

Plagiarism awareness among students: a case of IDM

E.L Howe
Institute of Development Management (IDM)
Matsapha
Swaziland
elhowe@idmbls.ac.sz

B. Dlamini
Institute of Development Management (IDM)
Matsapha
Swaziland
bdlamini@idmbls.ac.sz

ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is troubling the academic world today and it is a significant issue on campuses around the world. This can sometimes lead to assignments being submitted that are inadequately referenced or, worse still, assignments being submitted that are largely (or entirely) the work of someone else. The purpose of this study was to investigate plagiarism among undergraduate students at a higher education institution in Swaziland. This study investigated the awareness and causes of plagiarism among undergraduate first, second and third year students at various departments at the Institute of Development Management in Swaziland. The general trend in universities and colleges is that there has been an increase in the adoption of rules and practices to increase the awareness of plagiarism. A qualitative and quantitative research method was used. Data collected sheds light on both on awareness and attitudes toward plagiarism and how plagiarism is addressed on a university and classroom basis. The study also assessed the incidence of plagiarism among students and the perceived factors responsible for the plagiarism.

Keywords: Plagiarism; higher education; Swaziland; undergraduate students;

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities world over are expected to be centres for the creation of information and knowledge generated from basic and applied research. As such student expectation is high regarding access and use of information to write assignments and examinations or carry out academic research. However, literature suggests that students in most universities are engaged in malpractice such as plagiarism and that it is a global issue.

The term plagiarism has received much attention in recent times as incidents of plagiarism seem to be on the increase. With the advent of the Internet, information is more easily accessible without geographical constraints; hence researchers can now lay their hands on documents in any part of the world. Although, this is a laudable development considering that scholars develop new ideas while learning from the writings of others (Coulthard 2004), some researchers, however, prefer to steal the ideas of others rather than learn from their work. Okeke (2001) points out that the plague of plagiarism can be attributed to an educational system that seems to produce fake intellectuals, who merely endure education while stealing the work of others as cover up. Park (2003) states that plagiarism is a type of cheating where students present the work of others as their own for the purpose of academic credit.

Hannabuss (2001) denotes that a university is a place where students are taught, encouraged to perform well, instructed on intellectual property issues like copyright and how to use information ethically within their areas of specialisation. Failure by students to follow their institutions code of conduct should lead to either a fail or cancellation of assignment marks, suspension or revocation of an academic award. This is a worldwide expectation yet academic malpractice continues to be a constant worry not only for academic institutions but also for information creators. This can explain the many technological innovations developed in an effort to come up with software that can detect students cheating.

Patel et al. give an evaluation of the performance of some of the latest software but conclude that none is comprehensive enough to effectively detect plagiarism. Savage (2004) also gives some comprehensive findings about the Turnitin plagiarism software.

2. PLAGIARISM

According to Hannabuss (2001: 311) plagiarism includes a mixture of interrelated issues. These include; legal, intellectual, social, professional, and moral issues as well as matters of reputation, acceptance, shame, economic loss, self-esteem and indignation within an offenders educational and home community. However, all the issues sited out above do not seem to be the catalyst to why students engage in academic malpractice. The question still remains what causes to engage in unethical academic malpractice in an era of plagiarism checkers.

Park (2010) state that plagiarism has become very common and it I being fuelled by increased student access to digital information resources. Culwin and Lancaster (2001) agree and add that students are finding it easy to copy other people's work from the internet, modifying and presenting it as their own. William (2002) considers plagiarism a serious crime because it involves stealing someone's 'creativity, ideas or language'. Plagiarism exists in different forms as shown in table 1, below.

