



AL-HIKMAH JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 4 NO. 2 DECEMBER, 2017

ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Tertiary education is to contribute to national development through teaching, research and community development. Central to this goal is research activity in which lecturers and students play important roles. Conduct of research could foster or frustrate achievement in teaching and community development depending on the level of compliance with its ethical requirements. Academic plagiarism constitutes a violation of research ethics. Its causes could be attributed to personal, institutional and technological factors. It could stifle motivation and breed poor quality graduates. Thus, tertiary educational institutions are taking measures towards discouraging and preventing it among lecturers and students. These include dismissal and demotion for lecturers; and delay in graduation and poor grades for students. Lecturers in the educational institutions should emphasise causes and consequences of plagiarism when teaching research methods to their students while offenders should be dealt with according to law without fear or favour.

Keywords: *Academic plagiarism, Tertiary education, Research ethics, Lecturers, Students.*

Introduction

Building a united, strong and self-reliant nation is one of developmental goals in Nigeria. In pursuit of this goal, the Government initiated educational programmes and established educational institutions where individuals could acquire relevant skills and become productive citizens. The Government also stated that tertiary educational institutions were established to contribute to national development through high level manpower training (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2013). Lecturers in these institutions are expected to actualise the goals through teaching, research and community service.

Research plays a vital role in the development of tertiary education lecturers' personal and professional competence. It provides an avenue for the teachers to discover novel ideas which could be imparted to students through teaching. It also provides them required knowledge and skills for meaningful services to the community. More importantly, it assists them to prepare their students for research work so that the students will be able to fulfil a condition for graduation and be adequately prepared for future research studies.

Essentially, lecturers and students are expected to engage in academic researches. The lecturers would conduct research for their personal development, assist their students to understand research method and contribute to national development. Students are also expected to conduct research initially as a requirement for graduation and subsequently to be able to contribute their quota to national development. The more researches are conducted the more new ideas are generated for societal welfare and development.

The lecturers and students are expected to be guided by research ethics at every stage of their studies. It is an ethical requirement that original source should be cited whenever another person's written or oral works, words, ideas, opinions, theories, graphics, statistics or any other materials are quoted or paraphrased (University of Minnesota, 2003). However, many researchers tend to defy the ethical requirements and engage in dubious means of getting honour, reward, grades, recognition and promotion, by copying and presenting other people's work as theirs. This is technically referred to as plagiarism. While research study encourages exploration and production of new knowledge, plagiarism neither leads to production of new knowledge nor advancement in frontier of knowledge.

Educational institutions frown at plagiarism and many of them spell out measures towards its prevention. However, many researchers engage in it deliberately. Others are completely ignorant of it and its implications. This paper therefore examines academic plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions. It also discusses causes, consequences and prevention of plagiarism. Tertiary institutions are the institutions where education higher than secondary level is offered. They include universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013)

Academic Plagiarism

Plagiarism is described in different terms such as academic misconduct, dishonesty, theft, cheating and piracy. School Catalogue Information Service (2007) defines it as using other people's words or ideas without clearly acknowledging the source. Thus, it is a reproduction of a work, a write-up, or an idea which originates from another author or a group of authors without acknowledging the originator. It occurs when an already used idea is used again without reference to earlier user. An individual is said to have plagiarised when he copies another person's idea without referencing. Also, when an individual publishes the same words twice without acknowledging the first publication, he is said to have plagiarised.

Plagiarism can be either intentional or unintentional. Deliberate copying of another work is an intentional plagiarism. When this is done out of ignorance, it is said to be unintentional. Also, a person can engage in self-plagiarism. This is a situation where an individual copies and uses his own work for another publication without making reference to the earlier work. That is, the person reuses his previous work as a new one without referencing. Self-plagiarism is referred to as redundant or duplicate publication: a publication which is the same as an earlier publication (University of Minnesota, 2003).

According to San Diego State University (SDSU, n. d.) plagiarism includes omitting quotation marks when quoting directly from another source, close and lengthy paraphrasing of another person's writing and submitting another person's work as one's own. The School Catalogue Information Service (2007) also added the following as instances of plagiarism: copying entire or part of another person's work and presenting it as one's idea, paraphrasing without acknowledgement and purchasing from a research service, a student or an online site.

Causes of Plagiarism

Plagiarism could occur among students and teachers for different purposes. Students

plagiarise in order to get good grades in their academic endeavour while teachers do it for promotion, recognition and material rewards. Thus, tertiary education lecturers and their students do engage in academic theft for many reasons. School Catalogue Information Service (SCIS) (2007) identified lack of understanding of what constitutes plagiarism as a cause. It also stated that lack of citation convention, survival strategies to cope with information overload, poor note-taking and summary skills, new user of English and adoption of memorisation as a learning style are causes of plagiarism. In the same vein, Uloma and Chinyere (2013) stated that plagiarism could arise from substandard education system, teacher incompetency, online sales of research outputs, copying from the internet, inability to cope with academic work and lack of punishment for culprits. Also, Kent State University (2015) highlighted the causes of plagiarism as deliberate and non-deliberate. The deliberate causes are fear of failure, trivialising the importance of innovative writing and lack of fear for sanction. It stated the causes of non-deliberate plagiarism are poor time-management skills, instructors and institutional inadequacies, poor knowledge of integration of ideas, poor referencing skills and lack of clarity on what constitute plagiarism. From foregoing, causes of plagiarism could be examined under institutional, personal and information technological factors.

