

# Equipping Students to Avoid Plagiarism

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## Issue Identified

This intervention was developed to explore students' understanding about plagiarism and confidence in knowing how to avoid it.

It was observed that students attending Academic Offences Panels for plagiarism generally stated that they understood what plagiarism was, despite appearing to have committed it in their work, suggesting there may be a mismatch between university interpretations and the understanding of some students. Students often expressed feeling so ashamed at being 'accused' of plagiarism that they did not access formal advice and representation.

Questions asked by students attending daily 1:1 Academic Drop-in Support sessions often indicated confusion and a lack of confidence about avoiding plagiarism and fear about the repercussions of committing plagiarism.



## Literature Review

Inadequate understanding about plagiarism and under developed skills in writing academically without plagiarising, can leave a student vulnerable to academic and moral accusations (Soni, 2018). Many students experience anxiety about unintentionally plagiarising (Parks 2003). Even if an AOP finds an accusation of plagiarism is false, the experience can further reduce students' academic confidence when facing future tasks (Adam, Anderson and Spronkon-Smith, 2017; Soni 2018).

*'I felt very ashamed. I was very embarrassed about it...I would never do such a thing...the way they spoke to me, it was like, 'You've done it'.  
English Second Language student (ESL)/ADIS user*

Problems with plagiarism may be due to different cultural backgrounds and diverse previous experiences of education, given the increasing numbers of international and non-native speakers of English (NNSE) students studying in the UK (Glendinning, 2014; Soni, 2018). It is recognised that Western students struggle with the concept of plagiarism so it should not be surprising if international students and NNSE struggle more and are often considered the main 'culprits' of plagiarising (Hayes and Introna, 2005; Johnson and Clerehan, 2005). Many students simply fear that their own words will not be adequate (Parks 2003).

Johnson and Clerehan (2005) suggest that curriculum and teaching methods have not been reviewed adequately to ensure inclusivity for NNSE students studying in the UK. Park (2003) found that there were also issues with false assumptions made about levels of understanding about authorship on commencement of study in higher education.

Statements about plagiarism and the consequences are often held in the Student Handbook or within university policy statements covering expectations about academic integrity, mitigating responsibility from the sphere of teaching and learning (Barrett and Cox, 2005; Gullifer and Tyson, 2013). Through attendance at AOPs, Brown and Janssen (2017) recognised the depth of the problems around plagiarism but found no practical suggestions for moving a solution to the classroom. They then introduced specific 2 hour workshops which were found to be beneficial in improving students understanding.

*'The process needs to be far more deeply embedded into the learning environment as students often don't understand it, until they fall foul of the regulations'  
Lecturer/AOP Panel Member*

Recommendations in the Higher Education Academy (HEA) 'Addressing Plagiarism' publication, offered as part of the HEAs 'Teaching International Students' (TIS) project (2011), include greater social and cultural awareness, consideration of course and assessments to insure inclusivity, and learning guidance and support to help prevent cases of plagiarism.

*'To be honest...I still don't understand really how that was regarded as plagiarism and how I could do it in another way'  
ESL student/ADIS user*

## Intervention Aims

A voluntarily attended, 1 hour workshop for NNSE studying at any level aims to

- 1). Unite understanding about **what** plagiarism is and the importance of respecting authorship.
  - 2). Explain to students **why** it is important to avoid plagiarising and the value of using their own words to demonstrate their learning.
  - 3). Teach students **how** to avoid plagiarising by developing academic skills for using direct quotes, summarising and paraphrasing.
- Particular emphasis will be placed on developing and practicing paraphrasing skills.

## Methodology

A survey was created to measure self-reported confidence levels in response to 8 statements (S) about understanding plagiarism, using related academic skills (S 1-5) and confidence about seeking support related to plagiarism (S 6-7) and prior learning (S 8) among workshop attendees (n=8). Participants comprised 5 x L4 and 3 x L7 NNSE students. Measures were taken immediately pre and post the workshop.