2.1 Forms of plagiarism

Adapted from Richa Tripathi y S. Kumar (2009)

<p style="text-align: center;">Sources not cited</p>	<p>1.1 The Ghost Writer Presenting someone else's work as your own.</p> <p>1.2 The Photocopy Complete fragments are reproduced without alteration.</p> <p>1.3 The Potluck Paper Different sources are combined without any reference.</p> <p>1.4 The Poor Disguise The writer altered the paper's appearance and certain words are changed.</p> <p>1.5 The Labor of Laziness Reformulation of different sources that make up the final work.</p> <p>1.6 The Self- Stealer The writer "borrows" own previous work, violating the requirements of originality.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Sources cited (but still plagiarized)</p>	<p>2.1 The Forgotten Footnote The writer quotes the author, but without the information needed to locate the source. This practice tends to hide other forms of plagiarism</p> <p>2.2 Misinformed Unable to locate the sources cited because of its incorrect reference</p> <p>2.3 The Too -Perfect Paraphrase The writer quotes the author, but not the exact words in quotation marks, so he or she pretends to own an original interpretation.</p> <p>2.4 The Resourceful Citer Citations and references are correct, but practically constitute the bulk of the article.</p> <p>2.5 The Perfect Crime In some fragments are cited correctly in other sources but a paraphrase from those sources is introduced, this time without explicit recognition</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Other types of Plagiarism</p>	<p>3.1 Copy and Paste Plagiarism Direct quotations are reproduced without quotes.</p> <p>3.2 Word Switch Plagiarism Changes of some words quoted, reproduced without quotation marks.</p> <p>3.3 Metaphor Plagiarism Use creative language of an author without stating the due recognition.</p> <p>3.4 Idea Plagiarism Pass a creative idea or suggests a solution to a problem as his own.</p> <p>3.5 Reasoning Style / Organization Plagiarism Following the reasoning of another author in the approximate order that develops in this article.</p> <p>3.6 Data plagiarism Plagiarism data from other studies.</p>

Most higher education institutions like The Institute of Development and Management offer an academic skills writing course to undergraduate students in the first year of study. This course is designed to equip students with basic

academic writing, information search and use skills, including critical thinking and library skills. Conversely, this course is said to be inadequate in developing research skills due to the mode of delivery which is purely theory oriented. Nowadays many universities have replaced this course with Information Literacy skills training and most of these courses are spearheaded by librarians (Amunga 2011). IDM Swaziland is behind in this development.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general aim of the study was to assess students' knowledge of plagiarism. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain students' knowledge of plagiarism
2. Determine students' perception of reasons for plagiarism;
3. Find out students' attitudes to strategies for curbing plagiarism
4. Establish lecturer's views about plagiarism on campus

It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide more insight into the problem of plagiarism in higher education institutions and encourage various university administrations world over particularly IDM to come up with policies aimed at eliminating it.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study involved 25 undergraduate students and four lecturers at IDM, all conveniently sampled. An email was sent to all students, inviting them to complete the anonymous electronic survey and providing them with an internet link to it. Students were purposively sampled from the three different departments at IDM namely Human Resources Management Department, Public Health Department and the Business, Information Resources Management Department. Lecturers were given a questionnaire with open ended questions with the aim of soliciting opinions and issues about the study. In both instances questions were asked in relation to (a) awareness of plagiarism, (b) perception of reasons for plagiarism and (c) ways in which to curb plagiarism.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study sought to ascertain the level of respondent's awareness about plagiarism at IDM Swaziland Campus. Students on the franchised courses are aware of plagiarism because there is an academic misconduct and plagiarism policy they get from the international academic institutions. Local IDM students are aware but there is no policy and their assignments are not checked for plagiarism. IDM students attend a course on academic skills writing where they are taught on academic malpractice such as plagiarism. However, most of the time students ignore academic skills writing resulting high instances of plagiarism.

All the lecturers interviewed acknowledged that the practise was taking place on campus and it is one of the most serious academic malpractice done. When asked what makes students practice plagiarism one lecturer cited that students are generally lazy to do research, lack of academic discipline and relying on Internet sites that are not credible for academic research.

On responding to what cases have lecturers come across of academic malpractice two examples were given: in one case two students submitted the same assignment for assessment. They were interrogated on the matter and one confessed copying the other student's assignment. Another lecturer mentioned that they submitted the same research project and those were disqualified and they failed the research. In both instances a plagiarism software was not used but the moderator through reading noticed the similarities in the projects and assignments.

