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## 'Entrepreneurship Education and Plagiarism: Tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies'

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### Abstract

**Paper Type:** Research Paper.

**Purpose:** This paper contributes to entrepreneurship education research by exploring entrepreneurship students' views of plagiarism, and their ability to recognise and avoid plagiarism.

**Approach:** The study is based on a questionnaire administered to 205 undergraduate university entrepreneurship students, combining self-reported data with behavioural measures.

**Findings:** The results illustrate that although entrepreneurship students have a clear conceptual understanding of plagiarism and how to avoid it, and they demonstrate an ability to accurately recognise material which needs to be referenced, they do not see use of non-referenced material as being in breach of academic guidelines. The students also perceive lecturers to be more concerned with plagiarism than students themselves or the university.

**Research Limitations/Implications:** The research identifies a clear disconnect between students claims about their ethical stance regarding plagiarism and their ability to recognise it as a breach of academic guidelines.

*Practical implications:* The practical implications for entrepreneurship education are: first, the University needs to emphasise to entrepreneurship students that plagiarism is a breach of academic guidelines which will be treated as a serious offence. Second, the University, in partnership with lecturers, must adopt experiential learning approaches to improve plagiarism avoidance skills.

*Originality/Value:* This study supports previous research which identified that students held strong ethical views regarding plagiarism and claimed not to engage in plagiarism. However this paper highlights the disconnect between these claims and the students' ability to recognise plagiarism as a breach of academic guidelines – thereby highlighting the need to enhance academic guidelines on plagiarism.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship education; plagiarism; academic honesty

## **Introduction**

Research into entrepreneurship education in recent years has largely focused on an exploration of the efficacy of education programmes which prepare students for entrepreneurial endeavors. This paper looks at undergraduate entrepreneurship students and their perception of plagiarism in the aspects of their programme which focus on the study of entrepreneurship as an academic pursuit. The study extends entrepreneurship education literature by exploring entrepreneurship students' views of plagiarism, and their ability to recognise and avoid plagiarism. This exploration challenges the dominant logic which would indicate that students' self-reported views and recognition of plagiarism would automatically transfer into the recognition of plagiarism as being a of academic regulations. This study addresses this gap in the current literature between students' self-reported perceptions of plagiarism and their behaviour in practice.

## **Entrepreneurship Education**

The pivotal role played by entrepreneurial activities in driving the European economy is dependent on nurturing enterprising behaviours through appropriate entrepreneurship education (Europa, 2003). This has led to increased government and societal interest in entrepreneurship education programmes which in turn has led to substantial international growth in the number of entrepreneurship education programmes offered (Jones et al., 2008; Khan and Almoharby, 2007; Bechard and Gregoire, 2005). These programmes have largely been developed in response to dramatic international economic developments (Cooper et al., 2004) by pro-active educational institutions wishing to address the needs of the international business community in order to exploit creative potential and encourage enterprising behaviour (Galloway et al., 2005).

*“Entrepreneurship education is the process of providing individuals with the ability to recognise opportunities and the insight, self-esteem, knowledge and skills to act on them”* (Jones, 2007: 405). As such there are two core aspects to entrepreneurship education, (1) the study of entrepreneurship as an academic pursuit, and (2) preparing students for entrepreneurial endeavors. This split focus demands a combination of pedagogical approaches to equip graduates with a broad set of lifelong skills and to

develop enterprise capacity (O’Gorman et al., 2005; Martin, 2004; Audretsch, 2002; Galloway and Brown, 2002).

To date the most challenging aspect of entrepreneurship education has been to achieve balance between the study of entrepreneurship as an academic pursuit and preparing students for entrepreneurial endeavors. The orientation of many educational institutes towards traditional didactic teaching (which has been suggested may be less relevant to entrepreneurship courses), has been linked with the inhibition of the development of entrepreneurial skills and characteristics (Kirby, 2004; Gibb, 1993). This has led to the development and research of experiential, practice-based, action learning, integrated entrepreneurship education programmes (Hannon, 2005). Many such programmes focus predominantly on developing key competencies (such as opportunity recognition, resource acquisition and management, financial management and control, marketing and sales) (Jones, 2007) and nurturing individual student’s experiential learning in a range of practical contexts (Binks, 2005). However many of these programmes also contain an element of traditional entrepreneurship education methodologies used to transfer key academic concepts to students (Kirby, 2004) and a key element of the assessment of these programmes is the elimination of plagiarism.

