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Research Article

Ins and Outs of Plagiarism in Academia: Reconnoitring Concepts, Causes, and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

For developing fair intellectual practices, one requires paving the path of academic integrity. However, authors have been violating those norms knowingly or unknowingly. They are doing so for some reasons such as academic promotion, public fame, and dignity without hard work, to mention a few. Therefore, plagiarism is rocking the academia and it is high time to prevent it. The first step to prevent this immoral practice is to make the writers aware of its notions, causes, consequences, and ways to avoid it. These are the main aims of this article. Further, this article aims to highlight state-of-the-art and desiderata of the plagiarists' practices, whose penalties are unavoidable. Employing a review and analysis of a few cases of history, this article draws an inference that writers should follow ethical/legal practices to let intellectual integrity and fairness prosper in the field of academia.

Keywords: Academia, computer programme, documentation, fair use, plagiarism

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INTRODUCTION

Originality and honesty are the touchstones of academic activities including research articles, theses, dissertations, term papers, journals, books and many other presentations both oral and written. Plagiarism is a crucial legal and ethical issue that is to be kept at the heart of academic spheres, which call for genuine and novel output to dig out the pathways to march ahead in the domain researched. Towards this direction, plagiarism has recently been a serious issue for academicians because of the development of software and tools for its detection. Further, its consequences, from keeping the researchers on a blacklist through rebuke and retracting of the achieved degree to penalty, are obvious. As an intellectual theft, it has resulted in defame and disgrace of the researchers even years after they accomplish the task. Therefore, the researchers require being aware of committing such an academic felony and they should be conscious about the ways they can walk on the righteous track of research.

In this context, this article aims to highlight the notions, issues, consequences and ways to prevent plagiarism for the sake of fair use of copyrighted materials and others. The article also aims to raise the awareness in the intellectual spheres that plagiarism, once was and can be a sleeping dragon; when it wakes up (can wake up any time), it may destroy the researchers' faces. Thus, it is also an issue to take into consideration not only for the present but also for the future. That's why, both the state-of-the-art and desiderata should be highlighted and made accessible to the researchers because otherwise, they might be victims in spite of their hard work, innocence and incomprehensiveness about the fair use of others' materials. It has been a burning issue in print, electronic and hybrid media. Nevertheless, this article is delimited to reconnoitre the works in the written mode of communication only.

DATA AND METHODS

Since the aim of this study is to shed light on the crucial issue of academic writing, i.e. plagiarism; it follows the document analysis method (DAM) as a part of the qualitative research approach. DAM analyses available documents within the domain selected (Bell, 1999, as cited in Al-Jardani, 2012). Based on this very view, this study has selected the domain of plagiarism that is essential to maintain academic honesty and the document analysis lies within the frameworks of the three parameters of plagiarism such as recognition and classification, causes and consequences, and ways to avoid it. I have gone through the main documents like Kalani and Twinwal (2013), Rodreguez (2013), Masic (2014), MLA Handbook (2009 & 2016), Khadilkar (2018), APA (2010 & 2020), Farahian et al. (2020), and Krokoszcz (2021); and

analysed their contents related to the frameworks designed to draw inferences that plagiarism is to be avoided for the fair practices of intellectual integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reviews, synthesizes, analyses, and interprets the issues raised, in the domain of academic integrity, in the frameworks set in the previous section.

Identifying Plagiarism

Apparently, plagiarism tends to exist since human beings began intracultural and intercultural communication. Even the genius figures used and reused the ideas, concepts, words, and even entire texts to pass on knowledge and information from generation to generation. This is evidenced by the “Genie Article” phenomenon or “Banyan Tree” approach which refers to the retelling of the old stories magically or presenting the facts and figures as if they have come out of the blue (Khadilkar, 2018, p. 427). However, they were not noticed until the detection of plagiarism did not occupy a vital space in academic spheres.

