Factors influencing intention to plagiarize among nursing students in the Philippines

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Abstract

Background: Plagiarism is an ethical concern among students but is insufficiently discussed and acknowledged in some educational institutions. Determining what factors influence plagiarism can help the academic community manage its incidence.

Objective: This study determined the factors affecting the intention to plagiarize among Filipino nursing students.

Methods: Utilizing a cross-sectional research design, data were gathered from 304 nursing students last June 2021 using valid instruments administered online. Regression analysis identified influencing factors of intention to plagiarize.

Results: Findings indicated a generally low intention (M = 1.47, SD = 0.74) to plagiarize among nursing students. Internet literacy (B = -0.314, $p < 0.001$), attitude (B = 0.257, $p < 0.001$), moral obligation (B = -0.236, $p < 0.001$), past behavior (B = 0.139, $p < 0.001$), and subjective norm (B = -0.095, $p = -0.001$) influenced nursing students' plagiarism intention.

Conclusion: Several interrelated factors play major roles in nursing students' tendency to plagiarize. Creating an educational environment that does not favor the unethical practice of plagiarism is recommended for nursing schools.

Keywords

Background

Plagiarism among students has remained a significant and central issue for institutions of higher learning (Malik et al., 2021). With the advent of technology and the massive availability of information online, plagiarism remains a rampant issue, especially among students. Plagiarism is defined as the "copying (or using) of others' work that (accidentally or otherwise) deceives a third party about the authorship (or ownership) of the work" (Uzun & Kilis, 2020; Yeo, 2007). It is an offense against scholarly works' strict standards of originality, and according to the Philippine Department of Justice (2012), it is the "deliberate and knowing presentation of another person's original ideas or creative expressions as one's own." Unfortunately, in educational institutions, plagiarism is insufficiently acknowledged and discussed (Carnero et al., 2017), with little emphasis on avoiding it and its corresponding consequences, which cause students to intentionally and unintentionally plagiarize (Jereb et al., 2018).

With the rise of COVID-19, schools and universities have temporarily shifted to online instruction (Oducado & Soriano, 2021). Educators are concerned that online education and the availability of cyber information may breed academic dishonesty and further increase the risk of practicing plagiarism (Oducado, 2020). Technological advancement in educational practices increases the concern of academic misconduct as technology offers convenient ways for students to easily pass information and plagiarize (Abusafia et al., 2018;

Eret & Ok, 2014). Educators commonly use assignments and essays to assess and evaluate learning, making the students dependent on the information on the internet. With this, students may pass on requirements with contents lifted from the internet, making citing sources completely necessary.

Plagiarism, an act of academic dishonesty, is an ethical issue in nursing education (Carter et al., 2019). Nursing educators correlate the act of dishonesty in plagiarism as a vehicle for future unethical actions in the profession (Allen et al., 2017). Honesty and ethical standards are hallmarks of the nursing profession; however, plagiarism endangers the reputation of nursing education to the academic and social community (Krueger, 2014). The concept of dishonesty by plagiarism in higher education must be eradicated as this behavior may be carried by students into nursing practice (Carter et al., 2019). Thus, plagiarism in nursing education should be given attention, as observing ethical practices ensures client safety in clinical settings (Birks et al., 2018).

Nursing is a profession that highly values integrity and honesty. In fact, according to the 2020 Gallup report, nurses have been rated highest in honesty and ethics among other professionals for the past 18 years (Saad, 2020). While it is expected that there can only be a minor incidence of academic dishonesty among students in nursing schools, studies have shown otherwise. Studies from Australia (Birks et al., 2018), Malaysia (Abusafia et al., 2018), and Italy (Macale et al., 2017) reported nursing students engaging in acts of academic misconduct, with plagiarism reported as one of the common

forms. In addition, Ismail (2018) conducted a study among 280 medical students and 120 nursing students in Iraq. He found that 54.3% of the sample practiced plagiarism, 34.8% were unaware of the practice of plagiarism, and only 28% were knowledgeable about its legal consequences.

Prior studies highlighted the prevalence of plagiarism in academic circles. Thus, an urgent need to widen the knowledge and understanding regarding the nature of plagiarism is of paramount importance. However, plagiarism in nursing education in the Philippine setting has not been explored. There also have been some anecdotal observations of students failing to give proper attribution of someone else's work and submitting academic requirements with contents lifted straight from the internet. And while plagiarism per se is not as serious as being considered a crime in the Philippines unless it amounts to copyright infringement (Philippine Department of Justice, 2012), it is still an ethical issue and an offense against academic integrity that requires prompt exploration and attention. Hence, this research was conducted to assess factors affecting the intention of plagiarism among Filipino nursing students. Exploring and identifying these factors will help confront and deal with this academic misconduct among students (Uzun & Kilis, 2020). Anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior or TPB (Ajzen, 1991), this theory hypothesizes that behavioral intention, or in this study, the motivational factor or plan to plagiarize, is the immediate determinant of behavior. The TPB also assumes attitude, perceived control, and subjective norm as antecedents to behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). More recently, Uzun and Kilis (2020) extended the TPB framework and included additional variables such as past behavior, moral obligation, and Information and Communication Technologies literacy in studying the factors influencing plagiarism in universities. This extended theory of TPB was adopted in this study to explore the antecedents of plagiarism intention among undergraduate students in one government-funded nursing school in the Philippines.