### **Plagiarism**

Although the exploration of academic dishonesty is well established, there is much debate regarding the terminology and methodological approaches used within this body of literature. The concept and definition of plagiarism is highly subjective (Lyndsay, 2003; Ashworth et al., 1997) and has resulted in difficulties in obtaining clear conclusions and comparable empirical results (Vandehey et al., 2007). While the authors recognise that the scope of academic dishonesty goes well beyond a specific behaviour, for the purpose of this study a basic working definition of plagiarism is proposed as the behavioural manifestation of ‘copying text and inserting it in a document without citation’.

The predominant research approach is the utilisation of self reported incidence of plagiarism, however, there are significant limitations with this approach given the paradox of requiring survey participants to provide honest reports of their own dishonesty (Newstead et al., 1996). It is acknowledged that given the sensitivity of the issue of academic dishonesty, students may be tempted to give politically correct rather than truthful answers and may even lie intentionally, particularly where their anonymity is not guaranteed (McCabe et al., 2002; Pickard, 2006; Scanlon and Neumann, 2002).

In exploring self-reported engagement in plagiarism multiple variables have been utilised, including moral development (Austin et al., 2005); peer behaviour and perceived severity of penalties and rewards for cheating (McCabe and Trevino, 1997; McCabe et al., 2001, 2002; Vandehey et al., 2007; Williams and Janosik, 2007); and internet use (Chaky and Diekhoff, 2002; Scanlon and Neumann, 2002; Underwood and Szabo, 2003). Explorations of students ethical views (their own views, their lecturers views’ and the institutions views) regarding academic honesty (Chaky and Diekhoff, 2002; Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead, 1995; McCabe et al., 2002; Scanlon and Neumann, 2002) may seek the students own definition of plagiarism/ academic dishonesty; or may ask them to indicate the extent of their agreement with pre-stated

definitions (Ashworth et al., 1997; Barry, 2006). These approaches have one common purpose, they do not address the gap in plagiarism research between what students' say they do and what they actually do.

Throughout these studies, there is an assumption that a student who understands what plagiarism is will avoid plagiarism. This underexplored association between understanding and behaviour forms the focal point for this study.

### **Research Methodology**

Based on the definition of plagiarist behaviour adopted for this research ('copying text and inserting it in a document without citation'), a structured questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of undergraduate entrepreneurship students using independent researchers. In order to reduce the self-selection bias that electronic questionnaires can introduce the questionnaires were administered in a class setting to two hundred and five entrepreneurship undergraduate students. The respondent gender ratio was 60% female and 40% male with an age range of 17-31.

The first part of the three stage questionnaire assessed student's conceptual understanding of plagiarism, eliciting qualitative information on students definition of plagiarism and their explanation of how it could be avoided. The second part of the questionnaire utilised a series of Likert-type scaling questions based on research measures adapted from Scanlon and Neumann (2002) exploring ethical attitudes towards plagiarism, self-reported engagement in plagiarism, their peer's perceived behaviour, and lecturer's and university views. The third and final part of the research instrument presented two case scenarios based on Brown and Howell (2001) and Frick (1991) where an original piece of text was presented, followed by two case scenarios. The first scenario presented a piece of writing by a hypothetical student ('JB') who had included two identical sentences from the original text (verbatim) with no acknowledgment to the author (see Exhibit 1). The second scenario presented another piece of writing by a different student ('PR') who had included rephrased the original text (paraphrased) with no acknowledgment to the author (see Exhibit 1). These were used to explore students' practical understanding of plagiarism as a combination of applied recognition and applied avoidance. Students were asked to rate the seriousness of the breach of academic guidelines from their own point of view, their lecturer's views, and the need to provide a reference on a scale from 1 to 100. To simplify the analysis of the results, the responses were coded to both variables into three differentiated categories: 'agree' (scores greater than 70), 'neutral' (scores between 30 and 70) and 'disagree' (scores less than 30). These cut off points, though subjective, greatly contributed to the clarity of interpretation of the results of this study.

