerals, or rearranging sentences, content is nearly verbatim	1.93	.36
2	Creating a complex or composite statement by copying two or more simple sentences from the original source.	1.99	.55
3	Using a peer's assignment as a source and duplicating a significa nt portion of it, but with possible variations in other areas	2.22	.63
4	Borrowing a senior student's assignment as a model and copying its format	2. 96	.61
5	Copping and pasting content from other sources to include in the written report, along with citing the information's source in the reference section	1.98	.57
6	Referring or citing any paper that you haven't referenced in your report in the reference section	2.81	.64

Similarly, the students considered 'creating a complex or composite statement by copying two or more simple sentences from the source (mean of 1.99, with standard deviation of.55) to not be plagiarism. Item No. 3 also indicated that using a peer's assignment as a source and duplicating a significant portion of it, but with possible variations in other areas (with a mean value of 2.22 and.63 as the standard deviation), was not one form of plagiarism. For item No.

5, the students responded that copying and pasting content from other sources to include in the written report, along with citing the information's source in the reference section (mean score of 1.98), was not plagiarism. However, they were not sure whether borrowing a senior student's assignment as a model and copying its format and methodology was plagiarism or not since the mean value approaches 3. Similarly, they were not sure whether to refer to or cite any paper that you haven't referenced in your report in the reference section (mean value of 2.81 and standard deviation of.64).

Students' familiarity with open sources and commercial sources of plagiarism detection tools

Several academic institutions in the world use electronic plagiarism detection tools, which are open sources and commercial sources of plagiarism detection tools. The following Tables 3 and 4 are intended to explore postgraduate students' familiarity with both open sources and commercial sources of plagiarism detection tools, respectively.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics on postgraduate students' familiarity with open sources tool (software) to detect plagiarism

	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Dupli Checker	110	1.0727	.26088
2	Grammarly	110	1.9091	.28880
3	SmallSEOTools	110	1.1636	.37164
4	Copyscape	110	1.1364	.34474

Not familiar (1) and Familiar (1)

From Table 3, the respondents were not familiar with Dupli Checker (1.07 mean), SmallSEOTools (1.16), and Copyscap (1.13) as open source tools (software) to detect plagiarism, except Grammarly (1.90 mean). Therefore, by taking measures such as providing an overview and explaining plagiarism detection tools, comparing different tools, and demonstrating tool usage, educators can help familiarize students with open-source plagiarism detection tools, promote awareness of academic integrity, and encourage responsible research and writing practices.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics on students' familiarity with commercial sources tool (software) to detect plagiarism

S.No	How familiar are you with commercial sources tool (software) to detect plagiarism?	Mean	Std. Deviation

Table.4 continues…

1	Copy Catch Gold	1.9727	1.96977
2	EduTie.Com	1.7364	1.87047
3	EVE2	1.9900	.30137
4	Turnitin	1.6636	.47463
5	Urkund	1.7273	.44740

Familiar (1) and not familiar (2)

In Table 4, 1 represents familiar and 2 represents not familiar. It can be seen from Table 4, Copy Catch Gold (1.97 mean). EduTie.Com (1.73 mean), EVE2 (1.99 mean), Turnitin (1.66 mean), and Urkund (1.72 mean). This indicates that most of the respondents were not familiar with the commercial sources tool (software) to detect plagiarism.

Analyses of common forms of plagiarism reported by postgraduate students

Table 5

Common forms of plagiarism Reported by postgraduate students

	Forms of plagiarism	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Patchwriting	2.86	.35
2	Summarizing text without acknowledgment	1.42	.70
3	Copying text word by word and pasting without acknowledgment	1.42	.70
4	Submitting others' work without their agreement	3.68	.47
5	Writing an assignment for a friend	3.40	.78
6	Using quotation marks without appropriate citation	2. 86	.47
7	Submitting works written as group work as of individual	3.74	.48
8	Copying others' work from the internet and submitting it as your work	1.28	.45
9	Self-Plagiarism	3.32	.81
10	Paraphrasing without Attribution	2.64	.69