Methods

Study Design
This study adopted a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional approach.

Participants/Samples
All 417 undergraduate nursing students of one government-funded nursing school in the Philippines were invited to participate in an online survey, but only 73% of the total population, or 304 nursing students, responded. The sample adequacy was determined using G*Power 3.1 with a priori power analysis (Faul et al., 2009), suggesting 112 is the required sample size for multiple linear regression with eight independent variables, an effect size of 0.15, an alpha of 0.05, and 80% power.

Instruments
The data were gathered using nine questionnaires and a demographic profile section. The scales to assess attitude, subjective norm, computer, internet, and information literacy, moral obligation, past behavior, and intention to plagiarize were adopted from Uzun and Kilis (2020), while the items on

the scale to assess perceived behavioral control were adapted from the work of Stone et al. (2010) and Verma and Chandra (2018). The respective authors granted permission to use the research instruments through email correspondence. Only the adapted tool was content validated by a nurse educator, nurse lawyer, and a licensed librarian and was pilot tested among 30 nursing students.

The attitude was evaluated using four bipolar semantic differential items on a 7-point Likert scale. Negative attitude choices (unfavorable, harmful, foolish, bad) were given lower points, while positive attitude choices (favorable, beneficial, wise, good) were given higher points. A negative attitude means student nurses did not favor the concept of plagiarism.

Subjective norm (3 items), moral obligation (3 items), and intention (3 items) were answerable by a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strong agree."

Computer (5 items), internet (5 items), and information literacy (7 items) assessed the level of awareness and skills of nursing students in the use of the internet, information, and computer technology. All items were answerable by a 5-point Likert scale with choices ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree."

Past behavior (2 items) assessed the occurrence of plagiarism behavior in the past. The first item evaluated the degree of previous plagiarism occurrences, and the second item assessed the frequency of plagiarism behavior in the past. Participants were asked to respond to a 7-point Likert scale with choices ranging from "1 = very little" to "7 = a lot" for the first item and from "1 = never" to "7 = every time" for the second item.

Perceived behavioral control (8 items) assessed the ease and difficulty perceived by nursing students in committing plagiarism. Items in this section asked participants to respond to a 5-point Likert Scale with choices ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree."

The following are the Cronbach's alpha values of each scale based on the survey: attitude scale = 0.85, and subjective norm scale alpha = 0.56. perceived behavioral control = 0.83, computer literacy scale = 0.77, information literacy scale = 0.91, internet literacy scale = 0.76, moral obligation scale = 0.82, past behavior = 0.85, and intention scale = 0.91. The mean values for each major variable or construct in this study were computed.

Data Collection
Relevant permissions to conduct the study in June 2021 were secured from the Office of the Dean, the level chairpersons, and the Ethics Review Committee. Before the actual conduct, point persons from each year level were contacted by the researchers to assist in distributing the online questionnaire accessed via Google Forms. The researchers then provided full disclosure of necessary information regarding the nature and purpose of the study, emphasized voluntary participation and self-determination, and guaranteed students' anonymity. Participants can accomplish the instruments within 15 to 20 minutes. Due to the platform it was given, a window of 2 weeks was given to nursing students to complete the questionnaire. After achieving the target response rate, the link to the instrument was closed two days later. The responses were monitored for completeness, consolidated, and organized.

Data Analysis

The SPSS version 26 software package was utilized for data analysis. Frequency, percentage, standard deviation, and mean were used to describe the data. Pearson's r was employed to determine significant relationships, and step-wise multiple linear regression was used to identify significant influencing factors. The results were considered significant if the alpha level was equal to or below 0.05.

Ethical Consideration

The Unified Research Ethics Review Committee (WVSU.URE RC-2021.CONS_002) approved the study on 16 June 2021. Participants had to answer an electronic consent form that was given together with the online questionnaire accessible through Google Forms.

Results

Table 1 shows that the mean age of the participants is 20.31 (SD = 0.97). In terms of sex, 70.4% were females, and 29.6% were males. When grouped as to year level, 31.6% were from the first year, 34.9% from the second year, and 33.6% from the third year.