### **Exhibit 1: Case study presented to students as example of direct plagiarism**

*(Original from journal<sup>1</sup>)* Technology has significantly transformed education at several major turning points in our history. In the broadest sense, the first technology was the primitive modes of communication used by prehistoric people before the development of spoken language. Mime, gestures, grunts, and drawing of figures in the sand with a stick were methods used to communicate -- yes, even to educate. Even without speech, these prehistoric people were able to teach their young how to catch animals for food, what animals to avoid, which

vegetation was good to eat and which was poisonous.

**(JB essay)** In examining technology, we have to remember that computers are not the first technology people have had to deal with. The first technology was the primitive modes of communication used by prehistoric people before the development of spoken language. Mime, gestures, grunts, and drawing of figures in the sand with a stick were methods used to communicate -- yes, even to educate.

**(PR essay)** Technology has impacted education all along human history. Before language was developed, humans started using diverse tools for communication and education like mime, sounds, gestures and icons. This was used to teach young ones how and what to hunt and what plants to eat.

<sup>1</sup> **Source:** Frick, T. (1991). *Restructuring education through technology*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

## Results

In exploring entrepreneurship students perception of plagiarism the responses to the qualitative question illustrate that the respondents have a clear conceptual understanding of plagiarism which is quite close to the working definition (“copying text and inserting it in a document without citation”) used in this study:

*“Copying or using somebody else’s ideas in any form be it writing a quote or paraphrasing without referencing/citations”*

*“Taking someone else’s work and passing it off as your own without any reference to the original source”*

These interpretations of plagiarism were explored further by asking students to suggest how plagiarism could be avoided, examples of some of the responses include;

*“Referencing all sources used in research. Using quotations if copying directly”*

*“Citing and referencing where you took the information from”*

*“By referencing acknowledging that you are using pieces of work from other authors while integrating it with your own”*

Such responses clearly demonstrate that students possess an academic understanding of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, which led to an investigation of student engagement in plagiarism. This revealed that 88.6% of entrepreneurship students identified that they never or almost never engage in copying text and inserting it in a paper without citation while 92.9% never or almost never use the internet to engage in copying text and inserting it in a paper without citation (see Table 1). However their engagement in plagiarism decreases as the extent of plagiarism increases with 98.7% (non-internet source) and 100% (internet source) noting that they never or almost never copy an entire paper without citation and submit it as their own. These findings

suggest that entrepreneurship students are more likely to engage in plagiarism when using hard rather than soft copies of documents.

Table 1: Reports of engagement in plagiarism: *How often do you/do you think other students engage in each of these acts?*

		<b>Never/ Almost never</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Frequently/ Very frequently</b>
<b>Self engagement in plagiarism</b>	<b>Copying text and inserting it in a paper without citation</b>	88.6%	9.0%	2.4%
	<b>Copying an entire paper without citation and submit it as your own</b>	98.7%	0.5%	1.0%
	<b>Using the internet to copy text and insert it in your paper without citation</b>	92.9%	4.7%	2.4%
	<b>Using the internet to copy an entire paper without citation and submit it as your own</b>	100.0%		
<b>Engagement of other students in plagiarism</b>	<b>Copying text and inserting it in a paper without citation</b>	35.7%	43.8%	20.5%
	<b>Copying an entire paper without citation</b>	76.7%	16.7%	6.7%
	<b>Using the internet to copy text and insert it in your paper without citation</b>	43.9%	27.1%	29.0%
	<b>Using the internet to copy an entire paper without citation and submit it as your own</b>	72.4%	19.5%	8.1%

In addition Table 1 also illustrates that when students were asked to give their views of how often other students engage in plagiarism it emerged that they perceive other students to be less honest than they are. Notably, entrepreneurship students perceive that 35.7% (non-internet source) and 43.9% (internet source) of other students never or almost never engage in copying text and inserting it in a paper without citation. Again, as per their self reporting the entrepreneurship students perceive that engagement in plagiarism decreases as the extent of plagiarism increases with 76.7% (non-internet source) and 72.4% (internet source) noting that they never or almost never copy an entire paper without citation and submit it as their own.