Respondents also identified the following challenges in curbing plagiarism:

- Copying and pasting from the internet
- Assignments and Research projects are not excessively analysed
- The library is not adequately equipped with books and journals thus students will resort to the Internet
- The lack of plagiarism detectors especially with local assignments
- There is no institutional policy to deal with plagiarism

The students were asked if they knew what plagiarism is and the question had two options to choose from, “Yes” or “No.” The response showed that all the students (100%) were aware of plagiarism.

Figure 1: Types of Plagiarism

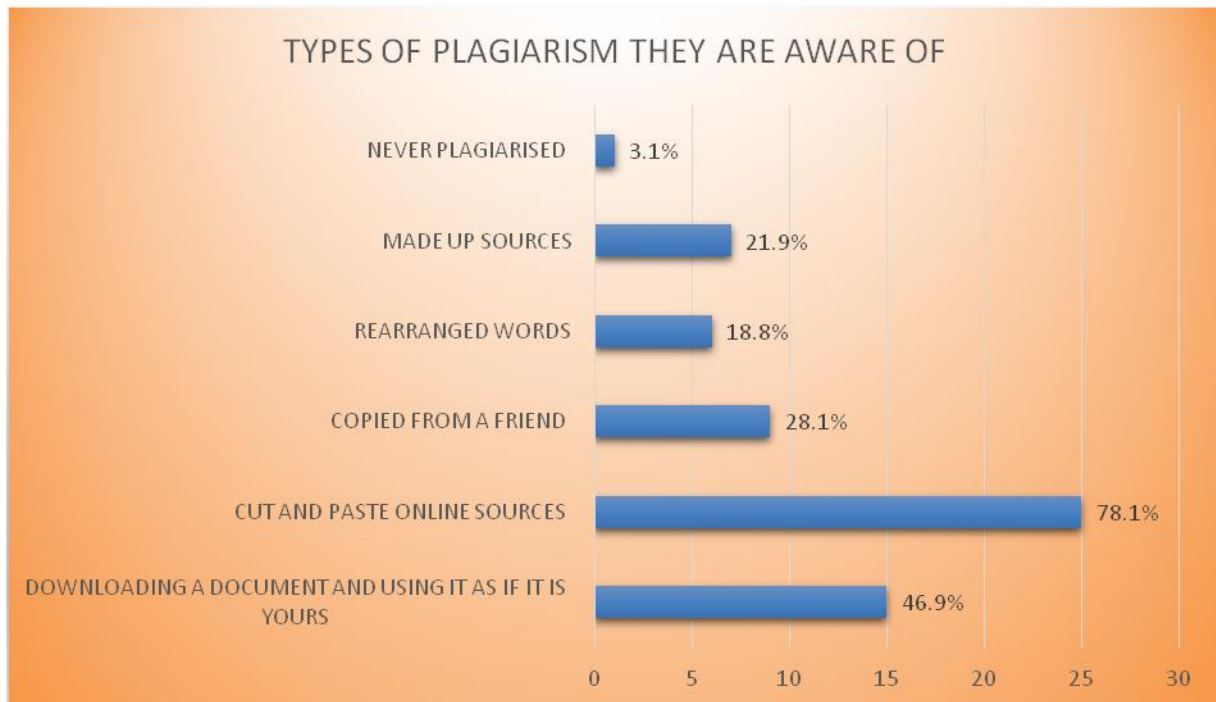


Figure 1 shows that a majority of the students (78.1%) mostly cut and pastes online sources in their assignments, while (46.7%) downloaded documents as used them as their own work. These two (2) types of plagiarism show that students use an easy way of getting information and it also forms part of laziness. This is evident in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Reasons for Plagiarism

