

Paid Academic Writing Services: A Perceptual Study of Business Students

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Abstract

It seems challenging to detect the beneficiary students of the Academic Paid Writing Services, which refers to a practice in which authors or students appoint professional writers to produce scholarly work (including research papers, university assignments, research reports, and so on) with a predefined style. This study aimed to explore the factors leading the students in higher education to choose the paid Academic Writing Services (PAWS), which affects their performance and personal development due to contract cheating and make them realize that learning is better than grades as through self-explorations only a person can get something better. By employing quantitative approach to obtain information associated with PAWS, data was gathered from 117 business students enrolled in six Higher Education Institutes in Karachi, Pakistan, using adopted questionnaire having close-ended questions with 5-point Likert scale, measuring students' attitude towards class assignments, their awareness about plagiarism, and their attitude about academic paid writing services. The results revealed that male students were more inclined towards paid writing services than their counterpart female students were and the increase in Students' Attitude towards Assignments brought the increase academic paid writing services. Therefore, academic professionals servicing in universities are recommended to take due care of the two factors to prevent the increased paid academic wiring services.

Keywords: *Class Assignments, Contract Cheating, Paid Academic Writing Services, Plagiarism*

INTRODUCTION

In academia, Paid Academic Writing Services (PAWS) refers to a practice in which authors or students appoint professional writers to produce scholarly work (including research papers, university assignments, research reports, and so on) with a predefined style. Labelled as 'contract cheating,' Lines (2016) defines the PAWS as a creation of work, which is tailored to fulfil the academic requirements of students and, most amazingly, none of the original writing credits is recognised to the ghostwriter. PAWS are asserted as an academic writing piece produced by a ghost writer for someone who contracted to produce work in respect of the fulfilment of

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the academic requirements in return of money. According to Curtis and Popal (2011), some students act as ghostwriters to produce work as a token of favour.

Roberts (2009) argues that the concept of Paid Writing, previously, was commonly practised by political leaders to improve their speeches to be delivered publically, as the professional writers had word-selection skills. Landers (2008), as cited by Fusch, Ness, Booker, and Fusch (2017), reporting for the Wall Street Journal, wrote that ghostwriting for presidential speeches and books have been a long-known implementation and seems to be commonly accepted. Ghostwriting is a legal and justifiable business, and many ghostwriting agencies have a significant history of success. Having the similar notion as the ghostwriting, the paid academic writing services are not acceptable in academia, as it is a rising misconduct in the academic field (Singh and Remenyi, 2016).

However, it seems challenging to detect the beneficiary students of the Academic Paid Writing Services. Figuring out the statistic report (appeared in 2013) of Turnitin, a commercial software known as internet-based plagiarism-detector, Wallace and Newton (2014) discuss that more than seven per cent students of higher education accepted to purchase the services of paid academic writing. Since the PAWS, being professional, are prospective to be high quality, students availing such services are able to achieve higher grades than that of the other students. According to Ma, Wan, and Lu (2008), universities, currently, do not have satisfactory policies in place to police the PAWS to prevent the unjust grading (Sarwar, 2016). It is right to state that PAWS lead the students to the academic success without learning, hardworking, and personal development. From this perspective, the present study aims at exploring the attitude of the business student in Karachi, Pakistan towards academic misconduct, particularly the Paid Academic Writing Services. This study explores the factors leading the students in higher education to choose the PAWS, which impacts on their performance and personal development due to contract cheating and make them realize that learning is better than grades as through self-explorations only a person can get something better

LITERATURE REVIEW

Paid Academic Writing Services are very common nowadays. A few students almost in the very university are involved in contract cheating and they repeatedly do, they hire a person (known as Ghost Writer) to give their online exams. Ghost Writers do various assignments and projects up to the required standards so that students can achieve their needed grade. They provide the services on the charges in accordance with the assignments level and time limitations (Roberts, 2009). The trend of PAWS is adopted by students due to various reasons including, they have lots of workload and pressure and unable to submit on time or lack in expertise regarding the subject such as no command in English writing skills or not good in numbers.