In expanding this exploration to examine students' perception of what is wrong Table 2 illustrates that 82.1% of entrepreneurship students agree that copying text and inserting it in a paper without citation is wrong in their opinion, wrong in their lecturers' opinion (92.6%) and is strictly punished in college (86.9%). This pattern is repeated when students' perceptions of copying an entire paper without citation is explored with 95.1% of entrepreneurship students agreed that it is wrong in their opinion, 96% that it is wrong in their lecturer's opinion and 94.1% that is strictly punished in college. These findings suggest that entrepreneurship students think that their lecturers are more concerned about plagiarism than either the students themselves or the university.

Table 2: Self reported plagiarism using non-internet based material

		<b>Strongly agree/ Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree/ Strongly disagree</b>
<b>Copying text and inserting it in a paper without citation</b>	<b>...wrong in my own view</b>	82.1%	13.0%	4.8%
	<b>...wrong in the lecturer's view</b>	92.6%	4.4%	3.0%
	<b>...strictly punished in college</b>	86.9%	9.2%	3.9%
<b>Copying an entire paper without citation is</b>	<b>...wrong in my own view</b>	95.1%	2.9%	2.0%
	<b>...wrong in the lecturer's view</b>	96.0%	2.0%	2.0%
	<b>...strictly punished in college</b>	94.1%	2.9%	3.0%

In the context of internet based material Table 3 highlights a similar pattern to that of the non-internet material, whereby 82.4% of entrepreneurship students agree that using the internet to copy text and insert it in a paper without citation is wrong, 93.2% believe it is wrong in their lecturers opinion and 85.5% believe that it is strictly punished in college. These levels of agreement rise even further when examining the use of the internet to copy an entire paper without citation, this is wrong in the opinion of 87.9% of students, wrong in their lecturer's opinion (97.1%) and that is strictly punished in college (92.6%).

Table 3: Self reported plagiarism using internet based material

		<b>Strongly agree/ Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree/ Strongly disagree</b>
<b>Using the internet to copy text and insert it in your paper without citation is</b>	<b>...wrong in my own view</b>	82.4%	13.2%	4.4%
	<b>...wrong in the lecturer's view</b>	93.2%	4.4%	2.5%
	<b>...strictly punished in college</b>	85.5%	9.2%	5.3%
<b>Using the internet</b>	<b>...wrong in my own view</b>	87.9%	1.4%	1.9%

to copy an entire paper without citation and submit it as your own is	...wrong in the lecturer's view	97.1%	1.5%	1.5%
	...strictly punished in college	92.6%	4.9%	2.4%

To further explore entrepreneurship students' understanding of plagiarism students were presented with two scenarios based on an original piece of text. The results illustrated in Table 4 demonstrate that for JB's essay (i.e. the text taken verbatim and not referenced) students are clearly aware that the text needed to be referenced (71.7%) but surprisingly, they do not consider that JB's essay is in breach of academic guidelines (23.8%). Similarly while 44.3% of the respondents thought it necessary to reference the paraphrased text in PR's essay only 13.3% considered that not referencing the text is in breach of academic guidelines.

Table 4: Plagiarism scenarios: Verbatim and Paraphrased text

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
<b>Do you consider that JB's essay is in breach of academic guidelines? (Verbatim plagiarism)</b>	33.0%	43.2%	23.8%
<b>If the lecturer noticed that JB has used the text in his/her essays, do you think that s/he would consider it to be a breach of academic guidelines? (Verbatim plagiarism)</b>	43.9%	36.6%	19.5%
<b>Was it necessary for JB to have given the reference to it at the end of this passage of text? (Verbatim plagiarism)</b>	71.7%	18.1%	10.2%
<b>Do you consider that PR's essay is in breach of academic guidelines? (Paraphrased plagiarism)</b>	13.3%	37.0%	49.7%
<b>If the lecturer noticed that PR used the text in his/her essays, do you think that s/he would consider it to be a breach of academic guidelines? (Paraphrased plagiarism)</b>	19.0%	36.4%	44.6%
<b>Was it necessary for PR to have given the reference to it at the end of this passage of text? (Paraphrased plagiarism)</b>	44.3%	26.8%	28.9%

In summary, the findings illustrate that entrepreneurship students can define plagiarism (according to the working definition of plagiarism adopted for this study, 'copying text and inserting it in a document without citation'), recognise examples of plagiarism but do not recognise it to be a breach of academic regulations. The results highlight the argument at the centre of this article: that there is a disconnect between students stated views of plagiarism and their practice of plagiarism avoidance.

