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## Demystifying Plagiarism in Academia

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### *Abstract*

Plagiarism seems to be carried out across the board. Novice as well as expert academics are fully aware that this malpractice is unethical and severely condemned. Nonetheless, plagiarism does not appear to give way to academic honesty. The current paper endeavors to spot light on the issue by discussing its nature and point out to its consequences. It is within the range of the paper to examine the effectiveness of software programs in detecting plagiarism and expose perpetrators.

**Keywords:** plagiarism; Academics; software programs; perpetrators

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## INTRODUCTION

Although there are so many software programs to detect plagiarized works, researchers consciously or unconsciously, indulge in appropriating other researchers' ideas, thoughts, words, and works without giving due credit. It appears that plagiarism is endemic in the academic circles, which affects negatively these institutions in the long run. Plagiarism is considered by scholars as unforgivable sin carried out by desperate and unscrupulous researchers, who once caught, start to provide shallow excuses for their lack of integrity. The pretexts range from lack of time, fatigue, forgetfulness, and unintentional additions and so on. Whatever the excuses put forward, a plagiarized work is a blemish in the trustworthiness of the researchers and their findings. This paper attempts to address the topic at hand by (1) indentifying the intricate nature of plagiarism, (2) explaining its facets, and (3) minimizing the resort to this malpractice by suggesting some strategies.

### I. PLAGIARISM: OLD NEWS

It is worth of note that this phenomenon of plagiarism is by no means new. (Nam: 2014) corroborates 'the concept of plagiarism is not new for Confucian countries; special terms are known in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean to define plagiarism and they have been used since ancient times' (cited in Railean: 1999: 846). Furthermore, Muslims often quote in the Prophet's (PBUH) saying *whoever cheats does not belong to us*<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, plagiarism cannot be claimed to be either culturally- based or gender-based as proved above. All cultures and civilizations seem to condemn this unethical behavior whatever its nature is, and whoever commits it. Research has reported that both male and female researchers (particularly young researchers, i.e., students) indulge freely in plagiarizing in part or in toto other research without giving credit to original authors. Only in stereotypical literature, a specific culture and gender are involved in plagiarism in that one culture and/ or gender is unfairly (racial or sexist) said to be tolerant vis-a-vis plagiarism.

### II. NATURE OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism derives from Latin "plagiarius", meaning kidnapper, robber, misleader and literary thief. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines plagiarism as "the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own". Plagiarism can be understood as the use of other's own ideas, thoughts, words without mentioning the original writer. Plagiarism can, therefore, be claimed to be the booty of poor research practices in that perpetrators rob Peter to pay Paul as the proverb goes. Differently stated, those whose perpetrate the act of plagiarism expropriate the original authors from their copyright to unlawfully attribute it to themselves.

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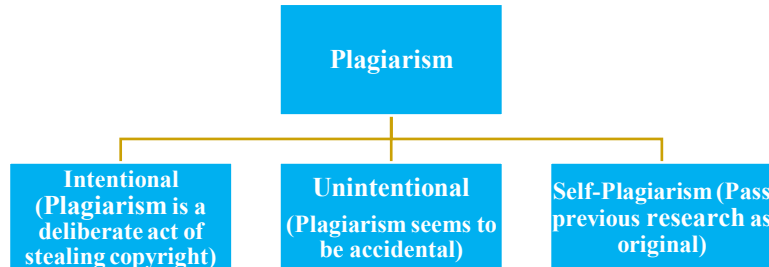
<sup>1</sup> من غش فليس منا

Scholarly definitions are as colorful as the etymological ones if more accurate. Plagiarism is the use of the author's words, ideas, reflections, and thoughts without proper acknowledgement of the source (Culwin, 2001; Larkhan (2002). As it could deduced from this definition, the authors seek to outline the instances of plagiarism. Sox (2012: np) defines plagiarism in more virulent terms "**stealing** someone's work and **lying** about it afterward" (**emphasis added**). Helgesson & Eriksson (2014: np) identify plagiarism as the "appropriation of another person's ideas, process, results, and words without giving appropriate credit". In other terms, students and researchers copy text, words, paragraphs, methods, results, interpretations and presenting them as their own without giving due credit to the original author(s), which would be incriminating in the long run. A case in point is the scandal of plagiarism that involved the German Defence Minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg in 2011, and the consequence of which was his resignation despite his outstanding political career.

Overall, plagiarism turns out to be an unethical malpractice that endeavors to spoliage others from their ownership and copyright; this offence is so grievous that it only brings scandal, shame and disgrace to the plagiarists and their institutions.

### III. MANIFESTATIONS OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism manifests itself in a variety of ways: intentional, unintentional, and self plagiarism as illustrated below.



**Figure 1.** Manifestations of plagiarism

Intentional plagiarism (IP) is a deliberate act of expropriating original authors of their thoughts, ideas, words, phrases, results without giving due credit. Hence, IP is a conscious act, and to all intents and purposes, the perpetrator has deliberately and freely taken the decision to shamelessly plagiarize regardless of the consequences.