Conducting a study on academic ghostwriting, Zheng and Cheng (2015) found the ghostwriting as a common practice. Nevertheless, this practice is not acceptable in academia and thus requires to be excluded. One of the major issues associated with the ghostwriting practice includes the act of fraudulent, which creates injustice among the student's grades. According to Zheng and Cheng (2015), students committing this act must be punished severely and rusticated from the university. On the other hand, Das and Das (2014) argue that authors

of medical manuscripts should be provided with relaxation when it comes to the practice of ghostwriting. This is particularly because medical authors usually have a tough routine and thus cannot afford prolonged time devoted to writing. Nevertheless, they have utmost expertise in the therapeutic area. From this perspective, medical researchers often look for the support of professional medical writers with expertise in concise, clear, comprehensible, and coherent writing. Therefore, the contribution of such professional medical writers is merely limited to the preparation of a manuscript for publication. From this perspective, Das and Das (2014) do not consider as the ghostwriting unless the substantial contribution (contributing to the subject knowledge) of the professional medical writers.

Curtis and Clare (2017) conducting a study on Contract Cheating at Murdoch University, by floating out questionnaire found that deceitful, or written falsification through ghostwriting is an ethical issue among university students. The result of the study cited that few students involve in contract cheating, however repeatedly do. Similarly, research on Plagiarism and Ghostwriting by Fusch, Ness, Booker and Fusch (2017) the authors worked with students and able to draw conclusions that a small percentage of students are not interested in learning to write and plagiarized their works in academic tenure. Nevertheless, they are unable to clear doctoral programs thus plagiarism misleads them and affects negatively. Moreover, one article was Review on the primary and secondary reporting by Stretton (2014) using literature examination approach conclusions were drawn, that evidence of ghostwriting in the medical literature is restricted and can be incorrect. Primary reporting are not such suitable for meta-analysis whereas secondary estimates were not always authentic.

Conducting study on ghostwriters, Fisher, McLeod, Savage and Simkin (2016) through literature analysis and pilot study strategy the findings were as the online courses and test are increasing the rate of ghostwriting is also growing, which could be controlled by university management via numerous acts, as ghostwriting is considered unethical and contains negative impact on students. A similar study on Ghostwriters pledging grades was conducted by Lines (2016) by the students in Australia who seek this service able to found that majority purchased work received a passing grade. Moreover, higher grade if demanded to ghostwriting services. This type of cheating is undetectable by the authorities, as students make sure of it, which reveals a very disturbing situation for universities and threat to academic reliability and standards. Moreover, there was a study on plagiarism changing over time in which Maxwell, Curtis, and Vardanega (2008) discussed various researches namely cross-sectional, longitudinal and time lag. When the year's results were compared it was found that decline in the prevalence of plagiarism, however in ghostwriting there was no much difference between years proving that this trend has not discontinued.

Singh and Remenyi (2015) carried out the research to review the plagiarism and ghostwriting in existing situation and the misuse of it in academic. It was found that it could be disallowed by universities by the obligation of various penalties such as suspending or dismissing students from universities if they are indulging in such activities. Correspondingly research was conducted by Helgesson and Eriksson (2015) the role of plagiarism in research. In which they recommended that plagiarism should be understood before it would be used because plagiarism is used intentionally or unintentionally. Moreover, intentionally use of it involves deceitfulness and has various negative consequences. Similarly, Das and Das (2014) conducted a study that hiring someone to work on behalf of someone else is same as ghostwriting. Usually, the authors

who publish research on medical cannot give time to writing, so they hire a professional medical writer. The result was that ghostwriting and medical writer are not same as ghostwriting is immoral whereas medical writer contributes in the published research.

Draper, Ibezim and M. Newton (2017) carried study on Are Essay Mills submitting misrepresentation, this study was carried out against Fraud Act, which published in 2016. Essay mills are contracted cheating these are the facilities by students has been common in higher education. Results are found by comparing commonly essay-writing companies. It is usually used for research purpose and no plagiarism guarantee is given. Whereas research was done to check plagiarism, awareness by Starovoytova (2017) for analysing data descriptive statistics was used both qualitative and quantitative data. The outcome of the research was that it's the lack of lawful context to-manage literary theft, its-counteractive action and discipline, at higher-level such as Impersonation conduct, the perception of patent etc. Moreover, there was another research on plagiarism and associated profit with it. With respect to the issues identified with the different parts of scholastic misrepresentation, the way that has been sought after the most extreme may be the improvements of effective location programs that always request assist mechanical progressions and changes (Sarwar, Bhamani & Ahmad, 2017).

