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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE STRUCTURE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PLAGIARISM IN PAKISTAN; A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Plagiarism is considered as one of the universal issues in academia. Different research methods have been used to understand this phenomenon globally. It is not only injurious to scientific community rather it affects the society as a whole. It creates hurdles in scientific knowledge by affecting the creativity and intellectual growth of the people. Despite the strict plagiarism policies implemented by Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan, the issue of plagiarism still remains common. The present study highlights the structure of undergraduate student plagiarism in higher education of Pakistan.

Methods: It has adopted qualitative phenomenological approach for deeper exploration of a phenomenon, this approach is used to understand the essences of their lived experiences. 16 final year undergraduate students who claim to plagiarize the most were chosen for the study. Their lived experiences and life worlds were captured through in-depth interviews.

Results: Results show that plagiarism is like a vicious cycle which start from the very beginning of an academic life. The main three elements of this cycle; deeply rooted in the system, unintentional plagiarism and silent agreement of teachers are discussed in the paper.

Conclusion: The findings can be useful for the academicians and policy makers to prevent plagiarism in academia around the world.

KEYWORDS

Structure of Plagiarism, Academic Dishonesty, Higher Education, Undergraduate Students

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of plagiarism still remains a complex phenomenon despite of the decades of research available on it. The techniques of plagiarism are advancing day by day hence making it more concerning than ever (Eaton, 2021). The advancement in technology and mass media raised concerns over the intellectual property rights and the gravity of the issue increased with an advent of internet. Hence proper policies were prepared to combat plagiarism around the world (Park, 2003). In Pakistan these policies were implemented by Higher Education Commission HEC in 2007 but before that no such concept was there in academia and research work. Plagiarism still prevails in academia despite of these policies and usage of plagiarism detection software (Mansoor & Ameen, 2016).

Plagiarism is relatively a new concept in Pakistan. Higher Educational Commission of Pakistan has formulated strict policies to combat plagiarism in academia in 2007, prior to that there was no clear understanding of plagiarism in Pakistan. With time this concept gained more popularity and different researchers started working on it. Research available on plagiarism in Pakistan shows that there is an extreme confusion regarding plagiarism among students. Most of the students do not understand the gravity of the situation and

lack of awareness regarding plagiarism policies is alarming (Shakeel et al., 2013). Plagiarism detection software are working effectively to prevent plagiarism in higher education but their usage at graduate and undergraduate levels are extremely rare or nil (Sarwar et al., 2016).

Furthermore, research also show that there is no significant relationship between plagiarism and personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, neuroticism, agreeableness and extraversion) in Pakistan (Bhutto & Mamdani, 2019), and neither such relationship was found between positive attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Which means that there are other factors behind plagiarism which need our attention (Mamdani & Bhutto, 2019). The present study uses in depth interviewing technique as opposed to the self-reported questionnaire because it explores student's life worlds and the meanings of plagiarism in it. Understanding plagiarism from student's perspective is essential for academicians because at the end of the day it's the students we are dealing with.

1.1 Plagiarism and Scientific Knowledge

Plagiarism is detrimental to scientific knowledge. It violates the basic scientific principles of trust and honesty. It is not excusable in any circumstances. It is not just injurious to scientific community rather it

affects the society as a whole. Intentional or unintentional plagiarism both affect the original author whereas the plagiarists might gain some immediate benefits but in the long run they are in loss. Their creativity and intellectuality suffer the most (Traniello & Bakker, 2016). Pakistan is a developing country and the growth of any country depends upon the quality of its scientific knowledge. How can we compete with the modern world if our students or researchers lack the creative and innovative ideas? Therefore, being a part of scientific community is it our responsibility to prevent plagiarism in our society. While previous studies in Pakistan have strongly relied on surveys and correlational designs to examine the prevalence and attitudes towards plagiarism (Mansoor et al., 2024), this study adopts a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences and meaning-making of students, therefore it offers insights unavailable through quantitative methods.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to explore the structure of undergraduate student plagiarism in higher education of Pakistan and to understand its patterns in students' life worlds. The structure includes the basic components of plagiarism and its relationship with each other. In phenomenological terms, the structure of plagiarism, refers to the essential features that constitute students' lived experiences of plagiarism (Husserl, 1970; Giorgi, 2009).