The term ‘plagiarism’ in the Western World is supposed to have been derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* (kidnapper) and to *plagiarize* means “to commit literary theft” and to “present new and original idea or product derived from the existing source” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, as cited in MLA, 2009, p. 52). However, Masic (2014) has claimed that the word has been derived from Latin *plagere* which means “kidnap”, and *plagiatum* which means “stealing people” (Masic, 2014, p. 144). Thus, etymologically, plagiarism is an act of imitating others’ works in written, artistic, creative and critico-creative forms, without crediting the sources and presenting them as if they are the author’s own. Masic (2014) has cited three main types of plagiarism like direct form, mosaic form and self-plagiarism. The first type is a direct copy and paste but without revealing the source/s; the second is to mix up direct quotes and paraphrased words and sentences but without citing the references; and the third type is to reuse the previously published work but without mentioning its first-hand source. Whether it is stealing someone else’s concepts, views, ideas, styles, and findings or reusing one’s own previous work as a fresh one, plagiarism is a kind of deception and/or betrayal to the readers. Therefore, plagiarism, which is different from forgery, is an action of a fraud, and is categorized as intellectual theft. It is undesirable, amoral, illegal and therefore punishable work in academia.

Several scholars and institutions have observed plagiarism differently. Among them,

Booth, Colomb and Williams (2003) have asserted, “You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else’s words or ideas but fail to credit that person, leading your readers to think that those words are yours” (p. 201-202). Similarly, Gardner (2009) has defined plagiarism as, “the academic offence of using information from a source without giving proper credit to the author or other owner of the intellectual property” (p. 132). Likewise, Bailey (2010) has conceded, “Plagiarism means taking information or ideas from another writer and using them in your own work, without acknowledging the source in an accepted manner” (p. 7). This has been clarified in American Psychological Association (APA, 2010 & 2020) that has purported both cases of academic theft as copying other’s concepts and views as the author’s own (plagiarism) and as presenting previously published materials as fresh ones (self-plagiarism).

Similarly, Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (2010) has mentioned these conditions to recognize the piece of work as plagiarism, ranging from “direct duplication” to “handling in work that you have done with a group of peers without acknowledging (p. 141). American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has also conceded plagiarism as, “taking over the ideas, methods, or written words of another, without acknowledgement and with the intention that they be credited as the work of the deceiver” (as cited in Rodriguez, 2013, p. 1). This is also evidenced in Masic’s (2014, p. 144) citations in these words, “**Merriam-Webster dictionary** has mentioned plagiarism as: (a) The theft and use of other people’s ideas or words as yours; (b) Use of sources without attribution; (c) Literary theft; and (d) Presenting some ideas as own and as it is new, while this idea already exists in other source”. This implies that plagiarism does not only refer to the traditional copy-and-paste of previously published/unpublished materials but also the passing of ideas and concepts in oral or written forms that are beyond the access of the detection software. Thus, “Anything can be plagiarized” (Khadilkar, 2018, p. 426). To be specific, plagiarism is an unethical way of presenting another’s/own work (either whole or part) as it is the presenter’s own/fresh one, without acknowledging the original author/s. Thus, plagiarism is a wrongful appropriation of another’s work into one’s without crediting the original source.

Based on the delineations above, I have a huge impetus to infer that plagiarism is: (a) presenting another’s work as the author’s own, (b) copying text or part of the text without acknowledging the original one, (c) misappropriating the other’s intellectual property, (d) avoiding quotation marks and doing direct cut and paste in one’s discourse, (e) mixing up paraphrased terms and original ones without crediting the source/s, (f) over citing someone’s

words without the author's own comments, (g) passing on incorrect information from the source or giving one source for another, (h) giving the source that is non-existent, (i) reusing one's own work as a fresh one, (j) using other's copyrighted materials (graphics, images, figures, tables, and texts) without taking permission. The above-mentioned delineations confirm that plagiarism (and self-plagiarism) is academic misconduct like fabrication, falsification, and copyright infringement.