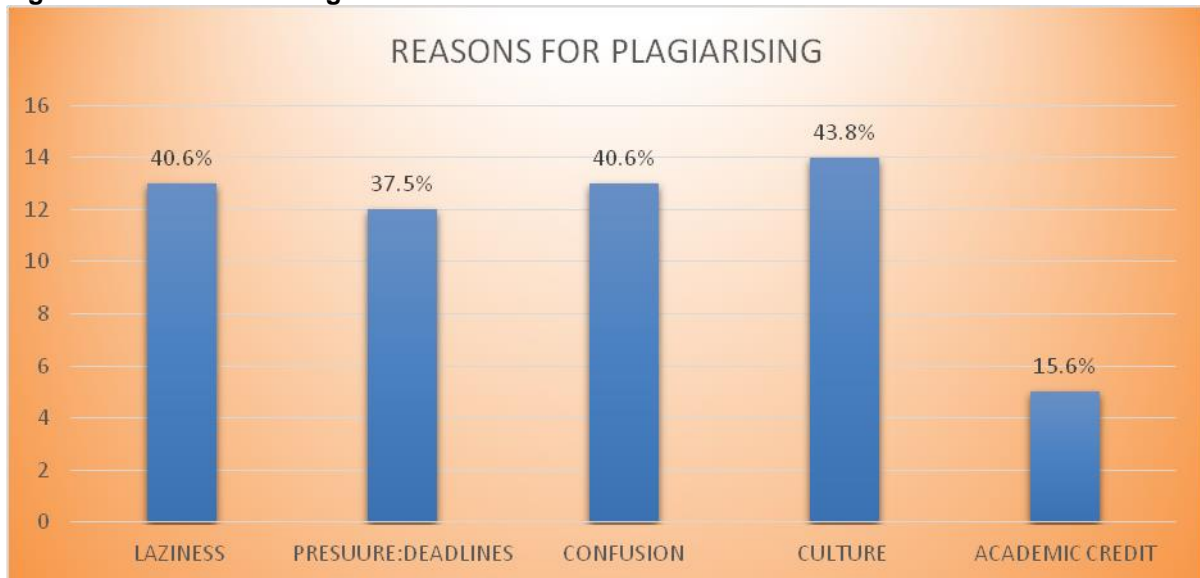


Figure 2 shows similar responses based on conditions that students fall under on why they plagiarize. There is similar responses from students who plagiarize due to laziness and confusion (40.6%) and a high percentage of students who blamed it on culture was (43.8%). From previous studies laziness and bad time management were identified as two of the common reasons for plagiarising (Errey 2002: 17; Wilhoit 1994: 162). Normally students have a tendency to do their assignments until the last day, hence most of them will plagiarise as a quick solution.

Figure 3: Do they know the consequences of Plagiarism?

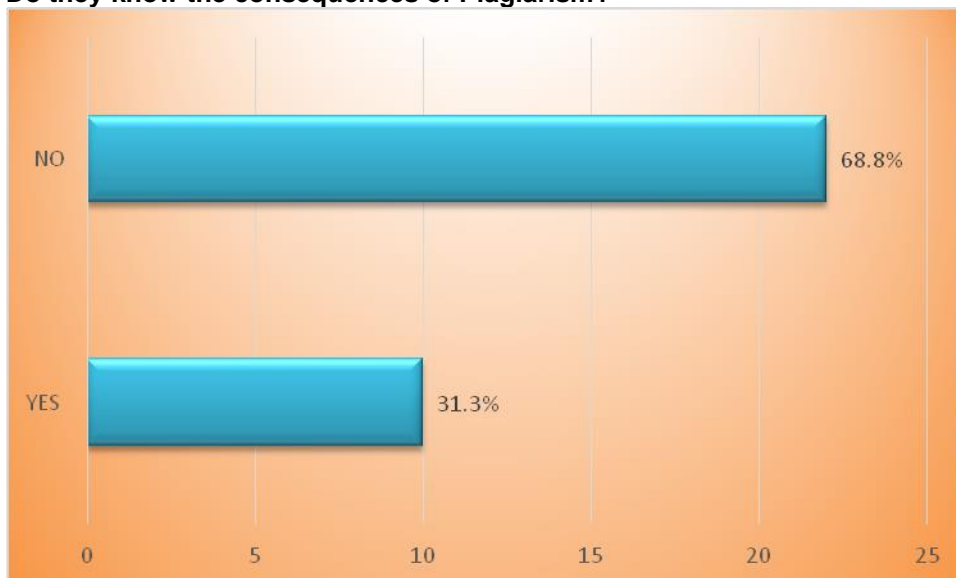


Figure 3 reflects the responses to the question if they know they can be nished for plagiarising. It shows that (68.8%) of the students know that there will not be