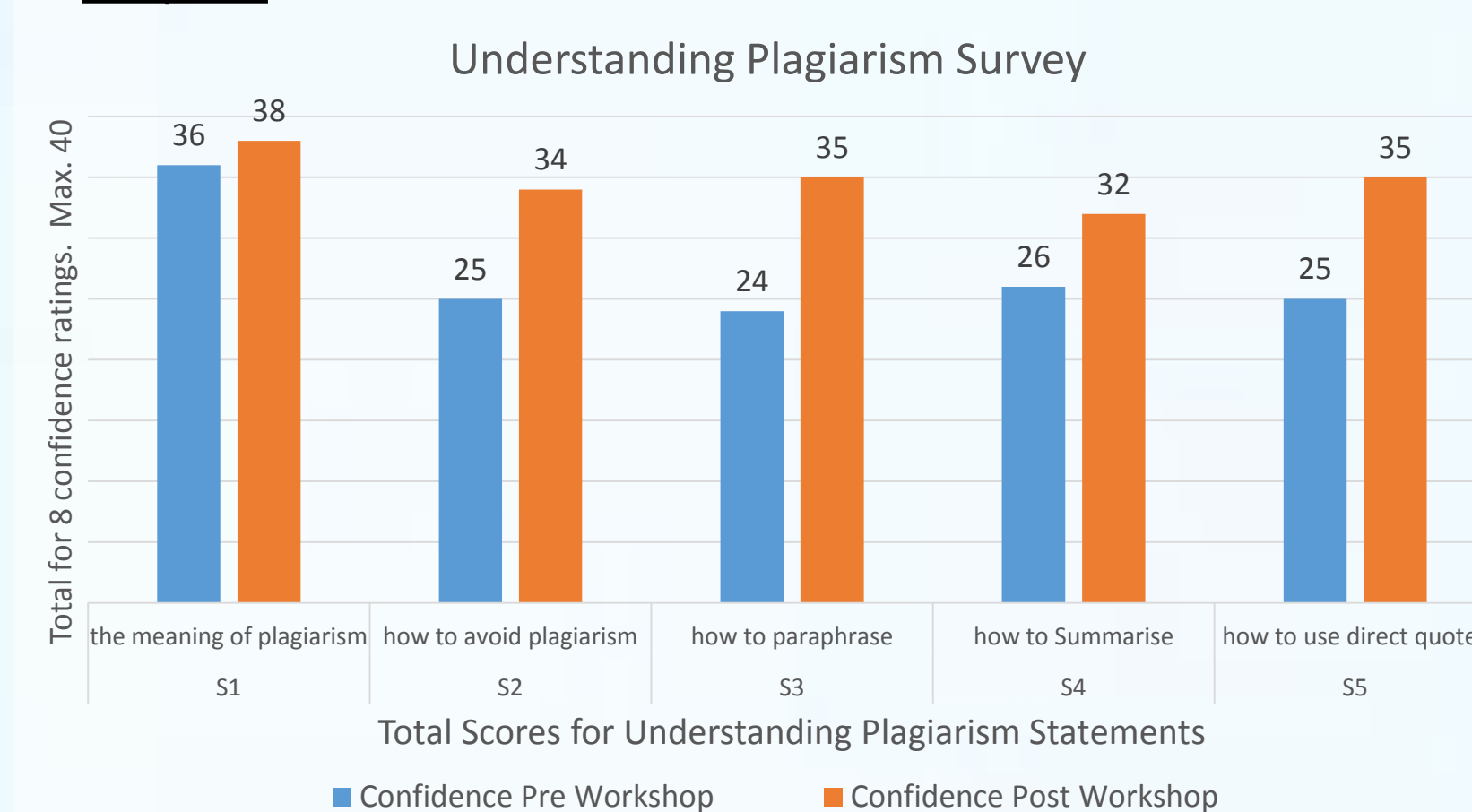
Statement (S) responses ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