Classifying Plagiarism

These delineations show the two main types of academic deception like plagiarism and self-plagiarism. Nevertheless, Masic (2014) has broadly labelled these types: clone, ctrl-c, find-replace, remix, recycle, hybrid, mash-up, error 404, aggregator, and re-tweet (p. 144). This taxonomy of Turnitin software, which does not directly address the cases from print resources, is mainly associated with the citation from the websites and the Abad-Garcia (2019) has classified plagiarism as academic misconduct with and without consent. They designated Turnitin's ten categories as the former and ghost authorship and text recycling as the latter type. They imply that plagiarism is an academic felony whether it is done with or without consent.

For Helgesson and Eriksson (2015), plagiarism has two components such as misappropriating content and passing it off as the author's own without giving proper credit to the original author. They have also distinguished plagiarism from duplicate publication, text recycling, salami slicing and copyright. Similarly, Khadilkar (2018) has classified plagiarism as verbatim/mosaic, paraphrasing, cyber plagiarism, and image plagiarism; and self-plagiarism as duplication, augmentation, segmentation, and text recycling; and other forms as bibliographic negligence, misappropriation of data, and suppression (pp. 426-427). Recently, Krokoszcz (2021) has observed the seven types of plagiarism which lie in the cline from complete duplication to redundant publication.

Causes and Consequences

Plagiarism tends to occur due to the lack of knowledge about its grave consequences. In this connection, Kalani and Twinwal (2013) pinpointed "unawareness" as a main cause of plagiarism, albeit its dire consequences may defame the plagiarists' academic carrier permanently. Besides the unawareness of copying materials from printed materials, another cause of increasing plagiarism is easy to access to many downloadable sources through websites and the Internet. However, Masic (2014) has pointed out that plagiarism is knowingly

or intentionally done to achieve research grants or “academic promotion”, to tackle financial problems, and to show off academic excellence for those who have poor academic backgrounds (p. 144). For Rothenberg (2009), plagiarism is the result of the messages of college libraries, which state, “Don’t read, just connect. Surf. Download. Cut and paste” (p. 70). Such instructions urge the students to copy and paste the web-based materials into their term papers, research reports and dissertations. Hence, even educational institutions are responsible for declining students’ level of originality.

Some studies have indicated the main causes of student plagiarism. Khadilkar (2018) illustrated these reasons: (a) easy access of information in electronic media, (b) lack of awareness about plagiarism checking, (c) author’s overconfidence, (d) poor language skills, (e) lack of moral integrity, (f) pressure to publish (perish or publish), (g) career opportunities, (h) pressure from seniors, and (i) ambition to be winner in an academic competition (p. 429). This list exhibits that plagiarism occurs because of the students’ psychological, social, and experiential contexts.

Similarly, Farahian et al. (2020) conducted a study on 291 university instructors. They found out that the reasons for plagiarism as the students’ personal characteristics, organizational and external factors. The first set constitutes the students’ lack of creativity, disbelief in their abilities, and low motivation towards writing. Even the supervisors do not tend to be supportive towards these aspects. The organizational factors are related to the loose institutional rules and regulations, supervisors’ unaware behaviours, and the improper process of theses writing. The external factors subsume the students’ socio-economic status, writing culture, technology, and social factors. Consequently, students are involved in academic misconduct. This study implies that the reasons for plagiarism are not confined within the circumference of the students but are due to the institutional and peripheral contexts.

These studies indicate that both the students and the institutions are not aware of the cases of plagiarism in academia. Despite this, the sufferers, who could primarily be the students themselves, should be aware of the consequences before they submit their works for evaluation (maybe it is a first draft).

Instances of plagiarism are observed even in scientific publications. In Krokosczyk’s (2021) study compared the instances of plagiarism in the journals published in 2013 and 2018 revealed that plagiarism and self-plagiarism are prevalent. However, the rate seems descending. Even most of the author guidelines and publication policies do not mention the term plagiarism in such prestigious publications. This study implies that one of the reasons of

plagiarism is that journals do not make the authors aware of this academic misconduct.

