

## The Menace of Plagiarism: Sensitizing Faculty, Staff and Students in Nigerian Higher Education Systems

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**Abstract:** This article was written to sensitize Nigerian students, staff and faculty of tertiary institutions to the problem of plagiarism. The study emanated from the humanistic point of reasoning and used data from secondary source to: (i) explain the concept of plagiarism, (ii) discuss various forms of plagiarism, (iii) highlight the causes of plagiarism and (iv) explain the consequences of plagiarism. The study also indicates how to avoid plagiarism in academic presentations in order to ensure academic integrity in higher education systems in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** plagiarism, academia, sensitizing, students, staff and faculty

### INTRODUCTION

While plagiarism software has been successfully developed and actively used in higher education systems in developed nations to reduce high rate of plagiarism [1-4], so as to safeguard academic integrity, little is known in the literature on this subject in many Third World countries higher educational systems [5]. In the light of this, cases of plagiarism in academic presentations could be very easy to detect in the former than in the latter. Also, the management of tertiary institutions in the former may likely find it easier to reduce cases of plagiarism than their counterparts in the Third World countries.

In Nigeria, the situation seems to be very imprecise because, in spite of the efforts of the Management of the 123 universities in the country in launching anti-plagiarism software to curtail the escalation of plagiarism Universities News [6] in higher education systems in the country, cases of plagiarism are increasing as the day goes by. This shows that the result of their efforts has not been commensurate with the alarming cases of plagiarism reported on a regular basis [7], The International School of Management, cited in Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko and Osinulu, [8], Onuoha and Ikonne [9] and Orim, Davies and Borg [10].

Besides, a few articles have examined the problem of plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary institutions [8, 10] but these studies were not without flaws. They focused mainly on students and ignored faculty and

staff who are also key players in academic environments. These flaws in knowledge paved the way for the present article. The study thus intends to: (i) explain the connectivity between the Internet and plagiarism, (ii) explain the concept of plagiarism, using the views of different scholars, (iii) discuss the various forms of plagiarism, (iv) highlight the causes of plagiarism, (v) explain the consequences of plagiarism, and (vi) indicate how to avoid plagiarism in any presentation.

Due to the poor quality of education [11, 12] in tertiary institutions in contemporary Nigeria, members of staff and faculty, mostly in the public sector, where the awareness on plagiarism seems to be very poor, should be adequately informed on this social problem and how it could be carefully avoided in their presentations. Thus, this effort could prevent many of them from falling victim to plagiarism. Also, it would ensure academic integrity in Nigerian higher education systems.

The roles of faculty and staff in ensuring academic integrity in academia could not be easily ignored. Although it could be argued that publishing is one of the core responsibilities of only the teaching staff while the core responsibility of the non-teaching staff is hinged on administration, it could be possible for some non-teaching staff to also possess scholarly skills. Some of such staff could find themselves in the non-teaching section of the university system due to one reason or the other and, they may want to develop their scholarly gift

by publishing in academic journals with the hope of converting to academics in the nearest future. Such persons should be properly trained or kept abreast of the skills required for publications and one of such is how to avoid plagiarism.

### **Internet and Plagiarism: Connectivity**

Advancement in education has resulted in Internet facilities via Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The Internet has its origin in the United States Business Dictionary. Com, [44] and it later spread across the globe via globalization.

Several studies across the globe have connected the use of the Internet with plagiarism but it is essential to note that, the use of The Internet depends on people's level of literacy and their access to computer and internet. While the use of the Internet increases daily in developed nations, many do not have access to it in Third World societies [13, 14], owing largely to abject poverty ravaging underdeveloped countries.

The Internet is a worldwide area network which connects computer systems around the globe [15]. This device involves many 'high-bandwidth' data lines which strongly support Internet facilities for effective communication. Data lines are usually linked with internet hubs which distribute the same (data) to different locations via web servers or Internet service providers.