Always (1), sometimes (2), rarely (3) and never (4)

As shown in Table 5, the result indicated that the respondents of this study always committed forms of plagiarism, such as summarizing text without acknowledgment (1.42 mean), copying other people's work from the internet, and submitting it as their own work (1.28 mean), and copying text word for word and pasting without acknowledgment (1.42 mean). They sometimes (2.46 mean) paraphrase without attribution. The majority of the respondents answered that they rarely commit plagiarism, such as self-plagiarism

(3.320), writing an assignment for a friend (3.40), using quotation marks without appropriate citation (2.86), paraphrasing without attribution (2.64), and patchwriting (2.86). They never submitted works written as group work as individuals (3.74), and they submitted others' work without their agreement (3.68).

It can be seen from Table 6, that accessibility and the digital environment (1.12 mean), lack of knowledge on what constitutes plagiarism (1.12 mean), pressure to meet deadlines (1.33 mean), anxiety about their academic performance (1.38 mean), and time constraints (1.28 mean) were reasons why they committed plagiarism.

Analyses of Why Postgraduate Students Commit Plagiarism

Table 6

The reason why postgraduate students commit plagiarism

	Reasons for committing plagiarism	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Accessibility and Digital Environment	1.12	.32
2	Inadequate writing skills	1.70	.46
3	Lack of awareness on what plagiarism contains	1.12	.32
4	Training on appropriate citing and referencing	1.86	.47
5	Low level of taking part in training on in-text citation and reference list	1.74	.44
6	Pressure to meet deadlines	1.12	.32
7	Anxiety about their academic performance	1.38	.53
8	Time Constraints	1.28	.45

1 represents yes and no represents 2

However, inadequate writing skills (1.70 mean), a low level of participation in training on in-text citation and reference lists (1.74 mean), and training on appropriate citing and referencing (1.86 mean) were not reasons why they committed plagiarism.

Analyses of the Interview

Interviews were another instrument of data collection used in this study. It allowed respondents to freely share their familiarity with plagiarism. It also helped the researcher identify the most common plagiarism they

commit and the reasons why the respondents commit it. The interviewees reported that the main reason for committing plagiarism was to get better grades. They did it because they lacked time, were busy, and did not consider plagiarism a big concern. Other reasons they reported were lack of self-confidence, teachers' low familiarity with plagiarism, lack of training on how to avoid plagiarism, ease of access to information on the internet, lack of interest in works, and instructors' high expectations for assignments. In addition to this, there is a lack of academic writing skills

and poor language. For instance, S3 said that I take ideas from the internet because of a lack of time. I plagiarize when I have no concepts and to increase my grades. The other reason that led them to commit plagiarism, as reported by the postgraduate students, was poor language proficiency and a poor understanding of the principles of academic writing. For instance, 54 said, 'I doubt my language.' They are also unaware of the seriousness of committing plagiarism. St2 said, ''I delete some part of it, change some words, and use my own words.'' St5 said, ''I change the structure of grammar.'' It can be observed from the St2 and St5 sounds, that they commit types of textual plagiarism, which is called 'patchwriting' according to Jamieson (2023).

Textual plagiarism is taking one's words or ideas from others without proper acknowledgment. Some of them took someone's work and wrote in new contexts. This is also patchwriting. All of them agreed that they copy and paste for the ease of copying online materials. All of the interview respondents reported that they plagiarize most of the time because of the ease of copying and pasting. This can be because of a lack of time to write assignments and research papers. For instance, S1 said, ''I take ideas from the internet because of a lack of time.'' The other reason identified by the interview was that the students committed plagiarism because they lacked concepts and wanted to increase their grades. For example, S3 said, ''I plagiarize when I have no concepts and to increase my grades.''

All of the students replied that they had not experienced punishment for the students who were punished for plagiarizing. For instance, S5 said, 'I have not heard or seen any students punished because of plagiarizing.'' This implies that the students had no idea about the penalties for plagiarism in academic contexts.