Whether it is intentional or unintentional, one who commits this academic crime cannot get rid of its consequences, which are different from one context or country to another. In the UK, “penalties range from a zero on an assignment to an E in the course. In some cases, suspension, dismissal or expulsion may be imposed” (Plagiarism: What is it, 2007, n. p.). For plagiarists, penalties may be in a line from reduced/failed grade to expulsion. Regarding the consequences of plagiarism, Masic (2014) has reported worrisome cases in these words:

The National Science Foundations (NSF) in March 2013 stated to explore more than 100 cases of suspected plagiarism in a year. [...]. In Germany, two prominent members of the Cabinet of the Prime Minister had to withdraw from office amid allegations of alleged plagiarism in dissertations. Similar scandals rocked Canada, the Philippines Romania and Russia. Most high-publicity scandals are illuminated in the past three years. (p. 145)

Further, Rodriguez (2013) has asserted that one of the German Cabinet Ministers was the Minister of Education and Research; the next case is of a Vice-president of the European Parliament who resigned in disgrace of plagiarism.

These plagiaristic instances (only a few of many) have been possible to detect because of the development of computer programmes, which are advancements in this field since the first attempts to address intellectual dishonesty in the USA in 1992 along with Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and in the UK with the establishment of a Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) in 1997 (Masic, 2014). Therefore, student plagiarism may result in failure in the exam or turn the teacher’s role from mentors to detectives for plagiaristic cases; freelancer plagiarism can result in public embarrassment and loss of prestige; professional plagiarism may lose their jobs; and researcher plagiarism may earn disgrace and other severe penalties based on their degree of plagiarism (MLA Handbook, 2009 & 2016). This wave has already entered the Indian Sub-continent too and so one should be aware of its grave results throughout the globe.

Ways to Avoid Plagiarism

Since plagiarism is a punishable practice, writers (students, faculties, and researchers) should avoid it. Numerous computer programmes, like Turnitin.com, eTblast, arXiv, LexisNexis and iThenticate, SafeAssignment, Docol©, and Eve2 (Easy Verification Engine); and commercial software such as www.plagiarism.com, www.plagiarism.org, www.m4-software.com, and www.canexus.com/eve/http://www.plagiarism.comwww.plagiarism.comwww.plagiarism.com.

plagiarism.orgwww.m4-software.com www.canexus.com/eve/ have been developed to detect plagiarism (Shahabuddin, 2009, pp. 356-7). As there are tools and techniques for detecting engines, as there are developments to avoid them. In this regard, Helgesson and Eriksson (2015) have mentioned the limitations of the software that can only check text similarity. They have also noted that these engines cannot detect similarity when the ideas and concepts are translated across languages. Further, these devices cannot be used if the materials are only in printed forms. Besides, oratory sermons and the students' writing after the recitation of authentic sources are beyond the access of such engines. Therefore, it is hard to find cases of plagiarism only by the use of detection software.

However, the penalty is unavoidable provided that it is detected. For developing intellectual integrity and for being safe from the accusation of such an unethical and illegal action or practice, one should be aware of the serious consequences on time and should follow preventive measures (as curative ones are hard to face).

The best way can be consulting the experts or writing style manuals. Different institutions have developed their own styles of citation, some of which are like Vancouver (applied in Biological Sciences), NLM (National Library of Medicine), ACS (American Chemical Society), IEEE (Institute of Electrical and electronics engineers), Chicago, MLA (Modern Language Association), APA (American psychological association), and LSA (Linguistic Society of America), among others. These manuals provide necessary guidelines for in-text citations (citations within the main text itself), and referencing (citations at the end of the text and often arranged alphabetically).