Levine and Pazdernik (2018) conducted a research on assessment of anti-programs. Keeping up theoretical reliability and avoiding students from deceitfulness is challenges looked by advanced education establishments. It was found that using an amalgamation of a structured education component associated with plagiarism could be detecting with anti-programs such as Turnitin. Furthermore, Rigby, Burton, Balcombe, Bateman and Malutu (2015) conducted research on contract cheating and its market where the study was on student's specified inclination to contribute in essay market. Descriptive statistics were used with a sample size of 90. It was expected progress of higher grade in increasing the service from essays but the price term was negative. Correspondingly, Clare, Walker and Hobson (2017) carried a study on the detection of contract cheating. Outcomes were analysed from one of the Australian university. Findings propose it might be conceivable to utilize existing authoritative information to distinguish appraisal things that give appropriate chances to contract deceiving. As well, the approach that has been used is commendable to assist educational institutions to cope up with contract cheating.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach to obtain information associated with the perception and contact of Business Students in higher education institutes in Karachi, Pakistan with paid Academic Writing Services. According to Creswell (2013), in quantitative research, the investigator uses post-positivist claims primarily in order to develop knowledge employing the strategies of inquiry including surveys and experiments and collects the data on pre-arranged instruments that yield the statistical data. In this study, data was gathered using adopted questionnaire having close-ended questions with the 5-point Likert scale to measure students' attitude towards class assignments (SAA), their awareness about plagiarism (SAP), and their attitude about academic paid writing services (PAWS). Data was collected from six Higher Education Institutes running Business Management Programmes in Karachi, Pakistan. 150 students were approached, based on quota sampling (25 students from each selected institute), enrolled in certain Business Programmes (including BBA, BS, MBA, and MS/M

Phil). Nevertheless, the acceptable responses – based on reverse coding – were 117 (n=117). Subsequent to the data gathering process, the gathered data was analysed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences by employing both the descriptive and inferential analysis, using regression test.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis

The following table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of respondents in terms of their age groups, different genders, current jobs, and educational levels. From this perspective, the highest number of observed respondents was of the age group between 20 and 25, which contained 96.6 per cent of the whole sample. Similarly, the proportion of the female students was high (53 %) as compared to that of the male students (47 %). The highest proportion of the students' sample reveals that 59 per cent of respondents were full-time students, whereas 87.2 per cent students were BBA students, who can be stated as the beginners in the higher education.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Students

Age-Wise Frequency of Participants		
	Frequency	Percent
20-25	113	96.6
26-30	3	2.6
31-35	1	.9
Gender-Wise Frequency of Participants		
Female	62	53.0
Male	55	47.0
Job-Wise Frequency of Participants		
Student Only	69	59.0
Accounting & Finance	11	9.4
Engineering	1	.9
Sales & Marketing	3	2.6
IT	4	3.4
HR & Recruitment	5	4.3
Education & Teaching	1	.9
PR, Advertising & Marketing	6	5.1
Other	17	14.5
Education-Wise Frequency of Participants		
BBA (or BS)	102	87.2
MBA	12	10.3
MS/MPhil	3	2.6
Total	117	100.0

Table 2 shows the Descriptive Statistics of the attitude of students towards their class

assignments, their awareness about plagiarism, and their attitude towards paid assignments services. From this perspective, the mean value of the attitude of students towards their class assignments is 2.8510 with .71018 as Std. Deviation and .06566 as Std. Error. It is worth noted that this attitude is of students towards their class assignment is measured as negative. On the other hand, the mean value of their awareness about plagiarism is 3.2863 with .75520 as Std. Deviation and .06982 as Std. Error, whereas the mean value of their attitude towards the paid assignments services is 2.5406 with 1.005 as Std. Deviation and .09294 as Std. Error.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Attitude