Unintentional plagiarism (UP), although difficult to prove the innocence of an unintentional plagiariser, it is frequently tolerated. UP is occasioned when researchers read a great deal and when they start writing, all those ideas, words, and phrases that clung in the subconscious come 'naturally'. Unfortunate coincidence may also account for the 'overlapping' of ideas, thought, words, or phrases leading straight to unintentional act of 'mock' plagiarism. The first authors get the credit and late-comers the blame and/ or ignorance as it happened with Antonio Meucci, Elisha Gray, and

Oberlin College who failed to obtain patents of invention for some impediment, which worked for Alexander G. Bell.

Self-plagiarism refers to the reuse of materials which were written earlier in authoring a new work without acknowledging the previous ones (Lancaster, 2019, p.). Self-plagiarism is, therefore, a deliberate act of concealing previous materials and presenting them as originals in deliberate contempt of consequences.

#### IV. TYPES OF PLAGIARISM

Railean (1999: 848) draws a table where she mentions factors and types of plagiarism. The succinct elaboration of the table illustrates plagiarism and its facets that oftentimes confuse young researchers.

**Table.1.** Plagiarism classification (Railean: 1999, 848).

| Factor                         | Type                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Source of plagiarized material | Intra-corporel and extra-corporel plagiarism, self plagiarism (autoplagerism).      |
| Intention to plagiarize        | intentional and unintentional                                                       |
| Subject of plagiarism          | Plagiarism of ideas, text (copy& paste); word switch, verbatim, metaphor and style. |
| Severity of plagiarism         | Levels of plagiarism (1-3 or low-medium- serious).                                  |

The instances of plagiarism (as stated above) elicit a complex phenomenon usually taken for granted by students, untrained researchers, and unscrupulous plagiarists. A good number of people involved in plagiarism may consider one instance as a birthright and in no way illicit.

The literature on plagiarism provides a comprehensive illustration of types which, amply explains the different examples. The table below illustrates the various types.

**Table .2.** Types of Plagiarism

| Types                  | Illustration                                                                                     |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| deliberate Plagiarism  | It happens when the writer is fully aware and willing to copy other's words, thoughts and ideas. |
| Spontaneous Plagiarism | It is when a person plagiarizes because of his/ her unawareness and lack of skill in writing.    |

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Casual plagiarism</b> | It is due to the lack of awareness of plagiarism, or insufficient understanding of how to cite.                                                                                                 |
| <b>Autoplagerism</b>     | It refers to re-use someone's own already published works in different forms on different occasions. Fishman (2009) notes "author of the work is benefiting multiple times from a single work". |

Certainly, there are other types of plagiarism (Mosaic and global plagiarism, etc.) that are not included in this essay not because they are not important but because they are implicitly included in other typed mentioned above. It is noteworthy to mention that each type has its controlling circumstances which favour its emergence. Teachers and instructors need be aware of the various types and the way to hedge them.

## VI. CAUSES FOR PLAGIARISM

Why Plagiarize? Perhaps this is the most legitimate, crucial question that needs to be addressed if this malpractice is to be minimized once and for all. Research has provided many reasons why researchers and students resort to plagiarism. Intuitively, students and researchers resort to plagiarism because they were conditioned to do it: so many assignments and little time and the stakes are high. Hult and Hult (2003 cited in Roberts, 2007, 31) report that students in Swedish universities take to plagiarism for a number of reasons on top of which the shortage of time to complete the different assignments, easy access to Internet materials. Nicholls and Feal (2009: np) corroborate "information sharing has become easier, so has plagiarism". Besides, the increase of anonymity as a result of increased students group sizes contributes also to the emergence of plagiarism. It appears that teachers and examinations forms lead to the propagation of this malpractice, finally, greater cooperation and collaboration among students; some excellent students for pecuniary reasons rides essays and research papers for their classmates. It seems paradoxical to note that some students plagiarize just because other students are doing it as well.

Plagiarism is growing into hurricane that threatens to blast the integrity of the academic circles. In a study carried out by McCabe, cited by Rutgers, 2003 in Lampert, 2014, 65) reveals that 38% of undergraduate students seem to use the copy& paste method of the internet plagiarism on various occasions. Moreover, 44% of the students believe that this cut& paste method as a legal way to quote online materials. These figures are alarming as much as frightening because they expose a phenomenon that

incessantly grows to terrifying consequences for the integrity and trustworthiness of research findings as well as higher education as a whole.

## V.II. PLAGIARISM DETECTION MEASURES

What are the countermeasures to minimize the devastating hurricane call plagiarism? It should be cogent to approach the anti-plagiarism policies from different perspectives as shown by the table below.

**Table.2.** Methods to Detect Plagiarism

| Method                      | Illustration                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| General sight Overview      | Teachers are required to examine and assess the structures, grammar used by students' assignments. Moreover, they have to check the work performed which is higher or lower than their abilities. |
| search of Online bookstores | These stores aid teachers to check whether the students have stated the right date of publication or not.                                                                                         |
| search of key words         | It is the search of key words in search engines like "Google" and other sites in order to find instances.                                                                                         |
| using softwares             | There are many software applications and tools that can aid teachers to detect plagiarized texts. Software programmes like <i>plagiarism checker</i> (most common used).                          |

Although there is a dire need for methods to detect plagiarism, the responsibility for keeping research integrity lies within the institutions themselves, supervisors and most importantly students/ researchers who should honour the moral pact of academic integrity policies.