Since its inception, Internet facilities have remained a catalyst for excellent communication system worldwide [16-19]. Its usefulness in storing and retrieving data [20] cannot be over emphasized. In the academia, internet serves as a powerful instrument for carrying out research and impartation of knowledge [21]. Without access to data, research will certainly become difficult for stake holders in academia. However, the negative effects of the Internet have been a sort of concern to scholars across the globe.

Plagiarism is one of such negative implications. It could be regarded as one of the resultant negative effects of Internet use in recent times. Its occurrence has gradually become rampant due to the availability of the Internet facilities. The improper use of information retrieved from the internet, deliberately or unknowingly has resulted in several cases of plagiarism [22, 23].

Although other scholars have argued that since the availability of the Internet for research, no information has connected the increase in the rate of student plagiarism with its usage [24] but this data could be relevant in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and it may not be accurate in developed nations because, access of students, staff and faculty to the Internet is

still very poor in SSA. Actually, previous studies show that the SSA use of internet [21, 25] believe that its speed has been relatively slow [25]; Internet World Stats, 2012 cited in Brafi and Arthur [21], its speed is arguably very slow [21]. These authors also argue that computer users in West Africa are not only confronted with the problem of insufficient computers, but users themselves lack the required skill to operate the Internet. These reasons and more may thus be responsible for both technological ineffectiveness of the use of the Internet in SSA.

In Nigerian higher education in particular, the above scenario holds true for most institutions, public and private. A few private universities however provide effective and efficient Internet facilities for academic activities [26, 27]. In such private universities, many students, faculty and staff may fall victim of plagiarism, due to lack of adequate knowledge about it. In other words, they use their Internet opportunities to retrieve materials for their academic use without proper paraphrasing of such materials simply because they are not aware of its implications.

In another development, the danger of plagiarism in public institutions, where soft wares to check plagiarism are not available could be grievous. The tendency for students, staff and faculty of such institutions to use internet materials for their academic papers wrongly may not be ruled out. Also, in institutions where the use of print materials is rampant, it may be very difficult to detect cases of plagiarism. But students, faculty and staff of such institutions are in danger of not knowing what actually constitutes plagiarism and it may be responsible for its escalation in leaps and bounds and it may likely affect their academic advancement.

Hence, it is necessary to sensitize students, faculty and staff on what constitutes plagiarism. This is particularly critical as tertiary institutions are gradually becoming global and it is important they safeguard their academic destinies.

### **The Concept of Plagiarism: Scholastic Views**

The concept of plagiarism is perceived differently by scholars and it is a known fact that different organisations have defined the concept based on their own peculiarities or situations. Hence, some may perceive it as a serious problem while others may view it otherwise. Given this, Jameson 1993, cited in Sentleng and King [28] argued that a generally accepted definition of plagiarism does not exist anywhere; its occurrence therefore "depends on the context, circumstances, audience, expectation and genre of the written work" (p. 2). However, Hayes and Introna 2005, cited in Gow [29], perceived it as an illegal act analogous with fraud and it is punishable under the law.

Examining the above views, it is obvious that the act itself has not been properly defined. For instance, the, Covenant University Policy on Plagiarism [30] defines the term as a situation where a student, faculty or staff copies another person's write-up and fails to acknowledge the writer. Similarly, Badke 2007, also cited in Sentleng and King [28], viewed the concept as presenting another scholar(s) ideas as one's knowledge, resulting in misrepresentation and crime. It is, however, important to note that a paper can be referenced and still be regarded as plagiarized, depending on the similarity index of such a paper. If the index is exceptionally high it is regarded as plagiarized and if it is very low, it is commendable. But, it should be noted that the allowance of similarity index in any academic paper is not the same globally. It depends on every organization.

The foregoing is strongly associated with the wrong paraphrasing of text copied from another source. This means removing a few words from another writer's work or replacement of other words without or with acknowledgment.

#### **Forms of Plagiarism**

It is evident in the literature that plagiarism takes different forms. Prominent among them is *copying* another person's work without reference which could be regarded as a deliberate act of using another person's work as one's idea. The reference that would have given credit to the original author is deliberately ignored in order to ascribe such credit to oneself. This is common among students who are regarded as 'No Future Ambition (NFA) Students'. The aim of such students is to get their degree without studying. Such students usually achieve this aim by copying their assignments from books, internet and friends.