Table 1 Profile of participants

Variables	f	%	M (SD)
Age			20.31 (0.97)
Sex			
Male	90	29.6	
Female	213	70.4	
Year level			
Level 1	96	31.6	
Level 2	106	34.9	
Level 3	102	33.6	

Table 2 shows that nursing students obtained the following mean scores: attitude towards plagiarism (M = 1.56, SD = 0.76), perceived behavioral control (M = 3.22, SD = 0.87), subjective norm (M = 5.97, SD = 1.19), computer literacy (M = 4.41, SD = 0.63), internet literacy (M = 0.71, SD = 0.47), information literacy (M = 4.34, SD = 0.63), moral obligation (M = 6.44, SD = 0.78), past behavior (M = 3.20, SD = 1.32) and intention to plagiarize (M = 1.47, SD = 0.74).

Table 2 Descriptive of major variables

Variables	M	SD
Attitude	1.56	0.76
Subjective norm	5.97	1.19
Perceived behavioral control	3.22	0.87
Internet literacy	4.71	0.47
Computer literacy	4.41	0.63
Information literacy	4.34	0.63
Moral obligation	6.44	0.78
Past behavior	3.20	1.32
Intention	1.47	0.74

Table 3 reveals that all variables showed a significant relationship toward intention to plagiarize. Attitude ($r = 0.512$, $p <0.001$), perceived behavioral control ($r = 0.188$, $p = 0.001$), subjective norm ($r = -0.434$, $p <0.001$), computer literacy ($r = -0.186$, $p = 0.001$), internet literacy ($r = -0.262$, $p = <0.001$), information literacy ($r = -0.224$, $p <0.001$), moral obligation ($r =$

-0.558, $p <0.001$), past behavior ($r = 0.474$, $p <0.001$) were significantly correlated with intention to plagiarize.

Table 3 Correlates of intention to plagiarize

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value
Attitude	0.512	<0.001
Subjective norm	-0.434	<0.001
Perceived behavioral control	0.188	0.001
Internet literacy	-0.262	<0.001
Computer literacy	-0.186	0.001
Information literacy	-0.224	<0.001
Moral obligation	-0.558	<0.001
Past behavior	0.474	<0.001

When all significant variables were entered in the regression model, internet literacy (B = -0.314, $p <0.001$), attitude (B = 0.257, $p <0.001$), moral obligation (B = -0.236, $p <0.001$), past behavior (B = 0.139, $p <0.001$), and subjective norm (B = -0.095, $p = -0.001$) were found significant factors accounting for 51% of the variation in intention to plagiarize among nursing students (**Table 4**).

Table 4 Multiple linear regression of intention to plagiarize

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	p-value
	B	**Std. Error**		
(Constant)	4.195	0.474	8.858	<0.001
Internet literacy	-0.314	0.065	-4.848	<0.001
Attitude	0.257	0.046	5.574	<0.001
Moral obligation	-0.236	0.049	-4.786	<0.001
Past behavior	0.139	0.025	5.550	<0.001
Subjective norm	-0.095	0.029	-3.330	0.001
R Square = 0.510, F = 62.054, $p <0.001$				

Discussion

The present study looked into the factors that affect the intention to plagiarize among nursing students. While prior research noted plagiarism as a common form of academic misconduct among nursing students (Abusafia et al., 2018; Birks et al., 2018; Macale et al., 2017), it is significant to note that nursing students in this current study had a low intention to plagiarize, which means they are less likely to commit plagiarism in the future. Similarly, Mirzaei-Alavijeh et al. (2021) reported that most medical students in Iran intend not to plagiarize in the future. In addition, the creation of software, such as Turnitin and Grammarly, to detect plagiarism has made it easier for faculty to detect nursing students' intentions to plagiarize (Carter et al., 2019).

It is also noteworthy that while the intention to plagiarize was low, there are still students in this study who reported committing plagiarism in the past. The result of this present study disclosed that past behavior of plagiarism influenced the intention to commit plagiarism in the future. The more frequently the student nurses acted in response to committing plagiarism in the past, the higher their intent to practice plagiarism in the future. Students are likely to continue participating in behavior if no other factor hinders them from doing such (Anaman & Agyei, 2021). Uzun and Kilis (2020) similarly found past behavior significantly correlated with plagiarizing intention. Nursing schools may also look into the factors that cause and contribute to the act of committing

plagiarism, as the act of dishonesty in plagiarism can be a vehicle for future unethical actions (Allen et al., 2017).

This study found that internet literacy influenced the intention to plagiarize. Surprisingly, the higher ability of students to operate Internet technologies, the lower their intention to practice plagiarism. In contrast, the study of Uzun and Kilis (2020) showed that internet literacy was not a significant factor. While there can be an increase in plagiarism tendency with the use of the internet, especially due to the advancement of technology (Abusafia et al., 2018; Eret & Ok, 2014), it may also be that for this study, nursing students gained more information about the negative consequences of plagiarism through the internet and are familiar of plagiarism detection software available that lowered their plans of committing plagiarism. It may also be that less technology and internet-savvy students might believe that plagiarism is a less severe offense than other internet-related offenses like hacking or digital piracy (Chan, 2015); hence students with lesser internet literacy are more likely to plagiarize. Some scholars are also still arguing that no empirical support demonstrates that the internet has accelerated or is a contributor to student plagiarism (Davies & Howard, 2016).