## VIII. PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC LAWS

All academic institutions across the world deplore and condemn academic dishonesty of any kind be it cheating on tests, plagiarizing materials, doctoring documents or results, and providing false statements. By all accounts, plagiarism is a gross violation of the honor code especially as researchers are expected to be integrity-bound in conducting academic and scientific inquiries. Any malpractice is considered a breach of the honor code and the perpetrator is to account for that. According to Arrêté 933 of July 26th, 2016, any researcher who is indicted of plagiarism need be tried in a Conseil d'Ethique et de Deontologie de la Profession Universitaire (CEDPU)<sup>1</sup>. The aforementioned CEDPU is composed of 10 members from different disciplines and well known for their academic integrity.

In case plagiarism is confirmed with waterproof evidence, the perpetrator faces the following sanctions:

1. cancel his/ her of the oral defence (aka, viva voce);
2. revoke the earned degree, and/ or
3. withdraw the published paper.

Interestingly, all those who suffered from the act of plagiarism have the right to try the perpetrator in a court of law according to the same Arrêté 933, Section IV, Article 38. These sanctions demonstrate that plagiarism is a gross violation that necessitates deterrent measures.

It should be noted at this stage to point out to the levels of plagiarism, which determine the rate of "similarity" and subsequent tolerance. As a general rule, the tolerated rate of similarity should not exceed a quarter of the whole work, i.e., 25%. The table below illustrates the tolerated rate of similarity in a number of universities.

**Table 3.** Tolerated rate of similarities

| University                                         | Tolerated rate of similarity |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| The World Islamic Science and Education University | No more than 15%             |
| Ain Sham, Egypt                                    | Less than 10%                |
| Anbar University, Iraq                             | Less than 20%                |

<sup>1</sup> Ethics and Deontology Council of the University Profession

|                                                       |                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Mahatma Ghandi University                             | No more than 25%   |
| Jadavpur University                                   | No more than 15%   |
| Kwame Nkrumah University<br>Of Science and Technology | No more than 20%   |
| Universiti Sains Malaysia                             | Between 13% to 25% |

Original work, which is at the other end of plagiarism, is, therefore, sought across the board. To be submit an original academic work, three quarters of the work in question should be the brainchild of the researcher. "Cutting a few corners" by dropping giving due credit, misquoting, wrong paraphrasing, or reprinting one's work and submitting it anew will be sooner or later discovered and sanctioned.

UNICHECK, a plagiarism detector organization calculates the total similarity score (TSS) by following this mathematical equation:

$$\text{TSS} = \frac{\text{Matches word count}}{\text{Total word count} - \text{References word count}} \times 100\%$$

SCRIBBR editors offer the following guidelines to evaluate the TSS, which are grouped in table for a better illustration

**Table 4.** SCRIBBR estimation and evaluation TSS

| SCRIBBR Estimation        | Evaluation  |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Higher than 10% of TSS    | Troublesome |
| Between 5% and 10% of TSS | Not bad     |
| Around 5% of TSS          | reasonable  |

Overall, the claim could be boldly put that when the TSS noticeably decreases, the originality of the work increases. Inversely, the originality of the work decreases when the TSS increases.



## IX. PRACTICAL TIPS TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

**1. PROPERLY GIVING CREDIT:** Researchers are urged to study guidelines issued by organizations specialized in the development of referencing systems.

**2. PROPERLY CITING AND QUOTING:** a special care and attention should be paid to the right punctuation quoting. And, when citing, an extra care should be paid to cite properly the source.

**3. PROPERLY PARAPHRASING:** A mastery of the art and science of paraphrasing need be prioritized by researchers. to paraphrase properly needs to painstakingly follow rules. Replacing original phrases and terminology will not be the right thing to do.

**4. CONSULTING PLAGIARISM DETECTOR:** Before submitting an academic work, it should be proofread by an authority be it a supervisor or a reviewer. Once this is done, a selection of a trustworthy plagiarism software need be used to spot any similarities with previously published works.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the current paper has made its point to identify a serious academic fraudulent behaviour that seems to plague students' and researchers' works. The illegal appropriation of other researchers' ideas, thoughts, words and works, aka plagiarism, comes to be condemned as a *cardinal sin* by all the academic circles. The growth of information technology, rapid growth of knowledge, lack of awareness, students' laziness and other factors have all contributed to the spread of this bane which could be claimed to be the black death of modern academic research. It is suggested that teachers should always tackle and discuss with their students the academic values and policies. By the same token, students should take pains to try to improve their skills in writing, research methodology, i.e., approaches, methods, research design, and so on. To finish with an optimistic note, the arch-enemy of academic integrity. i.e., plagiarism, could be defeated if self-reliance and self-confidence are restored in research circles.

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