Why Plagiarism is Considered to be a Serious Offence in Academics?

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June 02, 2021

Abstract

The paper discusses about the concept, perception, understanding and consequences of plagiarism among the future policy makers i.e., students. The paper also highlights acceptability of copying somebody’s ideas and thoughts to complete one’s own work which also indicates towards the casual approach of students. Acknowledging the fact that plagiarism is a kind of deception and is a major hurdle in the field of academic growth and development. Therefore, this must not be prevailed as it reduces the opportunity of uniqueness, in a way degrading the level of development in the thought process of people. Thereby, the paper tries to put forward the various consequences caused due to copying others’ ideas rather than putting efforts in creating some new ideas. The paper also talks about the students’ approach towards the idea of plagiarism and how educational institution tries to modify their policies in order to reduce the possibility of plagiarism.

Introduction:

Writing a good research article requires a good grasp of knowledge and expertise in the field of which the person is working. It is mainly done with the idea of publishing one’s work and unique results to the academic/research community so as to gain popularity and get one’s work recognised by the people working in the similar field. But while writing a manuscript, most of the researchers, especially the students are prone to commit mistakes and many are even being caught for plagiarism.

One of the most popular terms which is often used in the field of research and academics ‘Plagiarism’ is taken from a Latin word ‘plagiarus” which refers to a ‘kidnapper’ (Aronson, 2007). The term ‘plagiarism’ found its place in the Oxford English dictionary in the year 1621. The definition of plagiarism as defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica is “the act of taking the writings of another person and passing them off as ones’ own” (Dhammi & Ul Haq, 2016). Plagiarism is considered a serious ethical offence in the field of research and academics as it involves the act of forgery, piracy and fraud and additionally, it also violates the copyright law.

One of the latest definitions of plagiarism is “the use of other’s published/ unpublished work/ idea/ words/ other intellectual property without proper permission/ attribution/ recognition and presenting them as new and original idea rather than acceptance of deriving them from other existing sources” is given by the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), which can be accessed at the website http://www.wameorg/resources/publication-ethics-policies-for-medical-journals.

Paraphrasing someone else’s words with proper citation is also termed as plagiarism from the academic point of view as there is lack of recognition to the original person whose ideas are being used. Improper referencing too is considered as plagiarism irrespective of the fact that it was not intentional (Gilmore et al., 2010).

Copyright, on the other hand, is a legal tool to protect the ‘original intellectual work’ of an author which may be scientific, literary, dramatic, musical, artistic etc. The protection is provided for both published and
unpublished work. The copyright provides exclusive rights to the copyright holder and violation of any such rights is called copyright infringement and is punishable under law.

A simple difference between copyright infringement and plagiarism is that the copyright infringement is a construct of the law while the plagiarism is the construct of ethics (Sonfield, 2014). The most important point to be considered while defining plagiarism and copyright infringement is that the copyright infringement has just one victim, that is the copyright holder. On the contrary, the plagiarism has two victims, that is the original author and people who are unaware of the origin of the actual work (Budiman & Karnalim, 2019).

There are different types of plagiarism and all violates the essence of ethics in the academic/research fields. It is often seen that the young researchers, students who are new to the field of research where they have to publish articles as a part of their academic career are mostly found to use plagiarism. Most of these plagiarisms are carried out as they have lack of proper knowledge about the ethics and most of the time, they unknowingly commit these violations during the writing of articles/papers in their initial attempts. Gradually, once they are being taught on the subject, they try to defer from committing the ethical violations. Thus, by educating the students about the plagiarism is essential in order to identify their mistakes at the initial stages so that they can try not to commit such mistakes.

It is very important how the university policy makers and educationists introduce the concept of plagiarism to the students and academics/researchers. Some of the higher education authorities make it mandatory to introduce the topic formally to the students as their moral duty while some of them forcefully scare students of dire consequences if found plagiarising. Many students reported that they don’t plagiarise just because their professors and academic institutions said so even when they had no understanding of the concept of plagiarism and drawbacks related to it. The policies related to plagiarism defined by different institutions vary rapidly with varying countries and continents. It is also seen that the policies revolving around plagiarism is different for different countries while they are all a part of same continent and are neighbouring countries.