Moral judgment has a significant influence on a student's ethical behavior. Another variable found to influence plagiarism intention was a moral obligation. This means that the higher student nurses' moral obligation to avoid plagiarism, the lower their intent to practice it. Similarly, Uzun and Kilis (2020) found a significant negative association between moral responsibility and the intention to plagiarize. The more an individual perceives that the act or plagiarism is morally incorrect, the lower the intent to act (Camara et al., 2017). That is, the higher the anticipated sense of guilt the person has, the lower the intention to commit plagiarism (Cronan et al., 2018). Likewise, the study of Natalia et al. (2015) revealed a significant correlation between moral disengagement and plagiarism, suggesting that the higher the moral disengagement, the higher the chances of plagiarism.

The choice or decision to engage or not engage in a behavior is likely influenced by social norms (Camara et al., 2017). Consistent with prior research, external factors such as subjective norms influenced the intention to plagiarize among nursing students. This means that the higher the perceived social pressure placed upon the student nurses by their significant others not to commit plagiarism, the lower the intent of the student nurses to practice it. Yusliza et al. (2020) explained that subjective norms that do not promote plagiarism lessen the intent of committing the act. Moreover, according to Mirzaei-Alavijeh et al. (2021), subjective norms that encourage plagiarism tend to increase the intention and are one of the main factors associated to plagiarize among college students.

The negative opinion of their significant others about plagiarism influenced students' tendency to plagiarize, and this may have given rise to the student nurses' unfavorable attitude toward plagiarism. This study found that attitude toward plagiarism significantly influenced the intention to plagiarize. Positive attitudes towards plagiarism increase the intention, and negative attitudes lower the intention to plagiarize. The study of Stone et al. (2010) presented that favorable attitudes towards academic misconduct are positively associated with committing that kind of behavior, and in this case, plagiarism. Similarly, Camara et al. (2017)

disclosed that negative attitudes predict plagiarism intention. Also, the study of Uzun and Kilis (2020) revealed that favorable attitudes toward plagiarism increase the intention to plagiarize.

Finally, the results of this study support the extended theory of TPB (Ajzen, 1991) to some extent, wherein variables such as attitude and subjective norm from the original theory were found to be significant predictors to plagiarize. The inclusion of other factors such as internet literacy, moral obligation, and past behavior were also found to predict the plagiarism intention of nursing students in this study. Studies conducted locally and abroad (Al Maskari et al., 2022; Ditching et al., 2020; Oducado et al., 2022; Secginli et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2022) have similarly found the TPB a helpful framework in successfully explaining the behavioral intention of nursing students.

Implications of the Study

The study results provide implications concerning the factors that may influence students to commit plagiarism. Nursing educational institutions can tailor intervention strategies to mitigate future problems related to this academic misconduct by using the results of this study as a guiding framework and blueprint for creating an environment that does not promote plagiarism. Moreover, given that certain social factors affect students' plagiarism intention, this research implies the necessity for nurse educators to be good role models of integrity and ethical behavior. Despite the low plans to plagiarize among students of this study, there is still a need to continuously reinforce to the minds of students that plagiarism is a highly unethical and unacceptable act. This is because the very simple act of dishonesty in plagiarism can be a vehicle for future unethical actions that may be carried out in professional nursing practice.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations were noted in this study. The cross-sectional study focused on a limited factor associated with the intention to plagiarize among undergraduate nursing students in the Philippines. Therefore, generalizations can only be made among nursing students included in the sample. Moreover, the study cannot infer causality between variables. And because of online survey questionnaires, self-report bias is another potential limitation.

Conclusion

The decision to commit plagiarism is a result of a variety of interrelated factors. This study highlights that internal (moral obligation) and external (subjective norm) variables may contribute to nursing students' plans to commit unethical behavior, such as academic plagiarism. Identifying and recognizing these factors are essential to understand the nature of plagiarism better and further preventing or mitigating committing such behavior in the future. Cultivating a habit of properly attributing sources and creating an environment that does not support plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty is vital for nursing schools. Educational nursing institutions may need to reinforce stricter policies and guidelines against plagiarism to teach students the value of maintaining academic integrity.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

No conflict of interest to declare.

Funding

Acknowledgment

Authors' Contributions

All authors made a substantial contribution from conception to the finalization of this study and approved the version of the manuscript submitted.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of use of AI in Scientific Writing

Nothing to declare.

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