punished if caught plagiarising. This can be a result to a lack of policies or rules that provide guidance and penalties for plagiarism cases within the institution. This finding is also in line with those of Mundava and Chaudhuri (2007) who state that it appears that there are widespread beliefs that information on the Internet is not owned by people and so is free, hence there is no need for punishment. This also relates to the findings by Mandry (2007) where 74% of respondents were unaware of the seriousness of plagiarism. Reasons might be that because students lack information literacy skills, they are therefore unaware of how to work ethically, economically and legally with information.

Figure 4: Where they would seek help

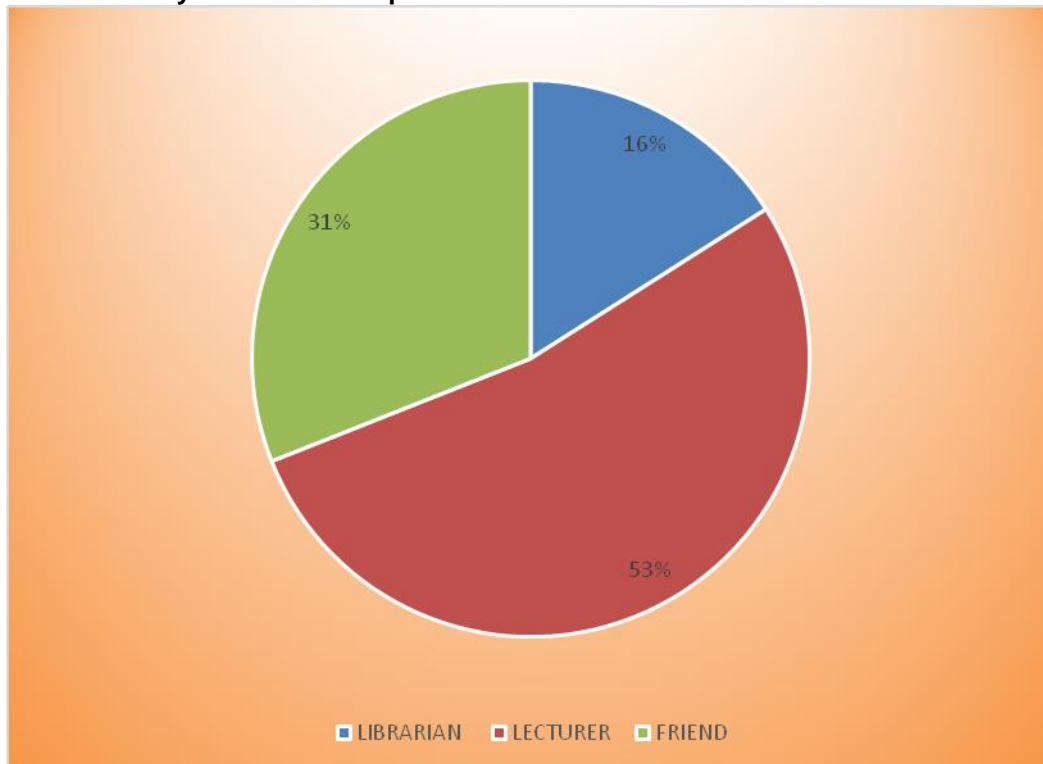
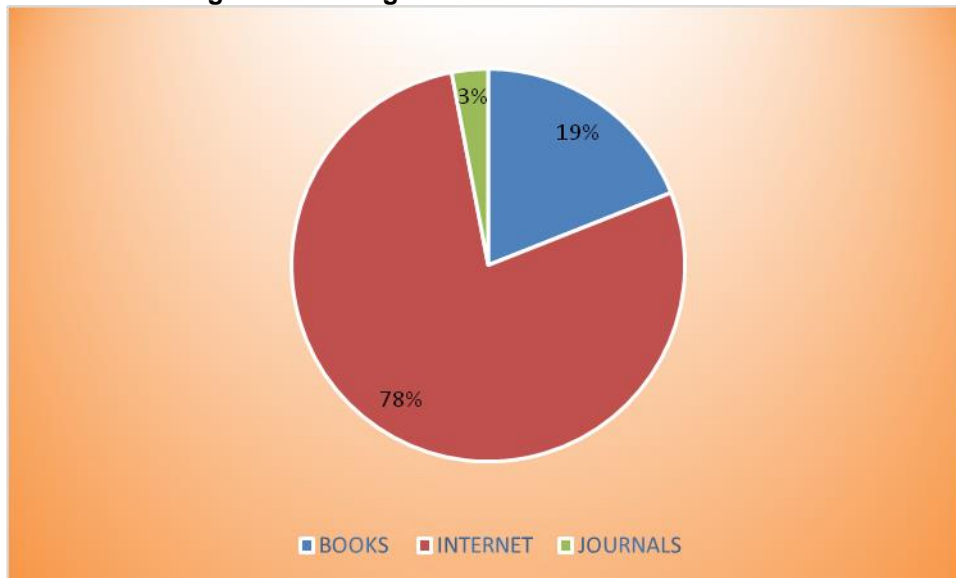