Institutional factors: An educational institution is supposed to act as a repository of knowledge. This can be possible when human and material resources for knowledge acquisition and dissemination are available in the institution. Students and their lecturers are likely to be adequately equipped for research activities when they have access to required resources in their institutions. Conversely, an institution which lacks required resources tends to make conduct of research difficult and this could make them plagiarise. An institution could also encourage plagiarism when it closes eyes on any act of plagiarism. The institution's failure to apply punitive measure to deter offenders and serve as a lesson to others could make **others** to perpetrate the act with impunity.

Personal factors: Incompetency on the part of a researcher could lead to plagiarism. This could be reflected in the researcher's inability to cope with academic work, poor time management skills, poor knowledge of referencing, poor note-taking skill, improper use of English Language, lacks citation convention and lack of understanding of plagiarism. Another personal reason for plagiarism is fear of failure for example a student wants to pass and graduate while a lecturer wants to get promotion. Laziness and greed on the part of an individual could also lead him to plagiarism.

Another reason for plagiarism is the development of ICT. The internet facilities have eased access to information on all aspects of life. People copy verbatim from the internet without quotation marks, **paraphrase**, cut and paste without acknowledging their sources. Also, there are professional essay writers on the internet who have turned research work into business. An individual would claim their writings as his own. He only needs to pay them. These constitute another dimension of cyber crime which has negatively affected research process and output. A plagiarist lacks creativity, steals other people's creativity and thus discourages creativity.

Consequences of Plagiarism

Plagiarism has negative impacts on the person whose work is plagiarised, the plagiarist, the Government, the employer of labour and the educational institution. It is **against** the ethics of academic research. Plagiarists are not self-reliant. They rely on production of others and are hardly able to do things on their own. A teacher and a student who indulge in plagiarism could not contribute to national development as they continue to wait for other people's output to be adopted as theirs. This attitude tends to stifle critical thinking ability. **Moreover**, the person whose work is plagiarised would feel demoralised and discouraged from further investigation and innovation.

Educational institutions whose teachers and students plagiarise have their **integrity** at stake. Plagiarism also affects the standard of academic performance and outputs of teachers and students of the institution to the extent that it would be rated low in terms of research breakthrough and contributions to scholarship.

Government objective of building a self-reliant nation can only be actualised when the citizens have acquired skills and knowledge which could facilitate self-reliance. Plagiarism kills innovation negates the concept of sustainable development and renders education a waste venture.

Similarly, employers of labour would be eager to engage school leavers. Plagiarist constitute a low quality set of school leavers and would become problem to organisations which employ them.

Many institutions have provided plagiarism checker (turnitin) to be able to determine the extent to which published works have been plagiarised. If detected before publication the plagiarist would be advised to effect necessary corrections. If the paper has been published before detection, the individual would face disciplinary measures such as dismissal, demotion, suspension. For example, at Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, an Associate Professor and two other lecturers were sacked while another two lecturers were demoted. Also, four lecturers were dismissed on allegation of plagiarism at University of Calabar (Kayode-Adedeji, 2013).

Recommendations

War against plagiarism should start from educational institutions. Although students are expected to undergo courses in research methods before they embark on research projects, the aspect of plagiarism is hardly taught. Research method lecturers should therefore explain all forms of plagiarism and their implications. According to SCIS (2007), the lecturers should also teach skills in correct citation, note-taking and summarising. They should clearly explain expectations in any assignment to be given to students. The assignment should involve high level thinking rather than direct reproduction of answers. The students should be made aware of all forms of plagiarism and their consequences.

Moreover, all educational institutions should make laws to discourage plagiarism. The laws should be published. That is, students and staff should be well informed about consequences of plagiarism. The laws should be implemented without fear or favour.

Research supervisors also have important roles to play in discouraging plagiarism. He should provide guidance to supervisees and ensure that new areas of knowledge are to be explored. This principle should guide choice of research topic.

Plagiarism is a form of corruption. Therefore, government and societal efforts to fight corruption at national, state and local levels should be extended to educational institutions. Administrators of the institutions should lead in the anti-corruption crusade and ensure that both teachers and students shun plagiarism. Laws against plagiarism should be enforced at institutional level.

Publications through research studies constitute an important criterion for assessing and promoting lecturers. In fact, any lecturer who fails to meet certain number of publications would be regarded as unproductive. Assessment of publications should include scientific test for plagiarism and paper that fails plagiarism test should be discountenanced.

Finally, lecturers and students should be aware of real meaning of plagiarism. An individual who plagiarises is dishonest. He has committed theft and kidnapping. He has no moral justification to accuse any other person of these bad behaviours.

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