For project writing, they visit other universities, pick project titles and submit them to their supervisors. If any of the topics submitted is approved, they make photocopy of the whole work and present it to their supervisors chapter by chapter. Such supervisors may not be aware of the fraudulence, especially if such students have previously shown generosity to them. This practice is also prevalent among faculty and staff in lower and higher educational institutions. In some cases, they change the topic of their previous articles and present them to another journal for publication. If the editors of such journals do not painstakingly check for plagiarism, the paper could be accepted for publication.

Another form of plagiarism that is very common among students, staff and faculty is copying another person's work, partially or verbatim without acknowledgment. This means the following information about the cited work are deliberately eschewed: (i) quotation marks-open and close, (ii) names of authors,

(iii) year of publication, (iv) page numbers and (v) indentation, if the lines involved are more than three. In such a case the plagiarist intentionally copied in order to assume the ownership of the work. This type of plagiarism normally occurs among lazy students, faculty and staff.

Apart from the above, plagiarism could be in form of improper paraphrasing of another person's text in a write-up. This normally occurs when students, faculty and staff do not have an adequate knowledge on plagiarism. The act in this context is generally regarded as unintentional because of the ignorance of the author in question. University of Liverpool [31] sheds more light on this type of plagiarism.

In addition to the above, embellishment of data is another form of plagiarism and it involves enhancing a small number of data to reflect data retrieved through legal means [30]. This practice normally occurs when an author or a student obtains small data legitimately and joins them with uncollected or fake data and presents them as real in academic presentations. More often than not, lazy students, faculty and staff who find it difficult to go to the field for data collection or who cannot adequately finance their projects or research works usually indulge in this type of plagiarism.

Very similar to the above is an extensive creation and presentation of data not in existence or not obtained for the purpose of conducting research. This form of plagiarism is also known as fabrication of data [30]. In this scenario, students or scholars usually imagine and form data at will without distributing any questionnaire or retrieving any data from documents etc.

In the light of the foregoing, this paper has only been an attempt to highlight some of the forms that plagiarism takes and has by no means provided an exhaustive list. Further studies may help to present more forms, which may aid further sensitization of ignorant students, faculty and staff of institutions of higher learning in SSA.

#### **Causes of Plagiarism**

Previous studies across the globe have attributed plagiarism to different reasons [32]. This is an indication that it does not have respect for a country's developmental level and academic intelligence [7] of mankind. However, its occurrences and prevalence could be linked with societal development. This is because as a given society interacts with other societies in the process of acculturation, new things are introduced to the people. These are regarded as innovations and they generally bring about social change in the structure of the society. They change either affect the structure positively or negatively. In the context of this paper therefore, the

Internet negative aspect of the Internet has resulted in plagiarism in education institution [23, 33].

However, this paper does not rule out the reigning idea among many faculty which is hinged on the 'publish or perish syndrome' as one of the causes of plagiarism. It is generally believed in the higher education system in Nigeria that an academic who is not publishing will soon perish. In order to avoid perishing therefore, most of them would want to publish many papers. In the process, they could get involved in plagiarism. Apart from the above, the idea of many lecturers to publish many books for sale as an author for financial gain could equally be associated with reasons why the problem is escalating in the academia. An attempt to produce many books could lead such faculty to plagiarism.

Some of the above-mentioned factors may be associated with an intention to engage in plagiarism. In such a situation, plagiarists are fully aware of the implication of such an action, but they decide to engage in it deliberately due to their vested interests.

In another development, plagiarism can also happen when students, mostly those who are not academically inclined or those who are lazy copy their assignments and projects from their friends [34] in order to pass by all means. This could be observed in many public institutions where students use textbooks and hard print copies of journals for research. It can also be observed in institutions where there is no policy on plagiarism. Also, it could be rampant in institutions that have access to internet but with little knowledge on plagiarism software.