1.3 Students

The whole academic setup is designed for the growth of students. They are the key recipients of knowledge and they are the ones who dissipate this knowledge in the outer world. Plagiarism affects the core of the education system hence affects the students too. The academic knowledge alone is not enough in a professional world. The other vital components of education such as originality, imagination, intuition, apprehension, and tolerance are equally important for the students (Learned & Wood, 1938). The key factor required to thrive in any setup is the motivation behind it. Similarly, the motivation of the students can be boosted by stimulating their motivation to learn new things, task mastery and efforts (Lumsden, 1994). Plagiarism challenges all of these motivators and inspire students to rely on others' ideas and work. In a scientific community the sole responsibility of plagiarism lies on the author. Ignorance and any other factor are not considered justifiable reasons (Traniello & Bakker, 2016). Plagiarism also affects the creativity of the students. It intellectually shuns the students by robbing the new and creative ideas (Wijaya & Gruber, 2018).

1.4 Plagiarism and College Students

Plagiarism among college students has been studied throughout the perspectives and disciplines yet it is not explored fully. Different psychologist, sociologists and educational experts have devised the policies and software to curb plagiarism but despite of their efforts plagiarism still thrives in colleges. Blum (2009) has greatly discussed this phenomenon in his book. Years of research and ethnographies had enabled him to claim that although plagiarism is considered an immoral and unethical act but all the students who plagiarize are not immoral. College is a transitory phase of student's life where they have to deal with social pressures such as maintaining good grades, creating new relationships, saving money, keeping up with parental and societal expectations, pressure of finding job after college, and being a part of an active social life. They entered in college with their "busy-ness" and remain focused to their future destination. All of it makes plagiarism less important to them.

Furthermore, today's college generation is the generation living in words. They are exposed to the internet and social media where there is a play of words. So, they read and write all the time. This exposure has lessened the boundary of authenticity of the words. Many of the students who plagiarize don't know how to avoid it and they are not aware about the exact policies regarding it. He also argued that the system of higher education is designed in such a way that confuses students. Multiple goals and pressures are bombarded in such a way that confuses students about which direction to choose. This uncertainty is one of the reasons behind plagiarism. Hence in order to study plagiarism we must step out

from the morality debate and start considering things from student's perspectives and cultural forces.

1.5 Plagiarism among Undergraduate Students

The widespread of internet has played key role in online plagiarism among undergraduate students. The research has shown that final year undergrad students are more likely to involve in online plagiarism as compared to the first-year students (Selwyn, 2008). The behavior of students in academia is socially constructed and accepted, that is why the attitudes and perspectives differ from group to group. Although cheating is considered as a major offence in academia but in the eyes of students cheating in exams is real cheating while other academically dishonest acts such as plagiarism is not really considered cheating (Pyne & Nantz, 1994). In a changing society where different social forces pull through different directions the sensitivity towards cheating has changed too. Students are become less sensitive towards plagiarism. The freely available material on internet has made them believe that it is free and without any ownership. They do not grasp the idea that learning is not just finding material on search engines but rather using it properly for the academic purposes (Park, 2003).

The concept of whole undergraduate education in students is to learn the already shared ideas and establishes knowledge. Therefore, they use other's ideas and work without understanding the importance of creating the new ideas and contributing their share in the knowledge pool. They follow this behavior in exams and tests where they write back the knowledge which they have learned. This behavior is appreciated and desirable in many universities therefore students carry the same attitude towards scientific knowledge too. The perspectives of undergrad students differ greatly from their professors. They consider plagiarism as an outside force and do not relate it to the intrinsic forces. The immorality of the act is not upon everyone. The students who plagiarize are not always immoral in fact many of them have the strong set of moral values, they just don't understand the concept clearly therefore its seriousness is compromised too (Power, 2009).

Although scholars such as Blum (2009) and Park (2003) have highlighted cultural norms and institutional frameworks of plagiarism in Western contexts, studies in South Asia (Fullerton, 2014) reveal unique structural challenges. Yet, these accounts seldom move beyond descriptive summaries, highlighting the need for a phenomenological inquiry that foregrounds lived experience (Moustakas, 1994).

2. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative phenomenological research method has been used in the study. Phenomenology deals with the lived experiences of people by studying the meanings they attach to it. Edmund Husserl, a father of phenomenology, said that anything which appears in the consciousness comes under the domain of phenomenology and anything which is not consciously experienced remains out of phenomenology. The term phenomenon is closely related to consciousness, what cannot be seen, what is not lightened up or brightened enough to appear, what cannot be consciously experienced is not a phenomenon (Heidegger, 1977). The internal experiences of consciousness direct people towards objects. These objects may be real or unreal, ideal or non-existence but if a mind is directed towards it then this directedness is studied and captured by phenomenology (Miller, 1984). There are multiple realities out there but a person's experiences and consciousness define his/her reality. The central focus of phenomenology is how people experience something and how they find themselves in relation to it. The present study captures the phenomenon of the structure of undergraduate student plagiarism by exploring the essence of the lived experiences of the students. It explores the direction of their minds and explains why they plagiarize.