The students committed plagiarism because they lacked awareness about plagiarism and its consequences. St3 said, ''Taking someone's work seemed like simply repetition. ' The students commit plagiarism in order to get benefits that they do not deserve; they were not aware they broke the rules and regulations of the university. Similarly, a study by Hasanah and Dewantara (2022) found that postgraduate students committed plagiarism because of a lack of awareness about plagiarism and its effects.

According to the interview results, lack of training on how to detect plagiarism was one factor leading to committing plagiarism in academic work. The lack of training on how to detect plagiarism can indeed be a contributing factor to the occurrence of plagiarism among postgraduate students. The results obtained by the questionnaires also indicated that most of the postgraduate students were not familiar with the various plagiarism detection techniques and tools available. Students need to consult their institution's policies and academic integrity guidelines or reach out to relevant faculty or administrative staff to obtain accurate information about the consequences of plagiarism specific to their institution. For the interview question, ''*Are you aware of the consequences of plagiarism at your institution?*''

The students were not familiar with the consequences that institutions may impose for plagiarism, such as academic penalties, resubmission or remediation, a record on the academic transcript, loss of scholarships or

funding, professional consequences, legal ramifications, and disciplinary actions. The following extracts were taken from interview sounds:

> *I have not seen a student receive a failing grade on the plagiarized assignment or in the course (S4).*

> *No students were expelled from the institution (S3).*

> *I have not experienced a permanent record of academic misconduct, which can affect the future academic and professional opportunities of students who plagiarize (S1).*

> *No student received a revocation or reduction of financial aid for committing plagiarism.*

> *Students were not given negative recommendation letters or references for future academic or professional pursuits (S2).*

> *I have not experienced meetings with disciplinary committees on plagiarism for formal disciplinary proceedings and investigations (S4).*

The students were also asked to report strategies for avoiding plagiarism in their assignments and research papers. Accordingly, some of them replied that they used referencing at the end of texts, citations, and quotations. They did not use strategies for avoiding plagiarism, such as summarizing, paraphrasing, and citing their own material; they used their own words and ideas. The interviewee respondents were asked if they used citations or not. Accordingly, most of them answered that they used citations in their academic writing.

From the researcher's personal experiences, even though citing is so simple, most of his MA students do not properly use citations. Postgraduate students should also cite their own previous works in their current writing, unless it is a form of plagiarism. For this, all of the students responded that they did not cite their own works in their academic writing. The interview findings showed that the postgraduate students did not publish articles or write manuscripts. They responded that they used referencing at the end of their academic works. From his personal experiences, the researcher observed that postgraduate students did not write references by following the guidelines used by Ambo University. In order to avoid plagiarism, the use of your own words and ideas is essential.

From his personal experience, the researcher of this study also experienced that the university has no access to modern plagiarism checker software to check the originality of manuscripts. Some of the students said they had less contact with advisors.

Discussions

The definition of the term plagiarism indicates that it has been regarded as criminal activity, which is parallel to stealing people's offspring (Pecorari, 2016). In its modern sense, plagiarism is intellectual theft. The goal of this study was to explore postgraduate students' awareness and the causes of plagiarism they commit. The data were collected using questionnaires and interviews. The findings of this study showed that all of the students had

access to the internet and used it for their academic studies. All of them admitted that they copied ideas from the internet and submitted them as their own works because they lacked knowledge about plagiarism and its consequences.

A study by Prashar et al. (2023) indicated that many students are unaware of their university's plagiarism policies, as they are not visible, publicized, or published. They feel the policy is too lenient and not effective in detecting and punishing plagiarism. The findings of this study are in line with Mukasa, et al. (2023) that academic dishonesty is not related to the students' lack of awareness about plagiarism. Bozdağ's (2021) study also found that there was no significant difference between students' fear of evaluation and academic dishonesty.

Previous studies, such as Michelle and Kari (2023) and Zikargae (2022) found reasons for students to commit plagiarism. For example, they found that lack of skill, attainment of high scores, inappropriate activity design, lack of awareness, large number of students in a classroom, load, and less contact with advisors.