## Discussion

This study has found that although entrepreneurship students have an academic understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, when they were presented with examples of plagiarism they recognised that references were required



but failed to recognise that by not referencing the material they were in breach of academic guidelines, even though this contradicted their previously stated views. This finding is in line with studies by Ashworth et al. (1997) and Pittam et al. (2009) who have previously noted student uncertainty around plagiarism in practice.

In order to explore this disconnect between students conceptual understanding of plagiarism and its avoidance an examination of student engagement in plagiarism with internet and non-internet sources of data was undertaken. Notably, 88.6% (non-internet material) and 92.9% (internet material) of entrepreneurship students revealed that they never or almost never engage in copying text and inserting it in a paper without citation. However, 98.7% (non-internet source) and 100% (internet source) note that they never or almost never copy an entire paper without citation and submit it as their own thus indicating that their engagement in plagiarism decreases as the extent of plagiarism increases. These findings suggest that entrepreneurship students are more likely to engage in plagiarism when using hard rather than soft copies of documents.

To understand this gap between conceptual and practical understanding of plagiarism this discussion focuses on three different roles (1) student's role (2) lecturer's role and (3) organisational role;

**Student role:** Having demonstrated a clear conceptual understanding of plagiarism and its avoidance, followed by lack of recognition of plagiarism in practice, entrepreneurship students must engage in experiential learning in order to bridge the gap between their conceptual and practical understanding of plagiarism. This experiential learning should explore the nuances of referencing, quotation and paraphrasing using strategies such as suggested by Uemlianin (2000), Barry (2006), and Landau et al. (2002).

**Lecturer role:** The findings have also highlighted an interesting gap in student perception of student, lecturers and university views of plagiarism. In all instances lecturers are perceived to be most concerned with plagiarism, with students and the university vying for second place. This suggests that students see their practices with regard to plagiarism as being close to university guidelines, and may indicate that they perceive university lecturers to be overly concerned about plagiarism. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to the lecturer's role given that previous studies have found that although lecturers recognise that plagiarism is a problem, many are reluctant to address it because of a lack of clarity around disciplinary procedures and supports (Vandehey et al., 2007).

**Organisational role:** The research results illustrate that the organisational role in combating plagiarism needs to be strengthened. Top and middle management must engage in the development and enactment of a standardised approach to experiential learning and the formalisation and implementation of anti-plagiarism-related policies and practices at institutional level (Brown and Howell, 2001; Devlin, 2006; MacDonald, 2006; McCabe et al., 2002; Walden and Peacock, 2006). This must result in a clear message that breaches of academic guidelines are regarded as a serious offence with punitive consequences.

## **Conclusion**

This study supports previous research which identified that students held strong ethical views regarding plagiarism and claimed not to engage in plagiarism, however this paper highlights the disconnect between these claims and the students' ability to recognise plagiarism as a breach of academic guidelines. Based on the empirical results the key conclusions emanating from the research are;

- Entrepreneurship students have a clear conceptual understanding of plagiarism and how to avoid it, and they demonstrate ability to accurately recognise material which needs to be referenced. However they do not see the use of non-referenced material as being a breach of academic guidelines.
- Entrepreneurship students are more likely to engage in plagiarism when using non-internet material rather than material sourced on the internet.
- Entrepreneurship students perceive that there is a disparity between student, lecturer and university views regarding the importance of plagiarism, with the lecturer being perceived to be more concerned with plagiarism than students or the university.

Arising from these conclusions, the implications for entrepreneurship education focus on two areas: first, the University needs to emphasise to entrepreneurship students that plagiarism is a breach of academic guidelines which will be treated as a serious offence. Second, the University in partnership with lecturers, must adopt experiential learning approaches to improve plagiarism avoidance skills.

Future research could address the dichotomy between students self-reports and their application of plagiarism avoidance measures exploring inter-disciplinary and cross cultural variances. In addition a qualitative case study based research approach could be adopted in order to explore students' academic writing and their interpretation of plagiarism in practice.

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