



DELVING INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IN DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM ISSUES AMONG ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGY

Rulan S. Morial¹, Henry C. Ligan, PhD²

¹Teacher II, Esperanza Elementary School

²Full-Time Professor, University of Mindanao Tagum College, Part-time Professor, St. Mary's College of Tagum, Inc.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore and describe the experiences of elementary school teachers in dealing with plagiarism issues among elementary students in the DepEd schools, Division of Davao del Norte. 14 participants were selected through purposive sampling, of which seven engaged in in-depth interviews while another seven participated in focus group discussions. The results revealed the experiences of elementary teachers such as pervasive plagiarism acts, lack of engagement, challenges in reforming undesirable learning behaviors, and noticing self-doubts and poor performance. Moreover, the coping mechanisms of the participants were student encouragement and communication, crafting of rules against academic dishonesty, academic integrity strategies, reporting and seeking advice, and collaborative approaches. Then, their insights were establishing standards and communication, creating policies and countermeasures, cultivating positive student behavior, promoting academic integrity, and cultivating patience. With these findings, it can be gleaned that elementary schools must strengthen their policies and programs against the menace of plagiarism. Teachers must also be wary of this fact and never give the students opportunities to commit plagiarism in the classroom. More so, considering that the elementary level covers the formative years of the children, it is also important to address the problem by focusing on their moral and spiritual aspects.

KEYWORDS: elementary students and teachers, plagiarism issues, qualitative research, phenomenology, Davao del Norte

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism or academic dishonesty has been a challenging focus for educators nowadays. With the presence of technology today, they can just copy and paste answers to assignments and other academic tests. Plagiarism does not only exist among students in higher education, but this is also being observed in elementary education as what I and my fellow teachers have observed among the students after the return of full face-to-face classes. Falsifying information, concealing errors, collaborating with others when not permitted, and plagiarizing are all examples of dishonest behavior. This poses a challenge among teachers particularly on how to deal with the plagiarism issues among learners, especially if the school has no measures to detect it.

In South Korea, academic dishonesty has been observed as a result of an increase in students taking online classes to complete their degrees, which has led to them simply copying and pasting answers to questions (Costley, 2019). Similarly, in Thailand, students have numerous opportunities to plagiarize content they come across on the internet (Nagi & John, 2020). Since Thai students have a low level of English proficiency, there is an acceptance of replicating from the internet. Additionally, in

China, students plagiarize on written English assignments, and it is ultimately necessary to explain and comprehend the mindset of students who plagiarize, as they are unable to construct good written English communication (James et al., 2019).

In the Philippines, for decades, Filipino scholars have conducted research on academic integrity, the majority of which focused on cheating on assignments and exams, with more than half of them involving students in elementary and secondary school. Several studies have found evidence of increasing academic dishonesty in academic institutions. Academic dishonesty at the primary level is more commonly understood as exam cheating. Cheating on homework or assignments is common due to the increased opportunities provided by the circumstances as well as the freedom from teacher supervision. It is blamed on the teacher's incompetence, peer consent, a rigid curriculum, and a lack of strict school policy that students can copy and paste answers from the internet. With this, sometimes, the academic performance of the students, most particularly in written work is not measured objectively (Beruin, 2022).

In the Division of Davao del Norte, particularly in Sto. Tomas East District, plagiarism among public school students has been



noted by the teachers. These acts of plagiarism include copying from the internet and then pasting to the assignment questions given to the learners. Also, learners are too dependent on duplicating notes or statements without acknowledging the authors of the passage of articles. This has posed a challenge for teachers who have experience with plagiarism among learners. This was supported by Beruin (2022) who claimed that students commit plagiarism due to various possible external (peer involvement, overwhelming academic workload, difficulty of subject/course, limited teacher assistance, parental expectations, and use of digital technology) and internal (laziness or procrastination, lack of proper time management, fear of failure, poor learning capability, motivation, state of mental health, self-attitude, capability, and intention) influencing factors.

The researcher deemed the urgency to conduct the study considering that there is an existing problem of plagiarism among learners. It is not yet conclusive, but the chances of this problem's recurrence in a complicated situation may happen since at this present time, teachers and students are still on the catch-up measures especially since the country has just turned into a full-blown face-to-face teaching-learning delivery. There are similar articles dedicated by Bautista and Pentang (2022) about academic integrity in higher education institutions and Campbell (2019) on cultivating academic honesty among elementary learners. These articles only served as additional literature on academic honesty and integrity among learners and they did not try to uncover the experiences of teachers regarding the plagiarism behaviors of their elementary learners. There is limited research data regarding this research topic, which merits the scholarly investigation of this study.