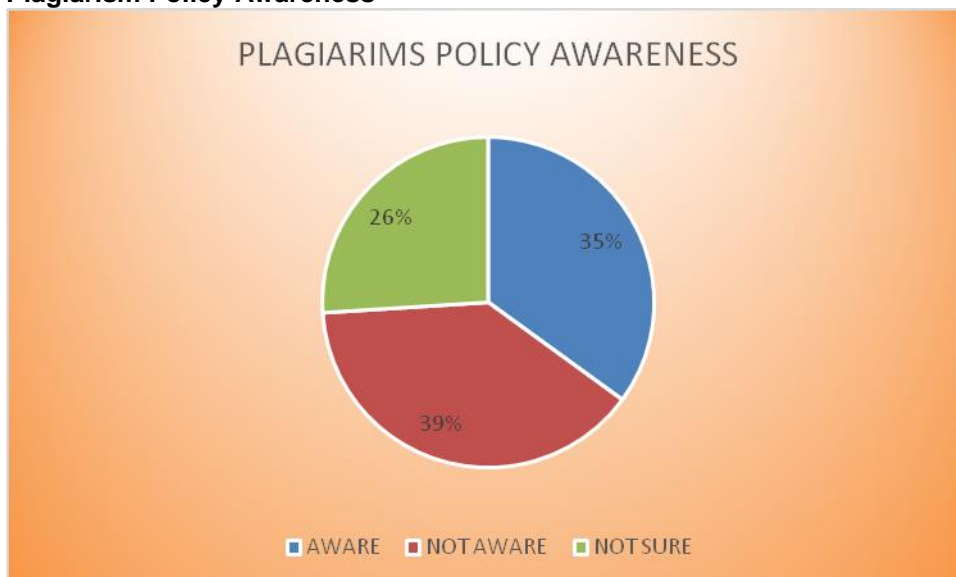
Figure 4 clearly shows that (53%) of the students would ask for help from the lecturers while (31%) will ask their friends for assistance. Only (16%) will request assistance from the librarian.