Apart from committing plagiarism intentionally, some members of staff, faculty and students commit plagiarism unintentionally [7]. Such persons would have gladly avoided plagiarism if they were well informed, but because they Lack Adequate Knowledge of Plagiarism they become victims of plagiarism. This may not be unconnected with the escalation of the scourge at an alarming rate in higher institutions in Nigeria. To have adequate knowledge on plagiarism could depend either on an institution or tutors. In an institution, where quality education is obtainable, cases of academic plagiarism may be very low. Moreover, if tutors are highly qualified, they will impact on students positively and cases of plagiarism may not be rampant. But in an institution where the quality of education is very poor, there would be little emphasis on plagiarism and how to reduce it to the barest minimum. In such an institution, the plagiarism checker may not be available to check the originality report of academic papers of students, faculty and staff and it could make them vulnerable to plagiarism.

Similarly, in the case of an institution where quality education is obtainable, dissemination of information on plagiarism between staff and faculty could be very poor and may likely make the non-teaching staff vulnerable to plagiarism. This usually happens in some private institutions where some members of staff are not valued and they are being separated from faculty members in the course of academic discussions.

Directly connected to the above is the Inability of Teachers to Impact Knowledge on plagiarism. Lecturers who are not competent may likely lack adequate knowledge on academic ethics. Every profession, academics inclusive, has technical knowledge. In academics this includes the ability to: teach, conduct research, supervise thesis, mark answers scripts etc. Such qualities are gradually eroding from many faculty members in tertiary institutions in Nigeria today and it could contribute significantly to the escalation of plagiarism.

In another development, Adele [35] argues that cases of plagiarism may be rampant in classes or institutions where lecturers are very slack in enforcing academic values. If students realize that their lectures are slack in ensuring academic integrity, they will take them for granted and present any document to them. In most situations, students are always interested in such lecturers because they will give them an opportunity to pass cheaply. If such lecturers discover plagiarism in any student's paper, he or she may not take any action towards amelioration. Adele [35] believes that such lecturers are not comfortable psychologically with catching and prosecuting students who indulge in plagiarism. Such a lecturer could perceive an action like that as destructive to a student's career and may want to avoid it. But such a lecturer might have forgotten that students like that can still be corrected with care and love without destroying their destiny. According to Adele [35], such a faculty may want to concentrate on his research works so as to be promoted rapidly instead of prosecuting students who indulge in plagiarism. This act could significantly contribute to the escalation of plagiarism among students.

Moreover, there are editors of journals who are only interested in publication fees. Such editors are not concerned about whether an article is plagiarized or not. The volume of articles published usually determines the money accruing to them. Probably this might have prevented them from using plagiarism software to check the originality report of papers forwarded to them for peer review. Such editors are dangerous because they may not add any value to the academic worth of their authors.

Further to the above, the disparity between the teaching and non-teaching staff in some faith-based



private institutions could also lead to plagiarism among the non-teaching type. In such institutions, information concerning academics is restricted to the teaching staff only. Usually, the management of such institutions does not have regard for the non-teaching staff. Even the academically gifted ones among them are persecuted and hunted because they believe that they are threats to them. Also, situations have occurred where some of them who have been privileged to publish in academic journals were advised to face their administrative work instead of giving them adequate training and motivation that will enable them to realise their God-given potential. Such advice could be regarded as a malicious plot carefully designed to frustrate them from forging ahead in scholarly activities. It could also be regarded as unwelcome development with the implication of creating a setback to the academic advancement of any higher education system created for capacity building, irrespective of staff category.

Lastly, lack of institutional policy on plagiarism could lead to its prevalence in the higher education system as argued by [32]. This however, could be limited to Third World countries, where the awareness on plagiarism software seems to be very poor. In institutions where there is no policy on plagiarism, certainly, cases of plagiarism maybe rampant because, where there are no rules there will be no violations. The policy on plagiarism has made a strong difference in dealing with plagiarism between developed and Third World societies. While many institutions in developed nations have a vibrant policy on plagiarism [36] many institutions in underdeveloped nations, Nigeria inclusive may not have such a policy.