S 1-7 all began: **'I am confident...'**

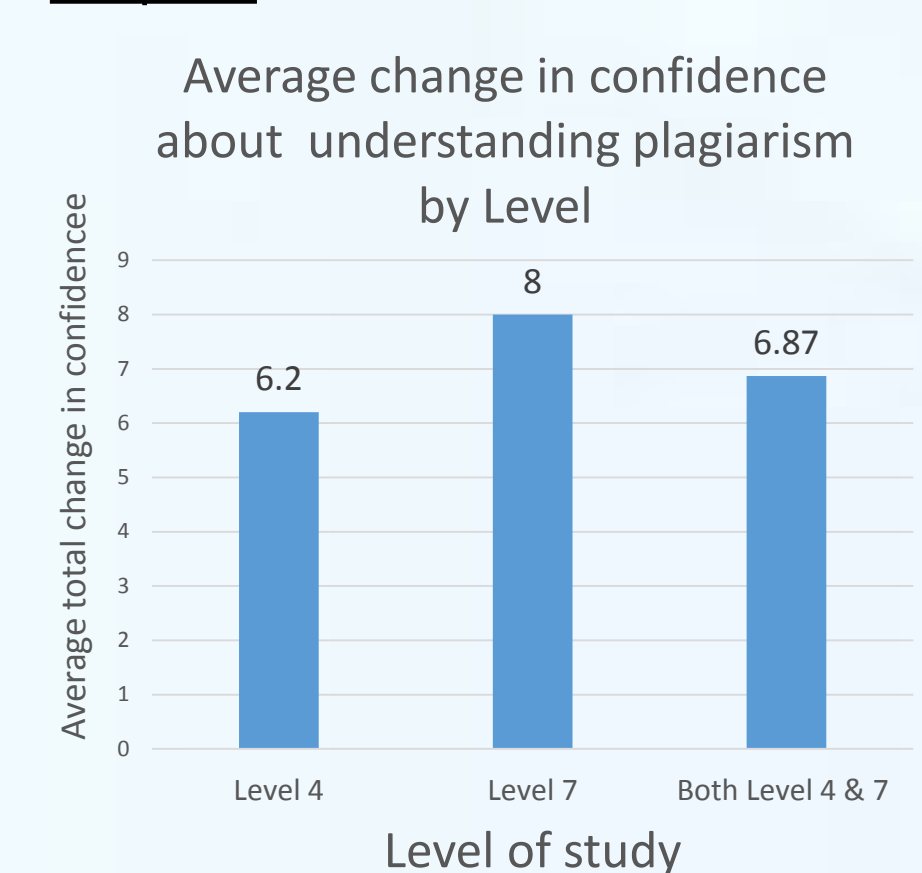
- S1. ...that I understand what plagiarism is
- S2. ...that I know how to avoid plagiarism
- S3. ...that I understand how to paraphrase
- S4. ...that I understand how to summarise
- S5. ...about how to use direct quotes
- S6. ...that I know how to access academic support services
- S7. ...about asking my personal tutor or lecturers when I need clarification
- S8. **I remember being taught about plagiarism on my course**