Purposive sampling was used and only those students who claimed to plagiarize the most in their studies and still do so in their final year were selected. A researcher located the respondents by personally going to each department and introducing her research purpose to the students. A form and contact details were given to the students and 16 final year students of three different faculties; the faculty of social sciences, the faculty of pharmacy, and the faculty of management and administrative

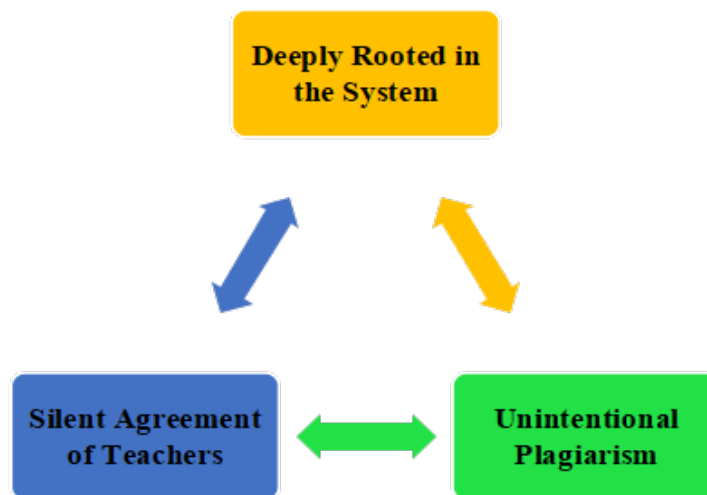


Figure 1 The Structure of Undergraduate Student Plagiarism

sciences, voluntarily participated in the study. In-depth interviews were taken from these students and each interview lasted 60-90 minutes. Questions were asked in a way which made respondents think about the patterns of plagiarism in their whole academic life especially in their undergraduate courses. Open ended questions were designed and a researcher made sure to let respondents talk freely about their experiences. The settings and timings of the interviews were all set by the respondents and their confidentiality was not compromised.

Reflexivity was maintained through note-taking and bracketing (Finlay, 2002; Tufford & Newman, 2010), allowing the researcher to identify preconceptions and minimize interpretive bias. Thematic analysis and phenomenological data analysis techniques from horizontalization to structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) were applied to analyzed data. Themes were made by following the six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Word by word coding was done to make the horizons which explained the phenomenon. These codes were clustered together to make themes and meanings were assigned accordingly. Each theme includes the textural description (students' responses as it is, without any researcher's biasness) and structural description was given separately to present the true meanings and essences of the phenomenon. A researcher made sure to cross check every theme with respondents before the final data analysis and presentation.

3. RESULTS

The structure of undergraduate student plagiarism is found to revolve around three major factors. These three factors are analyzed as a vicious cycle which promotes plagiarism among students. Figure 1 explains the related factors which describe the undergraduate student plagiarism.

3.1 Deeply Rooted in the System

As shown in Figure 1, plagiarism is deeply rooted in the early stages of academic life. It starts from schools and continues till university. Imitation and rote learning are promoted in our school system. Notes and guide books make sure that students follow it word by word and write the same in their answer sheets. The structure of college education is also designed on the same pattern. The concept of assignments and plagiarism are foreign to students. When these students enter in universities, they face difficulties in adapting to the university environment and accepting its demands. The behavior of plagiarism is ingrained in them and they do not question its authenticity.

"Plagiarism is an integral part of our educational system. I have been in this system from past 18 years and never have I heard anything against it. I have an MBA degree too but I was not satisfied so I came here to satisfy my inner curiosity. Everyone was saying to me that I have lost my mind by pursuing another degree of different discipline but I knew I had to do it for myself. All these years I have seen plagiarism as normal

because it was treated normal. School, college and university alike, it is taken seriously only when it comes to research." –R3

"There is no concept of assignments in school and colleges. We are given notes and take help from guide books but not doing anything on our own like university. I didn't even know the structure of assignment before coming here let alone about plagiarism." –R7

"Nobody thinks about these moti (difficult) terms in school and college. Life is easier there." –R5