### **Consequences of Plagiarism**

The negative implications of plagiarism could be perceived in different categories. More often than not, it varies from one institution to another. For instance, a student caught and found guilty is liable to the following penalties: (i) censure formally or placed under compulsory counseling, (ii) suspension for a specified period, and (iii) rustication from the university [30]. For members of staff and faculty, the penalty ranges from formal censure, (ii) suspension without salary for a specified period, not exceeding six months, (iii) demotion in status, usually for one year, (iv) remunerations increase denial for a long time, (v) suspension of promotion right or eligibility, usually between 3 and 5 years, (vi) termination of appointment, and (vii) dismissal from work [30].

Further to the above, it is evident in the literature that the consequences of plagiarism are on personal, professional, ethical and legal levels [37]. Commencing from the personal level, Thenticate [37] emphasis on how it could destroy the personal reputation of victims.

A plagiarist student stands the risk of being rusticated or suspended for a definite number of years, depending on the gravity of plagiarism by the standing committee on this offence in his institution. Such a student may find it intricate to gain admission into another tertiary institution for a long time. Moreover, some of them may never catch up with their mates again in life. Also, staff and faculty caught in the web of plagiarism are sanctioned accordingly.

Apart from personal reputation, the scourge of plagiarism could destroy the reputation of one's career. Plagiarism could be regarded as a stigma and it could be very difficult to erase it from someone's reputation. Reputation means respect and it enhances the individual's worth in his or her career. A career is a lifelong profession that determines how successful one can become in life. Therefore, if ones reputation is tarnished in his career, it can affect his success in life. In the same manner, the menace of plagiarism can destroy the academic reputation of scholars and their worth may be reduced to the barest level in the society.

Publishing is one of the main responsibilities of every faculty. It is on this note some people often argue it is better to publish than to perish. It is the belief of these persons that a faculty who is not publishing will definitely perish. This is because such a faculty will lack the publications, vital aspect of academic profession Adele [35] for promotion and recognition among peers. The beauty of every academic in any society lies in the numbers and the quality of publications he produces. The negative effect of plagiarism could hinder victims from massive production of academic papers.

Apart from the above factors, plagiarism could have a legal implication on the victims. This could be very dangerous because it affects the law of copyright. The term 'copyright' according to The Free Dictionary, [38] "is a legal device that gives the creator of a literary, artistic, musical, or other creative work the sole right to publish and sell that work". Using materials without acknowledgement can lead to legal confrontation [39]. Therefore, anybody found guilty may be sentenced to a number of years in prison or be asked to pay a fine (specific amount) to the owner of the work. In other words, plagiarism could cost the victims some financial loss which could be a huge amount of money [39].

### **Plagiarism: Solutions**

There are technical ways of writing in every profession. It is necessary to learn the skills and be proficient before any engagement. Students, faculty and staff of tertiary institutions must therefore learn and develop such scholarly skills that will completely forestall plagiarism. It is evident that many people fall into the web of plagiarism either because they were not taught how to paraphrase properly or they fail to learn

from experienced scholars. However, it is the belief of the authors of this paper that cases of plagiarism could be reduced to the barest minimum if the following factors could be strictly adhered to by the students, faculty and staff.

**Desist from Copy and Paste Data-**The idea of copying text from the web or from another document and paste it on the text one is writing is peculiar to many students, staff and faculty in the higher education system. This practice should be strictly avoided in order to ensure academic integrity. More importantly, it is advisable for students, staff and faculty to type their references manually.

Directly connected to the above is avoidance of direct citation or verbatim citations. Although direct citation with proper reference-the names of author(s), year of publication and page number is permitted but it has a negative implication. It increases the plagiarism similarity index. Hence, the higher the number of direct citations in any paper, the higher its originality report and it could make a writer liable to plagiarism. It is, therefore, advisable that students, faculty and staff reduce direct citations in their presentations to a few words as much as possible and engage in proper paraphrasing of texts, which involves writing another author's texts in a language that is completely different from the original author.