No self-plagiarism (auto-plagiarism) was found in this study. This is because all of the postgraduate students have not published any work before. Copying and pasting (the respondents responded that all of them commit copying and pasting without giving credit) was another type of plagiarism (see analyses of questionnaires and interviews).

Ali et al. (2021) stated that there were detrimental effects on the evaluated written work that students enrolled in various degree programs at the higher education institution in Oman were obliged to complete. Therefore, it is necessary not to burden students when giving them assignments and other work. The findings of this study also indicated that postgraduate students commit plagiarism because of a lack of understanding and awareness.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was to explore postgraduate students' awareness and the causes of plagiarism they commit. The data were collected using questionnaires and interviews. Investigating the level of understanding of postgraduate students can involve assessing their knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism, including intentional and unintentional forms, as well as their awareness of different types of academic misconduct. This study explored postgraduate students 'familiarity with plagiarism policies. Maximize postgraduate students awareness of plagiarism by becoming familiar with institutional policies and guidelines regarding academic integrity and plagiarism. This can include examining their knowledge of how to cite and reference practices, as well as their awareness of the consequences of plagiarism.

It was found that postgraduate students at Ambo University had a low awareness of plagiarism. When writing assignments or research papers, the students were not considering cutting and pasting texts from several sources without some difference and acknowledging them as plagiarism. In addition, the students' familiarity with open sources and commercial sources of plagiarism detection tools. Moreover, the result indicated that the respondents of this study always committed forms of plagiarism, such as

summarizing text without acknowledgement, copying work from the internet and submitting it as their own work, and copying text word for word and pasting without acknowledgement because of accessibility and the digital environment, a lack of knowledge on what plagiarism constitutes, pressure to meet deadlines, anxiety about their academic performance, and time constraints.

The study also found that students did not experience any punishment for committing plagiarism in academic studies. According to Jereb et al. (2018), science would ultimately be destroyed if plagiarism in it were permitted to grow to be extensive. The instructors themselves should be responsible for the occurrence of plagiarism. They can also ensure the quality of students' work. It is not good for instructors to feel that all assignments submitted by students are free from plagiarism.

The findings of this study indicated that the students commit plagiarism not only because they lack awareness about the rules and regulations of Ambo University but also because they lack awareness about plagiarism itself. Additionally, they commit plagiarism because they lack the ability to take ideas from other works. Most of them are unaware of plagiarism and the strategies to avoid it. Even though they had taken academic writing courses and researched methods, they had little knowledge about the consequences of plagiarism. Plagiarism starts in students' early childhood. If they lack training or awareness about plagiarism, they cannot stop copying others' works. In order to stop their academic misconduct, postgraduate students need a suitable awareness of acknowledging others' works.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since plagiarism can have various consequences for postgraduate students, both academically and professionally, such as academic penalties, long-lasting consequences for a postgraduate student's academic reputation, can lead to legal consequences, especially if copyrighted material is plagiarized, can strain relationships with mentors, supervisors, and peers, and can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and a loss of personal integrity, Therefore, students should be trained about what is accepted and what is not accepted in cases of misconduct.

The students' awareness of plagiarism and the existing policies are poor. To address this, full courses on ethics and plagiarism should be offered in the form of seminars, workshops, and symposiums to train students about plagiarism and its consequences. This study is also in line with the Tarisayi et al. study (2023).

The findings of the study also indicated that the sample did not face any punishment for committing plagiarism. Ambo University, as an academic institution, should take plagiarism very seriously and often inform students about its strict policies and their consequences.

Students should also consult their institution's academic integrity policies, student handbook, or relevant faculty members to understand the specific consequences that apply to their academic community.

This study is concerned with the implementation of strategies from contemporary theories of language teaching in the EFL classroom. Future studies may

explore the effectiveness of academic integrity policies, plagiarism prevention programs, and interventions aimed at promoting proper citation practices and ethical conduct, students' attitudes towards plagiarism, and educational interventions like the impact of workshops, training programs, or online modules on their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to plagiarism.

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DECLARATION

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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