		Students' Attitude to- wards Assignments	Students' Awareness about Plagiarism	Students' Attitude to- wards Paid Assignments Services
<i>N</i>	<i>Valid</i>	117	117	117
	<i>Missing</i>	0	0	0
	<i>Mean</i>	2.8510	3.2863	2.5406
	<i>Std. Error of Mean</i>	.06566	.06982	.09294
	<i>Median</i>	2.8571	3.3333	2.5000
	<i>Mode</i>	2.86	3.67	2.00
	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	.71018	.75520	1.00535
	<i>Variance</i>	.504	.570	1.011
	<i>Skewness</i>	.184	-.802	.398
	<i>Std. Error of Skewness</i>	.224	.224	.224
	<i>Kurtosis</i>	-.071	.938	-.499
	<i>Std. Error of Kurtosis</i>	.444	.444	.444
	<i>Range</i>	3.71	4.00	4.00
	<i>Minimum</i>	1.29	1.00	1.00
	<i>Maximum</i>	5.00	5.00	5.00
	<i>Sum</i>	333.57	384.50	297.25

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the three variables having 17 items was .677, .605, and .712 respectively when conducted the pilot study on 15 observations, signifying that variables had relatively moderate internal consistency, whereas it was .665, .566, and .752 respectively when conducted upon the completion of data gathering, signifying that variables had relatively good internal consistency.

Table 3: Reliability

Reliability Statistics			
	Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
<i>Pilot</i>	<i>SAA</i>	.677	7
	<i>SAP</i>	.605	6
	<i>SAPAWS</i>	.712	4
<i>Final</i>	<i>SAA</i>	.665	7
	<i>SAP</i>	.566	6

SAPAWS

.752

4

Multiple regression was run on SPSS to predict the attitude of business students about the paid academic writing services (the variable, therefore, denotes as SAPAWS) based on other multiple variables (also known as predictors) including Students' Attitude towards Assignments (SAA) and Students' Awareness about Plagiarism (SAP) based on their different genders. From this perspective, the following table 4 represents the Model Summary providing the R, R Square, adjusted R², and standard error of the estimate to determine how well a regression model fits the data.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model Summary						
Gender	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
Female	1	.046a	.002	-.032		.98152
Male	1	.417a	.174	.142		.95293

a. Predictors: (Constant), SAP, SAA

The R column in table 4 reveals the values of Multiple Correlation Coefficient, which measures the strength of association between the dependent (SAPAWS) and independent variables including SAA and SAP. In the present example, the Multiple Correlation Coefficient for male students is higher (.417) than the female students (.046). The next column (R Square) represents the value of the coefficient of determination' that is variance proportion in the used dependent variable explained by the independent variables. The value of R Square for female students (.006) reveals that the used independent variables are explaining 2% of the variability of the dependent variable, SAPAWS. On the other hand, the value of R Square for male students (.174) reveals that the used independent variables are explaining 17.4% of the variability of the dependent variable, SAPAWS.

Table 5 is ANOVA, which displays the overall regression model to measure if it is a good fit. As a result, the table shows that the independent variables are statistically significantly predicting the dependent variable (SAPAWS), $F(2, 52) = 5.483$, $p < .007$, in the case of male students. Nevertheless, the independent variables are not statistically significantly predicting the dependent variable (SAPAWS), $F(2, 52) = .060$, $p < .939$, in the case of female students.

Table 5: ANOVA

Gender	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Female	Regression	.121	2	.060	.063	.939 ^b
	Residual	56.839	59	.963		
	Total	56.960	61			
Male	Regression	9.958	2	4.979	5.483	.007 ^b
	Residual	47.220	52	.908		
	Total	57.177	54			

a. Dependent Variable: SAPAWS

e. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, SAA

The coefficient table 6 indicates the results of Regression showing that the independent variables have a significant prediction on dependent variable, SAPAWS, in the case of male students while an insignificant prediction on the dependent variable, SAPAWS, in the case of female students. From this perspective, the independent variable (predictors) Students' Attitude towards Assignments (SAA) and Students' Awareness of Plagiarism predict the variance in the Students' Attitude towards Academic Paid Writing Services (SAPAWS) having sig values as .070 with t value as 1.850 and .087 with t value as 1.743. Although the sig values are greater than .05 (less than .10) and t values are lesser than 2 (close to 2) but the model tends to retain these two variables as significant predictors. The beta values under Unstandardized Coefficients reveal that the attitude of male students towards paid writing services (SAPAWS) increase by .312 and .319 with the increase of their awareness about plagiarism and class assignments respectively.