The study is of social relevance since this may provide the Department of Education with some better strategies on how teachers handle plagiarism issues. Through this study, strategies against pupil plagiarism may be devised through the collaboration of concerned teachers and collaborators in the elementary department. More importantly, emphasis on values such as honesty and integrity may be highlighted in the classroom, all in order to discourage this dishonest behavior.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and describe the experiences of elementary school teachers in dealing with plagiarism issues among elementary students in the Division of Davao del Norte for the school year 2023-2024. The study may also be deemed important by teachers, students, school heads/administrators, Department of Education, and future researchers. To achieve the study purpose, the following research questions were devised:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers in dealing with plagiarism issues among elementary students?
2. How do teachers cope with the challenges in dealing with plagiarism issues among elementary students?

3. What are the insights drawn from the experiences of teachers in dealing with plagiarism issues among elementary learners that can be shared to others?

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This qualitative study focused on 14 elementary teachers' experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights into dealing with student plagiarism. The participants were the elementary teachers teaching in the Division of Davao del Norte. This study was conducted from July 2023 to August 2023 for the school year 2023-2024.

The study was dependent on the participant's ability to describe their experiences and respond to interview questions. Participants have varying levels of knowledge and experience with student plagiarism, so their opinions may be subjective. Higher authorities were informed of the rationale and purpose of the study because administrative permission was required to gain access to informants and participants.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I employed qualitative research design utilizing phenomenology as its approach. This study adapted the qualitative research design for it dwelled on the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of elementary teachers pertinent to the topic of this thesis.

My participants were the 14 elementary teachers of the Davao del Norte division for the school year 2023-2024, chosen from the 3 schools of Sto. Tomas East District. I chose seven for my in-depth interview (IDI) and seven for the focus group discussion (FGD). Purposive sampling was also used in looking for participants who can provide invaluable information about the thesis of this research.

For my participants, I considered the inclusion criteria as the following: (a) they must be public elementary teachers in the Division of Davao del Norte; (b) they must be coming from the public schools situated within Sto. Tomas East District; (c) they must be handling Grade 6 learners either as advisers or subject teachers; (d) they must have a minimum teaching experience of five years; and (e) they must have experiences about plagiarism among their learners whose writeups and essays in English were commonly identified to be plagiarized. For the exclusion criteria, the study did not include teachers in high school and college.

In pursuing this study, I performed the following duties in this study: as someone who ensured the ethical conduct of the study; as an interviewer; as a moderator; as a person who recorded the interview; as a transcriber; as a translator; as data analyst; and as a person who performed member checking. Interviews were the primary sources of data for this study, while published articles were the secondary sources of data for the same. The interviews were done in person, following the highest ethical standards and strictly adhering to the tenets of trustworthiness in qualitative research.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants shared their various experiences as elementary teachers who witnessed the plagiarism issues committed among their students. These experiences were organized systematically into themes which can be viewed in Table 1. In this section, there

were four themes which surfaced from the responses of the elementary teachers in the study. These themes were the following: pervasive plagiarism acts, lack of learning engagement, challenges in reforming undesirable learning behaviors, and noticing self-doubts and poor performance.

Table 1
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Lived Experiences of Teachers in Dealing with Plagiarism Issues among Elementary Students

Themes	Core Ideas
Pervasive Plagiarism Acts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> observing students who are copying answers without paraphrasing witnessing an all word-for-word copying of answers doubting the ability of students to use certain words which leads to the conclude that the answers were plagiarized confirming the suspicion of plagiarized answers upon doing internet search copying in assignments and projects, including Google ideas seeing identical answers among students in their assignment submissions noticing frequent student plagiarism in challenging writing tasks such as writing articles and biographies noticing plagiarism especially when writing essays
Lack of Learning Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> observing short answers with lacking explanations among students detecting plagiarism that is linked to lack of interest in lessons copying from the internet without any effort to modify their answers lacking effort and relying on others' ideas in writing which leads to plagiarism having lack of student attention during lessons which leads to confusion
Challenges in Reforming Undesirable Learning Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> difficulty in fostering independent learners having difficulty in changing the students' copying behavior facing difficulty with students continuing to plagiarize despite correction encountering difficulty in addressing their laziness in learning
Noticing Self-doubts and Poor Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> copying due to lack of confidence in one's own ideas having difficulty in generating their own writing which led students to rely on the internet having difficulty in identifying students who copy answers

The experiences of the participants were supported by different pieces of literature. For an instance, the theme is reinforced by Zaher et al. (2020) which cited that numerous scholarly investigations have presented analogous conclusions, identifying Iran, China, India, Japan, Korea, Italy, Romania, Turkey, and France as the nations with the greatest frequency of retractions resulting from plagiarism. Many of the scientific works that students complete dishonestly, such as exams, scientific research, assignments, quizzes, and research projects, have become contaminated with plagiarism. In consonance, the study of Horbach and Haffman (2019) outlined the potential internal

causes of plagiarism, including indifference, sloth or procrastination, poor time management, fear of failing, poor learning capacity, motivation, mental health issues, self-attitude, capability, and intention, as well as external causes, including peer pressure, an excessive workload, a challenging course or subject, few teacher resources, parental expectations, and the use of digital technology.