However, some scholars have presented a few tips towards this direction. Gardner (2009, p. 132) has forwarded these three tips: (a) Take accurate summary and paraphrase notes; (b) Take accurate notes; and (c) Document completely all summaries, paraphrases, and quotations of source material in your paper. His suggestions are to restate in your own words, to quote directly, and to cite (both in-text and reference list) the sources exhaustively and explicitly. These ways are confirmed by Kalani and Twinwal (2013, para. 11) who have recommended the methods like, "quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing". To tune these, Masic (2014) has recommended some ways, which suggest paraphrasing in the researcher's own words, to quote directly with quotation marks, to mention the original source even if it is the author's previously published own work, to cross-check in-text citations and references, to present full bibliographic information in reference list, and to follow the guidelines/rules, based on the particular style manual the researcher is following. Yet, these are limited to particular contexts

only. Thus, one of the possible solutions is to make the authors/students aware of the benefits of maintaining honesty for earning respect among peers, prospering scientific progress freely, and being safe from the victims of unlawful practices (Khadilkar, 2018). This proves the need for the producer's self-honesty.

In spite of these cases, there are some situations in which citation is not necessary. For example, common knowledge like "basic mathematical facts, [...] or certain historical facts [...] or certain geographical facts" can be mentioned without acknowledging any source/s (Rodreguez, 2013, pp. 2-3). Further, proverbs, sayings, and clichés are also not necessary to cite sources (MLA Handbook, 2009 & 2016). In addition to these, Bailey (2010) has noted two conditions which are not marked as plagiarism: "keeping some vocabulary from original source", and "presenting the result of your own research" (pp. 7-8). Nevertheless, the safe way is to cite if the researcher is in doubt. Likewise, only citing properly may not be sufficient condition for judging for credibility in case the work consists of excessive citations without the researcher's own comments. In this case, the researcher can be questioned not for plagiarism but for originality. Therefore, one should minutely observe how the ideas (self and the other's) are balanced to kill two birds with one stone.

Therefore, I strongly recommend following the expert's suggestions and the guidelines the researcher's institution is following because there are no uniform yardsticks to follow. Further, preventive measures seem more effective than curative ones. This finding corroborates with Krokosz (2021) which indicates the necessity of the plagiarism check before the submission of the manuscript for publication.

CONCLUSIONS

Plagiarism has been conceptualized differently in different contexts/countries. Nevertheless, it is taken everywhere as an unfair use and practice of using someone else's work as if it were the author's own. Whether it is committed intentionally or unintentionally, it cannot escape accusation and penalty. It is like a sleeping dragon; unless it wakes up, one can be capable of receiving grants, awards, academic promotions, good reputations, public fames and many more opportunities, However, if this dragon wakes up all these achievements along with future prospects will be turned into a heap of ashes. So, the writers should be aware since this can happen any time.

Plagiarism hence is to be avoided to let intellectual integrity prosper. There are preventive and curative ways to be followed. The preventive ways are that the writers should

be aware of its causes and dire consequences. They should be asked to follow the authentic guidelines which the affiliated institutions follow. For this, faculty members and researchers should collaborate for the fair use to protect academic excellence. The style manuals and plagiarism detecting programmes should be made accessible both for the faculty members and the researchers. Nevertheless, the researchers themselves should be aware about the possible pitfalls and problems in citing and referencing sources. Furthermore, they should be willing listeners to get rid of the prospective consequences.

Curative ways can also be taken. Academically, fair works should be highlighted and awarded; and publicized unethical practices institutionally. It may encourage sound practices and discourage immoral and even illegal exercises. Penalties should be fixed based on cases of plagiarism. For example, for one incident, the writers can just be warned; for two/three incidents, their marks/grades can be reduced; and for severe cases fail grades can be awarded. For faculty members too, similar allocations can be made. For this, rules should be made explicit. However, I prefer preventive measures to curative ones because they may lead to a 'win-win policy' both for the authorities and the researchers.

Detecting software can be employed only for online published materials. However, a huge number of sources are unavailable online. This limitation can only be overcome by the collaborative efforts of all the stakeholders like researchers, supervisors, editors, and the authorities. Mainly, the authors' ethical awareness and integrity are desirable for the prosperity of academic excellence.

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