"To be honest there are no consequences of plagiarism on our academic life, we are here to learn and to get a degree which we all do in this system with or without plagiarism. It is what we did in school and college too and see we are here regardless of everything. We might face some professional consequences in future but nothing in academics." –R1

"No reading and writing are ever promoted in our system. It is just about passing exams only. There was no such concept in my school and college. Imitation and rattaification is what we are taught from very early stage." –R13

"My school and college only focus on syllabus, nothing beyond it was welcomed. I have a weak foundation because of it, no English, no reading and no writing. My parents left everything on school and they thought that school is enough. Now when I look back, I realize that I should have read books other than my syllabus and should have worked on creative writing. I am not blaming my parents because they didn't know themselves but I must say that system needs to change." –R8

"Even though I studied in English medium school and college but there was no English there, all these are similar to Urdu medium apart from writing in exams. They didn't prepare me for university so I suffered a lot here. I am still better than others because I am able to overcome it but seeing others struggling and accepting everything as it is making me feel sad for them." –R4

3.2 Unintentional Plagiarism

The second main element of undergraduate student plagiarism is unintentional plagiarism (Figure 1). Students in academia are involved in unintentional plagiarism for so long that they start considering it as a norm. Plagiarism is introduced in their university life and is taken seriously in final year only. These students who have believed it to be normal have difficulty in accepting it as an academic dishonesty and intellectual theft. They struggle to grasp the concept and to change ways while meeting the challenges of their final year life.

"Plagiarism was introduced in final year and I didn't know anything about it before. A friend of mine told me about it and I was shocked and

somewhat fearful too that what am I going to do now.” –R2

“Plagiarism was introduced in my second year and I felt really bad at that time because it was difficult for me to accept it and mend ways.” –R6

“The term plagiarism was used in first year but it was never taken seriously, it was just a term only like many others we read about. The concept itself was taken seriously in final year because of thesis.” –R10

“Plagiarism was introduced in our first thesis class in final year, before that there was no such thing and unintentional plagiarism was thriving.” –R3

“Plagiarism was introduced in my final year and it is related to the research work only.” –R1

“I have heard about plagiarism and it is synonymous to copy pasting right? I am still not introduced to it properly. I know it is considered wrong and stuff but I don’t know about it fully. Maybe we will officially be introduced to it in our thesis class which is next week.” –R12

“I was working as a content writer in my 2nd year and that’s where I came to know about plagiarism. It was an internship of few months only and I thought plagiarism is for workplaces only. I didn’t know that it is seriously related to academia as well till my 5th semester.” –R8

“Plagiarism was introduced in my third year’s research course and most of my class mates associate it with research only. I never heard about the term before it.” –R4

3.3 Silent Agreement of Teachers

The last main element which completes the cycle of undergraduate student plagiarism is the silent agreement of teachers (Figure 1). Plagiarism has been circulated in the system and it has remained undetected by the teachers. Data shows that teachers do not use plagiarism detection software and students are not aware about the existence of these software. They are fully unaware of plagiarism reports and said that their plagiarism has never been detected in their whole undergraduate program. Undergraduate student’s plagiarism is known by teachers but very few to none measures are taken against it. There is no deterrent force to prevent it.

“I understand that I am a student and I was not aware about plagiarism and its prevention but my teachers knew it and they never pointed it out in my assignments before even though they were all plagiarized. Now in final year they are saying that they will check our thesis for plagiarism and I know that they are not going to do it because I asked my seniors and they told me that plagiarism is never checked here. There is no accountability for both teachers and students.” –R2

“I don’t think my plagiarism has ever been detected. The thing is that we are danda quom (a nation which works best under force) so if this fear was there then I might not have plagiarized all these years. Teachers knew that plagiarism occur and many times they even encourage, just see the marks distribution list and you will know everything.” –R5

“There is this teacher who is very strict about plagiarism and she always detect it. She insults everyone who is guilty of it in front of the whole class so I avoid doing plagiarism in her course because she really insults plagiarizers. Other than her there is no such big deal of plagiarism.” –R7

“It is an ethical responsibility of teachers to point out any wrongs done by students but they don’t mind plagiarism because it works for both teachers and students. Everyone in this system has short cut mindset. They just want things to be done no matter what the approach and this includes both teachers and students. I plagiarize and no one cares.” –R9

“There is no check and balance. Teachers don’t detect plagiarism and they don’t care who plagiarize and who don’t. There were assignments which were plagiarism free and no one appreciated me in it and then there are other assignments which are plagiarized but no one said anything against it either. This is how it works here and this is what it

always has been.” –R6

“I have this confidence that teachers are not going to detect plagiarism and this came from experience. It is as if they are silently agreeing with it, they know we all plagiarize but they don’t do anything about it.” –R12