In response to the challenges faced by elementary teachers, they revealed how they coped with these difficulties on the plagiarism issues committed among their students in schools. These coping



strategies were organized into themes which can be seen in Table 2. In this portion, we can see five themes which encapsulated the strategies that they used to cope with the mentioned plagiarism issues. These themes include: student encouragement and

communication, crafting rules against academic dishonesty, academic integrity strategies, reporting and seeking advice, and collaborative approaches.

Table 2

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Strategies of the Teachers in the Challenges in Dealing with Plagiarism Issues among Elementary Students

Themes	Core Ideas
Student Encouragement and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> encouraging open dialogue with students utilizing open dialogue to convey the negative implications of plagiarism encouraging the students to study hard consistently advising students against cheating emphasizing consequences of plagiarism
Crafting Rules Against Academic Dishonesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emphasizing the importance of following instructions advocating for a school-wide honor code making students sign a logbook as a commitment to avoid repeating plagiarism addressing plagiarism by explaining consequences issuing warnings and anecdotal notebook to address plagiarism issues
Academic Integrity Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> managing student plagiarism through increased reading time addressing plagiarism gradually by giving reminders encouraging oral expression to assess learning investing time in research to develop new strategies
Reporting and Seeking Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reporting of experiences among more experienced colleagues such as grade heads and master teachers about the similar answers of students sometimes reporting plagiarism to higher DepEd administrators seeking guidance from a master teacher who only advised the use of minimal measures seeking advice from co-workers
Collaborative Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> collaborating with colleagues for support and guidance seeking advice from colleagues to address plagiarism issues sharing incidents of plagiarism with co-teachers for personal guidance suggesting the option of consulting the guidance counselor for plagiarism issues

In connection, previous literature underscores the simplistic reliance on punitive measures or sanctions alone to address plagiarism which fails to recognize the nuanced motivations and circumstances underlying academic misconduct. While consequences may serve as deterrents, they often fall short in addressing the root causes or educating individuals about proper citation practices and ethical scholarship. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to combating plagiarism should encompass not only disciplinary actions but also proactive measures such as promoting awareness, providing resources for skill development, fostering a culture of academic integrity, and offering support mechanisms to empower individuals to engage in ethical academic practices. By adopting a holistic approach, educational institutions can better cultivate a culture of integrity and responsibility, ultimately mitigating the prevalence of

plagiarism within academic communities (Ndebele, 2020). Hence, rules and punishments are integral in deterring plagiarism behavior.

Moreover, the elementary teachers shared that they have reflected on the plagiarism issues among their students which led to various realizations and insights. These realizations were organized systematically into themes which can be viewed in Table 3. There were five themes which helped explain the realizations of elementary teachers regarding the issue being discussed in this paper. These themes were the following: establishing standards and communication, creating policies and countermeasures, cultivating positive student behavior, promoting academic integrity, and cultivating patience.



Table 3

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of Teachers on Dealing with Plagiarism Issues among Elementary Students

Themes	Core Ideas
Establishing Standards and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set standards before giving activity in the classroom • correct students and address their wrongdoings as a first step • remind the students about the consequences of plagiarism • provide guidance to students • conduct plagiarism-related symposium • encourage open communication and dialogue
Creating Policies and Countermeasures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advocate for a school-wide honor code with consequences for cheating • suggest the implementation of a reward and penalty system • recommend the confiscation of cellphones during class • providing prevention and investigation for penalties regarding plagiarism • suggest the creation of policies and orientation programs • collaborate with religious groups addressing dishonesty issues
Cultivating Positive Student Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • train students' attitudes, communication, and socialization skills • emphasize the value of honesty • recommend the importance of teaching values to students to inculcate the fear of committing plagiarism • focus on values formation by discussing that plagiarism is not good • realize plagiarism as a bad habit through values formation • advise students that the plagiarism they committed is wrong
Promoting Academic Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain the significance of their very own answers • stress the need to not ignore and address plagiarism issues seriously before it worsens • emphasize the importance of studying over copying
Cultivating Patience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teach patience and guide students in giving their own ideas • advise teachers to have patience in checking pupils' outputs • find ways to change the attitude of those engaged in plagiarism • extend one's patience and understanding