## Results

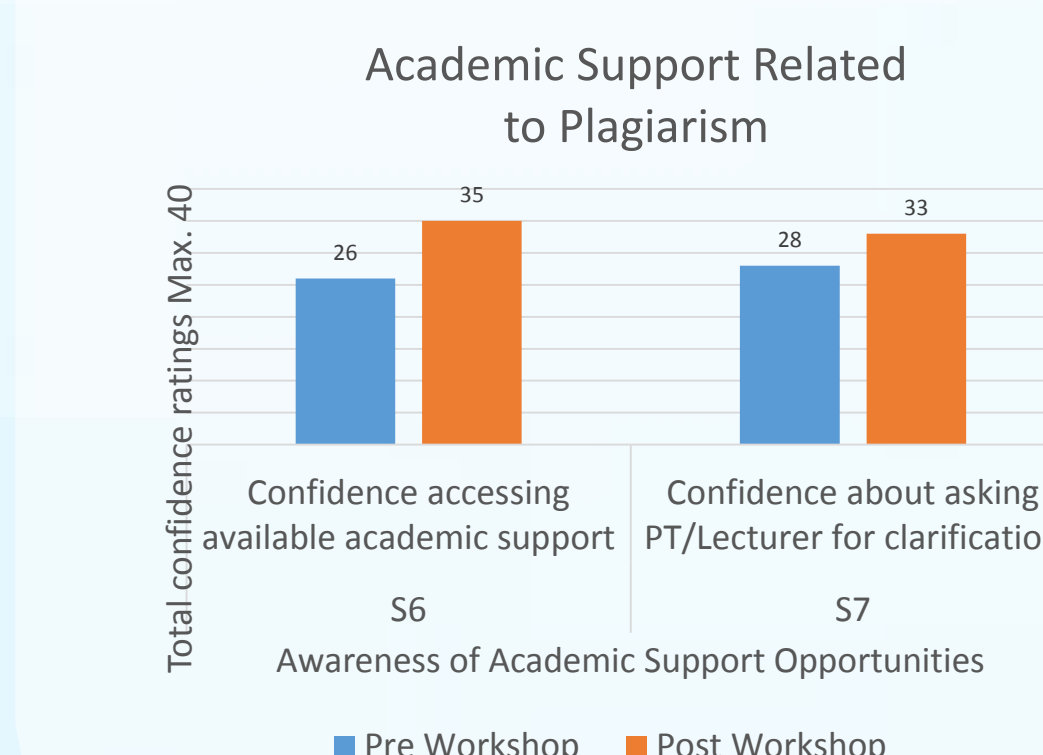
Graph 1.



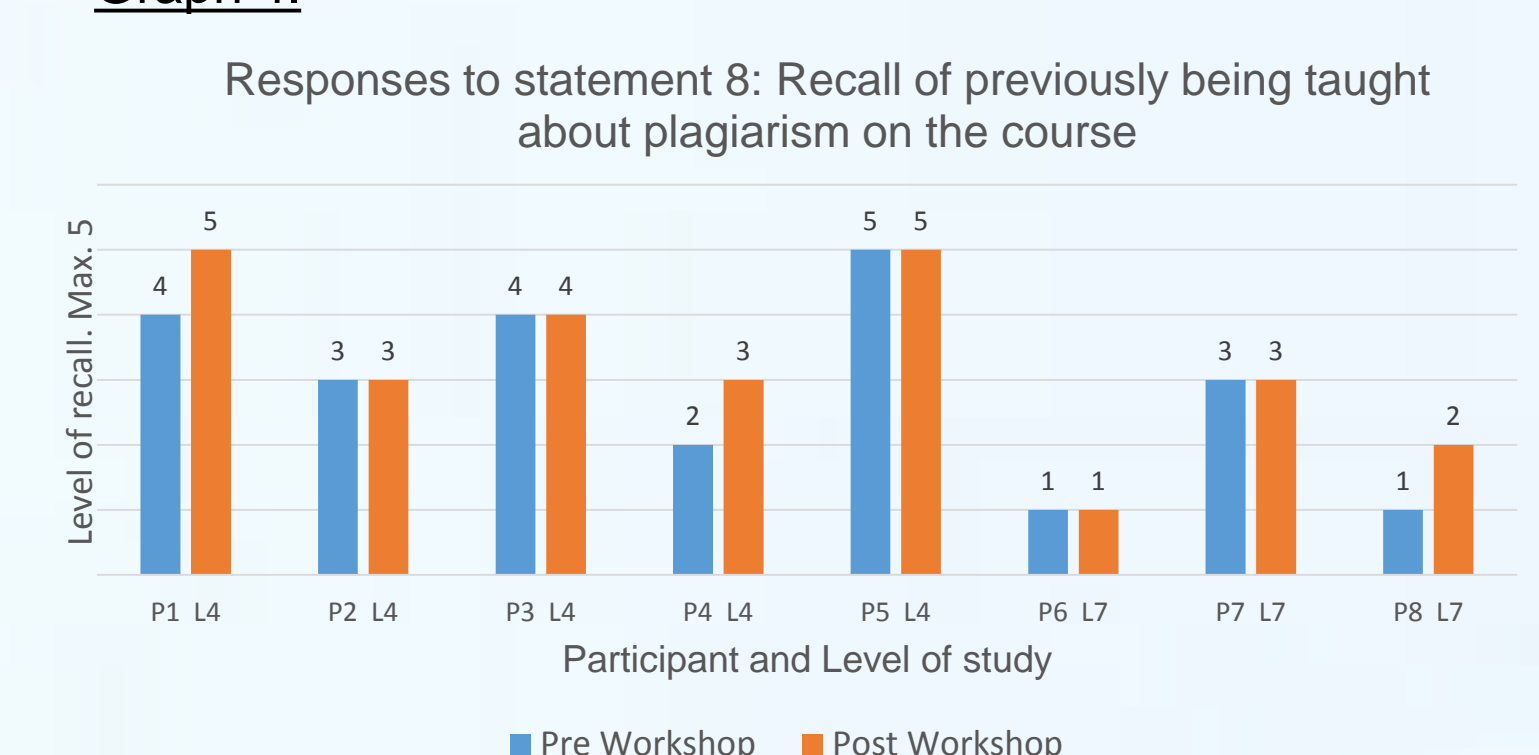
Graph 2.