Table 6: Coefficients

Gender	Model	Coefficients ^a				t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Beta		
		B	Std. Error				
Female 1	(Constant)	2.640	.752			3.510	.001
	SAA	-.067	.229	-.040		-.292	.771
	SAP	-.019	.178	-.014		-.105	.917
Male 1	(Constant)	.789	.604			1.307	.197
	SAA	.312	.169	.256		1.850	.070
	SAP	.319	.183	.241		1.743	.087

a. Dependent Variable: SAPAWS

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study reveal that the more the students are aware of the academic assignments the more they are intended to go for the paid academic writing services. Nevertheless, this finding of the study does not agree with the study conducted by Fusch, Ness, Booker and Fusch (2017) concluding that the students not interested in learning are more inclined towards the paid academic writing services. As a result, such students are unable to clear doctoral programs thus plagiarism misleads them and affects negatively. On the other hand, Das and Das (2014) conducted a study that hiring someone to work on behalf of someone else is same as ghostwriting. Usually, the authors who publish research on medical cannot give time to writing, so they hire a professional medical writer. The result was that ghostwriting and medical writer are not same as ghostwriting is immoral whereas medical writer contributes in the published research. These results are agreed with the results of the present study, as medical students are aware of their academic assignments; nevertheless, they often do not have sufficient time to write and thus need to hire professional writers. Furthermore, the results are also consistent with the study conducted by Clare, Walker and Hobson (2017) in which outcomes were analysed by one of the Australian university. Findings propose it might be conceivable to utilize existing authoritative information to distinguish appraisal things that give appropriate chances to contract deceiving. As well, the approach that has been used is commendable to assist educational institutions to cope up with contract cheating.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that male students are more inclined towards the paid academic writing services. Furthermore, the students having more awareness about their academic assignments are more willing to hire the professional writers to write their academic assignments. From this perspective, it is recommended that academic professionals servicing in universities take due care of the two factors, male students and their attitude towards classroom assignments, to prevent the increased paid academic writing services. A few students, almost at every university, are involved in contract cheating and they repeatedly do the same. They hire a person (known as Ghost Writer) to give their online exams and class assignments. Ghost Writers do various assignments and projects up to the required standards so that students can achieve their required grades.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Age: 20-25 _____ 26-30 _____ 31-35 _____

Gender: Male _____ Female _____

Profession/Job: Student Only _____ Accounting & Finance _____ Engineering _____ Sales & Marketing _____ IT _____ HR & Recruitment _____ Education & Teaching _____ PR, Advertising & Marketing _____ Other _____

Education: BBA (or BS) _____ MBA _____ MS/MPhil _____

Codes	Students' Attitude towards Assignments	1	2	3	4	5
SAA1	I feel pressured to complete several of my assignments during a given time period					
SAA2	I am unable to complete my assignments due to poor time management skills					
SAA3	Time given for completion of assignments is mostly short					
SAA4	I think my content is not deep due to poor research skills					
SAA5	I cannot complete my assignments as per the requirements of instructor					
SAA6	I think I am capable enough to prepare a good assignment (R)					
SAA7	I find it difficult to construct sentences in English					

Students' Awareness about Plagiarism

SAP1	Copying others' work without crediting (citing) them constitutes plagiarism					
SAP2	Plagiarism is like stealing final exam ahead of time and memorizing the answers					
SAP3	There are serious consequences if I violate plagiarism policy					
SAP4	If any student lends me his/her assignment to look at and I turn it in as my own, we both should be penalized					
SAP5	Copying my own submitted or published work does not constitute plagiarism (R)					
SAP6	If my classmate gives me permission to resubmit his work, it constitutes as plagiarism					

Students' Attitude about Paid Writing Services

S A P A - WS1	Sometimes I feel tempted to avail paid Academic Writing Services in completing my work because other students are also doing it					
SAPAWS 2	If my professor assigns too much work in a course, availing paid Academic Writing Services to complete my assignment is justified					
S A P A - WS3	When my professor assigns very short deadline to complete my assignment, there is no harm if I offer someone money to complete it					
S A P A - WS4	To achieve high grades, It is justified if I ask other students or professionals to complete my assignment					