“There is no check and balance. No one cares what is happening in the system, we plagiarize and teachers don’t detect it. I don’t know who to blame, perhaps we all are equally responsible.” –R10

“Teachers only motive is course completion and they are not really interested in what we do. They don’t mostly give us conceptual assignments because themselves have to read it first before giving marks so they choose ease for themselves and for students. Same assignments, same topic, same material and same marks for everyone.” –R11

“My plagiarism has never been detected because I never plagiarize from single source, I take material from different sources so teachers can’t detect it.” –R14

“This is my final year and no one has ever taken plagiarism seriously. It has never been detected because I think it doesn’t matter much in assignments but now teachers seem strict about thesis. I know they are not going to check it because that’s what seniors told me but I still work hard in it because I never know it might get caught eventually and it is wrong to plagiarize in research too.” –R1

“The problem with the system is that these teachers are the product of same system. They are MPhil and PhDs from the same system and they don’t know how to prevent plagiarism because they have never seen it themselves. They don’t know much about it themselves then how are they going to do anything about it? So, they just like us go with the flow.” –R15

“You mentioned that there is a plagiarism detection software but I have never heard about it before because it is not used here, none that I hear of. Teachers who do detect plagiarism is only through their experience but never through software. We have never been told about it and also, we never give much importance to references.” –R16

3.4 Structural Description of the Components of Undergraduate Student Plagiarism

Plagiarism starts from the very beginning of the academic life. The whole system is shaped in a way which promotes imitation and rote learning (rattafication) in students. Our curriculum is not designed to promote actual critical thinking in students which make them dependent on the available material of books, internet and teachers’ notes. They make their own assignments and notes by copying material from different sources and are rewarded and appreciated by teachers. The practice continues in college too where little to no difference is found. There is no mention of plagiarism and importance of references anywhere in schools and colleges.

This behavior of students promotes unintentional plagiarism in universities. Students feel that it is normal to copy paste and do not question the authenticity of their work. Plagiarism is casually introduced to them in their first years as a term only, no serious approach is mentioned to them in the first years of their undergraduate life. Teachers know about the existence of plagiarism and they are not found to play an active role in its prevention. They know that students plagiarize in their assignments and reports but they don’t do anything about it. Therefore, students start believing that plagiarism is not a serious offence against anyone because there are no serious policies against it.

This unintentional plagiarism continues till their final year where they are introduced to the formal research methods and are expected to abide by it. These students who have been plagiarizing throughout their lives because they believe it was normal are suddenly put under the burden of unexpected pressure. They are not equipping with the tools which help them to live a plagiarism free life. They are not train to write on their own, they do not have grip on language, they don’t know how to give references, they have weak writing skills, and on top of it they

are not confident or sure about their ideas. Expecting a sudden change from students in their final year seems a little bit unrealistic to them. Therefore, plagiarism continues in the system. These students then become a part of professional world and carry this behavior along with them. Some of them wish to pursue teaching career and they practice the same behavior there. Students under their supervision will suffer the same fate, hence the cycle of plagiarism continues working in the system.

4. DISCUSSION

Many papers have been written to highlight the flaws in Pakistani educational system (Akbar & Khan, 2020; Rehman & Khan, 2011). The major flaw which Pakistan has failed to rectify is the curriculum of the educational system. It is designed in a way which does not promote any critical and scientific interests in students. Furthermore, it is still outdated and follows pre-partition policies. The examination system is also shaped in a way which glorify highest marks and does not value the intellectual growth of the students. Cheating, cramming, paper leaking and other academic dishonesties have been found to be rooted in examinations, while rote learning in students is appreciated and rewarded. All of these practices do not encourage students to think out of the box and come up with new ideas.

The problem extends with the lack of professional teaching staff. Political interference in the past has employed many unprofessional teachers which creates trouble for the system and students. Many teachers in a Pakistani education system are found to be teaching because of the sole purpose of earning their livelihood. They are overburden with large number of students and have limited freedom to practice their own creativity due to the pressure of the curriculum and large classes. Hence the old educational tradition of rote learning thrives in it. A proper administrative and supervision system could have solved these issues but this system is also found to be in the quicksand of its own problems.