Graph 3.



Graph 4.



As shown in Graph 1, results for Understanding Plagiarism (S1-5) indicated that, pre-session, all participants Strongly Agreed (n=4) or Agreed (n=4) that they were confident that they understood what plagiarism meant (36/40). However, when asked if they were confident about how to avoid plagiarism, pre-workshop, confidence levels reduced by 11 to 25/40. The greatest overall academic confidence increase (ACI) was found between pre and post scores for understanding how to avoid plagiarism, which rose by 11 from 24 to 35/40.

Individually, 1 of the 3 L7 students had the greatest overall ACI, higher by 11 from 9/25 to 20/25. Another L7 student had the least ACI with no change from 18/25, pre and post the workshop. Overall, previous in-class teaching and low academic confidence about plagiarism is found to be limited for students at both L4 and L7 and L7 students felt least confident about asking academic staff for clarification.

## Discussion

As shown in Graph 4, participants showed a wide range of recall levels for prior experiences of being taught about plagiarism, with little overall change post the workshop, which may have prompted recall (23-26/40). This suggests that not all students receive teaching about plagiarism on their course or teaching may not have been fully inclusive, as suggested by Johnson and Clerehan (2005). Alternatively, false assumptions may have been made about students' understanding at commencement of study, as suggested to by Park (2003), especially as the majority of L4 and L7 NNSE students are likely to be new to a HE institution and, potentially, to study in the UK.

The 2 lowest pre-workshop plagiarism understanding scores were from L7 NNSE students, suggesting plagiarism teaching and guidance, recommended for all international students in the HEA TIS report (2011), is equally important for both levels.

Ensuring messages about plagiarism are incorporated in teaching, as proposed by Barrett and Cox (2005) and by Gullifer and Tyson (2013), places emphasis on developing the academic skills required to avoid plagiarising rather than the penalties of failing to demonstrate them. It may also raise students' confidence about seeking guidance from academic staff, if needed.

Expanding this intervention to a wider group of both NNSE and native English speakers might indicate the value of ensuring students are specifically taught about plagiarism and the impact it can have on students ability to avoid plagiarism.

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