Figure 5: Sources of Assignment writing



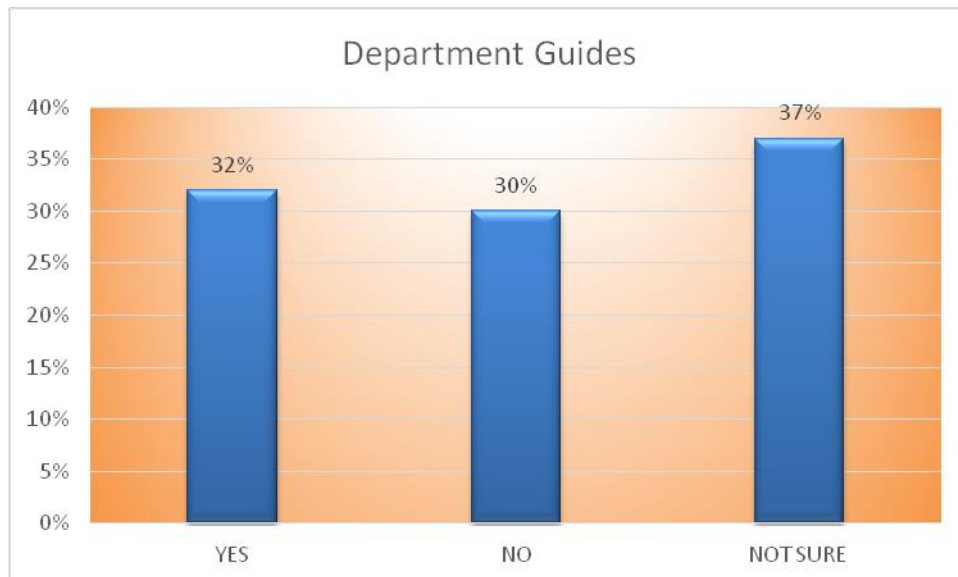
Respondents were asked to indicate which resources they have used for assignment writing and will use as potential sources when engaging in plagiarism. As indicated in figure 5 the internet (78%) is widely used by students to copy and paste information which plagiarism. Books (3%) are rarely used as a source of information and the library on campus does not have enough books and journals for research purposes. The internet is easily accessible on campus therefore a convenient source of information.

Figure 6: Plagiarism Policy Awareness



Respondents were asked if they were aware of plagiarism policy at IDM. Figure 6 illustrates that 39% are not aware of policies on plagiarism. 35% are aware of the policies from franchised courses while 26% were not sure if there is a policy on plagiarism.

Figure 7: Department Guides



Students were probed to indicate if they were aware of department guides on how to avoid plagiarism. 32% stated that they were aware of the procedure mentioned in their department's guides to avoid plagiarism. In the student handbook also plagiarism is mentioned but not in detail of what it really entails. The rest, 30% were not aware of the guides and 37% were not sure.

The study indicates that plagiarism does exist at IDM and students are willing to take the risk of plagiarising, regardless of knowing that it is unacceptable. The findings also confirm that plagiarism is common amongst students across all departments at IDM. The internet is widely used as a source of information. Most students are unaware of policies and guidelines on plagiarism. The results from the survey with regards to the research questions asked and objectives can be summarised as follows:

- The majority of students are aware of plagiarism and the consequences of plagiarising
- Causes of plagiarism include laziness, academic credit and pressure to complete assignments on time
- A Majority of students were not aware of or not sure about the policies and guidelines regarding plagiarism created by the institution.
- A Majority of students were not aware of or not sure about the department guides to avoid plagiarism

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings it is clear that plagiarism is fairly common on campus and students are aware of it. The findings point to a high awareness level among students of what comprises plagiarism as well as the different tactics used to engage in such. Even the academic lecturers are aware of plagiarism and they have stated that even when students are taught on plagiarism they still do it. It is imperative for the institution to find strategies to eliminate this practise regardless of the challenges faced in curbing plagiarism. In dealing with plagiarism the institution should ensure that a policy is formulated and included in academic processes. This policy must articulate the different forms of plagiarism, the measurement of plagiarism, disciplinary actions that are fair and consistent and instructions about how the institution will deal with plagiarism. Even though students attend a course on academic skills writing, the institution needs to equip the librarian and academics to teach information literacy, inclusive of using library and Internet resources to find information as well as referencing skills. Plagiarism software detectors must be used by all departments and lecturers and moderators must thoroughly read assignment for early detection.

Lecturers must have forums where they discuss plagiarism, share their experiences and strategies adopted and give suggestions on how to formulate department guidelines in alignment with the policy to reduce plagiarism. According to Scanlon (2003:163) state that plagiarism is misunderstood by students especially internet plagiarism. It is the duty of lecturers to raise awareness about internet plagiarism and guarantee that students know how to cite and reference sources from the Internet.

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