The findings of present study explore and explains the effects of these shortcomings to the students' lives and its linkage with the undergraduate student plagiarism (Figure 1). Students in the study claim to be the product of very same system. When they enter in to the university life, they realize that they are not equipped with the power of critical thinking and are not able to create their own work. They have been accustomed to the rote learning so much so that they involve in unintentional plagiarism. This unintentional plagiarism becomes normal for them till their final year where research comes in. Unintentional plagiarism along with unawareness and positive attitudes towards plagiarism play an important role in undergraduate student plagiarism.

The concept of plagiarism is gaining attention throughout the world but its awareness in Pakistan is still a concern for academicians (Ramzan et al., 2012). The level of awareness among undergraduates regarding plagiarism is found to be related to the act itself. A number of studies in Pakistan has shown that the students hold positive attitudes towards plagiarism, which is alarming for the whole educational system (Rathore et al., 2015). The Higher Education of Pakistan has created a set of plagiarism policies and the only problem with it is the proper implementation. Lack of institutional awareness about plagiarism and little to no academic consequences of plagiarism further promote student plagiarism (Javaeed et al., 2019). The findings of this study also shed light on the issue by explaining it through students' perspectives. Students start believing that plagiarism is a normal act and do not take it seriously because of the casual behavior of institutions and teachers. They plagiarize throughout their academic life and mostly come to know about it in their final year because of the research requirements. Expecting them to change their ways all of a sudden in final year where the academic pressure is at high is a bit too unrealistic. Students also believe that they do not have time and skills to completely abandon plagiarism on their own in their final undergraduate years because they have not been trained and informed throughout their academic life.

Seeing their teachers indulging in plagiarism (Gadit, 2006) also strengthen their plagiarism. The present findings have shown the positive and negative role of teachers in undergraduate student plagiarism. They believe that teachers know about their students' plagiarism but despite

it they don't do much about its prevention and they also do not take any strict measures against it, which signifies their silent agreement towards students' plagiarism. These negative experiences with teachers have made them believe that plagiarism is a norm and a justifiable act.

The incidents of plagiarism in higher academicians in Pakistan has been at rise in the last decade. Multiple cases of plagiarism had been reported and some of them are still unsolved. These academicians hold the position of authority in educational institutions and have supervised many students in research (Khan, 2019). The point of concern is their impact on the students. Students do not learn anything under their supervision other than to plagiarize just as them. These are the students who will enter into the professional world. Plagiarists have said that they will more likely choose a career which requires less critical thinking and originality, and according to them teaching is one of their choices. They will become a part of the system and will not question or challenge plagiarism because they have been trained this way. Hence plagiarism continues in the system and students will be a part of this vicious cycle. The normalization of imitation within classroom culture reflects Heidegger's (1962) notion of being-in-the-world, where practices acquire meaning through everyday social embeddedness. "The vicious cycle model" resonates with Moustakas' (1994) emphasis on how interrelated themes constitute the essence of experience.

5. CONCLUSION

The structure of plagiarism discovered and discussed in the study is alarming for policy makers. Plagiarism is not limited to the academia rather it spreads widely through it. These students and degree holders will enter in to the professional world and are more likely to continue plagiarizing because they themselves claim that they do not have skills, confidence and power to change themselves. The findings show that the strict, student friendly and effective policies from the grass root levels are required in the educational system of Pakistan. The structure and curriculum of schools and colleges should be of the nature which promote creativity and critical thinking among students. Marks and academic competition are important but the equal importance should be given to the personal and intellectual growth of the students.

The attention of policy makers is required to create policies which equip students with self-confidence, knowledge and determination to abandon plagiarism before starting their undergraduate programs. Professional degrees focus on sharpening the skills related to the particular field. It does not have time and means to do the basic work on students which should have been done by schools and college. Most of the students fail to meet the demands of university life because of it. Evidence suggests that plagiarism education integrated at the high school level, coupled with teacher training (Sutherland-Smith, 2010), can foster long-term integrity cultures. Therefore, interventions should move beyond punishment measures to incorporate academic writing instruction at early stages. Policies should be made on administrative levels throughout the educational system to maintain the uniformity, to strengthen the structures, and to execute the existing policies effectively. A system is in dire need of proper check and balance on both teachers and students.

6. LIMITATIONS

The findings of this research study have following limitations:

- The results of the study are not verified by any statistical method.
- It studies only students' experiences and descriptions.
- It does not include teachers and staff's point of views.
- Given the purposive sampling of students who self-identified as frequent plagiarizers, findings should be viewed as context-specific and not statistically generalizable. Further studies could triangulate with teacher and administrator perspectives.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author confirms that there are no financial or non-financial competing interests to declare.

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