The insights generally point the importance in cultivating the positive behaviors of their students. Research has indicated that developing traits in students such as self-control and academic self-efficacy can reduce their propensity to plagiarize. Thus, the theme is supported by Bautista and Pentang (2022) who mentioned that plagiarism is a recognized problem in higher education institutions worldwide. The association between positive attitudes regarding plagiarism and each element of negative emotionality is mediated by academic self-efficacy and self-control. It was also mentioned that future studies should look at the possibility of increasing academic self-efficacy and self-control by employing stress, anxiety, and depression alleviation measures, which could lower positive attitudes toward plagiarism.

In support, the idea of theme was in agreement with that of Camara et al. (2017) who revealed a crucial link between student intention and attitude towards plagiarism. Their study indicates that students inclined to plagiarize often hold positive attitudes towards academic misconduct, while those less inclined tend to have negative attitudes. This highlights the significance of addressing both intention and attitude in fostering a culture of

academic integrity. Educators and institutions must prioritize initiatives aimed at shaping positive attitudes towards originality, honesty, and ethical scholarship to effectively combat plagiarism and uphold academic standards.

CONCLUSIONS

I have personally come across instances of plagiarism among my own elementary students after the pandemic ended, and this study has helped me to a great degree to confirm that this issue is really a serious concern for the Department of Education. Thus, I have come to the conclusion that actions must be devised to correct these behaviors and reverse the effects of plagiarism on the present quality of learning of the pupils. This kind of behavior should be corrected as soon as the elementary days of the learners because these days are the formative phases of the personality of the learners. Leaving this issue aside would only encourage an undesirable culture of cheating in schools later which the affected students would carry from womb to tomb.

Personally, my belief lies in an integral part of the kind of values education and upbringing that learners receive at home from their parents or guardians. Values such as honesty, integrity, and



earnest desire for genuine learning are things that can be developed initially at home and imparted personally by the student's parents. It is time for everyone to be cognizant of this issue and of the fact that there is a need to revisit the values of education for the pupils. By looking into this aspect more closely, we may be able to find solutions to persisting problems in our community which includes the issues of plagiarism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study holds numerous implications for teaching practice that are addressed to public school teachers, students, school heads, and the Department of Education. Thus, the study delivers insights and ideas which can be considered and utilized by the mentioned sectors to optimize the education system, curriculum, and academic integrity in public schools.

On one hand, the study implies that teachers may collaborate with their colleagues and higher-ups in the Department of Education to find solutions to the persisting problems of plagiarism among elementary students. They may attend seminars on pedagogy as well as invest on educational resources in an effort to increase learners' engagement in lessons particularly in writing activities. They may also hold symposiums and orientations which inform students about plagiarism, its consequences, responsible use of information resources on the internet, and certain practices to avoid intentional and unintentional plagiarism. Above these, teachers should also walk the talk so that they serve as great examples of academic honesty which they constantly preach about.

On the other hand, the results encourage the students to prioritize learning than getting high grades. This study also serves as a reminder that academic integrity is an important concept which merits no additional grade but is instrumental in developing the wholeness of the moral character of the students. Students themselves and their parents or guardians should make great efforts to learn independently and consistently apply the values that are taught to them at school, as the heart of education is the education of the heart of the learners.

For the school heads and the Department of Education, strengthening the policies and penalties of plagiarism must be enforced in order to mitigate the problem in the elementary school level. Considering the suggestions highlighted in the study such as redefining the rules and regulations, advocating the honor code, conducting of reminders to emphasize the negative effects of plagiarism may be done by the thinkers in the upper echelons of the department to address this issue substantially. Acquisition of anti-plagiarism software programs may also be considered.

We have learned from pursuing this study that the issue of plagiarism is also pervasive in the context of elementary teaching as opposed to majority of related literature which only dwelt on plagiarism and cheating in the contexts of secondary and tertiary schools. With this in mind, this adds to the body of literature which has an identified gap in terms of the literature on plagiarism

issues in the elementary level. Further, this will also encourage future studies which will add more angles on the phenomenon that is investigated.

At this rate, researchers in the future may dedicate more similar studies employing different research designs and engaging participants or respondents from elementary schools in other places or multiple countries. Future studies may also be devoted on uncovering the factors of committing plagiarism among elementary students. Researchers may also test the efficacy of the mentioned strategies in the study to counteract plagiarism such as the use of honor codes, setting rules and regulations, giving of constant reminders on the consequences of plagiarism. Strategies to be tested may not be only limited to such which can also be another opportunity for future study by other researchers in the field of education.

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