In the light of this, however, any text being paraphrased must be properly done in such a way that the language of the original author will not reflect in the text of the person paraphrasing. The practice of replacing a few words in the original with others in one's work should be strictly avoided. Thus, the best idea is to paraphrase in another language extremely different from the language of the original author. In such a text, the name(s) of the author(s), year of publication must be properly acknowledged. In this situation, page number is not necessary.

In order to ensure proper adherence to the above, it is necessary that students, staff and faculty be subjected to adequate training on plagiarism. With the escalation of plagiarism in higher education in Nigeria, proper training on plagiarism should be conducted for students, staff and faculty via lectures symposia and conferences, on a regular basis. For students specifically, a special programme on plagiarism could be included in higher education curriculum. Besides, every teacher should consider it a priority to teach their students how to avoid plagiarism always. This should manifest in their assignments, term papers, seminars and projects. The idea of cramming lecture notes, textbooks and other materials in order to pass should be discouraged among students as well. Students should be taught how to present their original ideas in academic presentations, as much as possible.

Also, editors who assess papers during peer review should stop seeing financial gain as the sole aim of such an exercise. They should also place a strong emphasis on the quality of papers received for assessment. If any paper is plagiarized, the author should be adequately directed and guided on how to make amendments. Such an editor should try as much as possible to explain the Originality Report or Similarity Index to such an author. Also, the editor should inform the author of the minimum level of plagiarism that is allowed in his or her journal. The idea of accusing authors of plagiarism without proper efforts in adequately informing them on how to avoid plagiarism should be avoided.

Further to the above, editors should ensure that comments and suggestion for improvements raised by the reviewers on any paper are properly effected, and it does not matter if that is being done several times before such a paper is accepted for publication. In the process of correction, however, the author must comply with all the instructions of the reviewers and editors.

Additional, the idea of re-submitting an article to another journal because the editorial process of one journal is very tough must be strictly avoided. Every author must submit himself/herself to the process of correction till the paper is finally accepted. Such an exercise could help in building inexperienced authors.

For some of the non-teaching staff, who possess scholarly skills and want to publish in academic journals, the management of their institutions of learning should endeavour to properly engage them in training on plagiarism. Since academia is a place where potential materials should be encouraged to blossom and not be destroyed, it could be a good idea to place such persons under experienced scholars for proper grooming.

Finally, it is advisable to use plagiarism checker Weber-Wulff, [2] to find out the originality report of papers before turning them in for peer review process. Such soft wares include: iThenticate [37] and Turnitin, [40]. Scholars such as [41-43] have emphasized on the usefulness of these software in ensuring academic integrity in academia. These soft wares assist in x-raying the content of any paper to discover the plagiarism similarity index. If the index is very low, the author could proceed with the paper, but if the index is high, the author should carefully amend areas highlighted before sending their papers out for the peer review process. More importantly, students, faculty and staff should always endeavour to find out the similarity index allowed in journals and organisations they engage for publications.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SUGGESTIONS

The menace of plagiarism does not have respect for human status. Its implications therefore, could be far-reaching because ignorance is not an excuse in law. This paper therefore concludes that the technical skill involved in academic papers should be strictly learnt and adhered to before students; faculty and staff begin to indulge in academic presentations. It could be possible for somebody to have knowledge, but he might lack the skills required to excel in academic presentations.

Additionally, stakeholders in academia (lecturers, reviewers, editors, guidance, supervisors, examiners) should try as much as possible to engage proactive measures in tackling the problem of plagiarism. One of such is spreading information concerning the problem to every student, staff and faculty and how it could be avoided, extensively. This is because humanity could find it difficult to terminate ignorance, illiteracy, prejudice and subjective reasoning when knowledge and information is withheld. Therefore, the best way of reducing plagiarism to the barest minimum is to spread information on how to present plagiarized-free papers among people without prejudice.

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