It is also very clear from the studies published on plagiarism that many of the graduate students and even researchers have very faint ideas on plagiarism. Some of the students reported that the policies on plagiarism is being defined in their university handbooks but they have hardly ever referred to it as they don’t take it to be a very serious offence. Their casual approach towards the seriousness of the topic reveals how much flawed their education system is.

this study attempts to find out the perceptions of different students hailing from different academic backgrounds and different countries/continents on the concepts and understanding of the term plagiarism.

Methodology

The present review study attempts to compare different reported statements and understanding from different studies published worldwide to understand the students’ point-of-view on the seriousness of the offence of plagiarism and its associated drawbacks. Multiple articles were accessed for the conclusion of the plagiarism ethics blunders committed by the students/academics based on their country/continent of origin.

Results and Discussions

A study undertaken by Hofstede in 2001 (Eckhardt, 2002; Hofstede, 2001), conceptualised that the national cultures impact the work behaviour and functioning of organisations which comprises of four dimensions like power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term/short-term orientation and individualism/collectivism.

The above-mentioned factors can define the extent of plagiarism committed by the students/researchers as these factors varies with different places/countries/continents with varied plagiarism policies in education sector. In this study, an attempt is made to identify the variation among the plagiarism policies and grasp of students on the concept of plagiarism in different continents.

Hofstede (2001) defined power-distance as the extent to which “the less powerful members of the institutes of a country expect and accept that power distribution is unequal” while the definition for uncertainty
avoidance was given as “extent to which the members of any culture feel threatened to uncertain/unknown situations”. Individualism is defined as “a society in which everyone is expected to look after self and immediate family” while collectivism is “the society where the individuals are integrated into cohesive groups from birth are protected throughout lifetime in exchange of unquestioning loyalty”. Long-term / short-term orientation refers to “the choice of focus for people’s efforts: the future or the present” (Eckhardt, 2002).

In countries/continents with lower power distance is expected to have strong plagiarism policy which are readily available to all the students and researchers as they will be more open to such concepts and have better understanding of copyright infringement and plagiarism. On the contrary, the higher power distance means that the students have negligible understanding and access to plagiarism policy. Countries that have high individualism concept will be having higher individual responsibility while in the continents having collectivism concept will consider plagiarism to be university community responsibility.

The policies of universities around the globe regarding the plagiarism and copyright infringement varies with different countries. The western nations have lesser power-distance and rely heavily on individualism rather than collectivism. Hence, they have better understanding on the concept of plagiarism and have easier access to similarity detection tools. They also have the sense of responsibility that the content/article they publish should be plagiarism free and its in the discretion of the individual as well as the university, and just nix the university duty. High power distance nations find it hard when it comes to innovation according to a study by S. Shane (1992; 1993).

There are 7 continents in the world in which 6 continents are inhabited with human beings. The continents like Europe, Australia and North America are considered to be developed while the South America and Asia are considered Developing as the majority of the countries of these continents come under the category of developing nations. World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) classifies countries based on different categories as developed economies, economies in transition and developing economies (West et al., 2007). 32 of the 44 European nations comes under the developed nation category while the remaining 12 are under the economies in transition category. None of the European country is considered as developing nation. 2 nations of the total of 23 nations are developed in North America continent while none of the South American countries are considered to be developed as a nation. 2 out of 14 nations in Oceania (Australia) are developed while other nations are classified as developing economies. In the continent of Asia, only Japan is classified as a developed nation while 12 nations come under the category of economics under transition. The remaining 35 of the 48 nations of Asia are developing economies. It is seen that the developed economies have lower power distance as compared to developing economies where the power distance relatively very high. Hence the education policies of the nations which are classified as developed economies have better plagiarism policies as compared to the nations classified as developing economies.

One of the most common reasons of plagiarism is that the students do not know different types of plagiarism. They have many misconceptions on the topic and hence it is very important to educate them about different types of plagiarism.

Shelly Yeo (2007) in a study revolving around the first-year science and engineering students of Australia showed that about 45% of those students considers plagiarism to be merely copying the content without acknowledgement while 27% thinks plagiarism is done for the deception of the study after copying. For another 18% of students, plagiarism is for copying and then no acknowledgement of the original work while 7% of the students considers plagiarism as simple copying of content. Remaining 3% of the students have no idea on the said matter. The same study also reported that 38% of the students think that the student who is found to plagiarise his/her paper/article/thesis should be punished as per the university policy while 55% of the students believes that the deduction of academic marks is the most suitable punishment for such miscreants. 7% of the surveyed students considered that a warning is enough for the students who are found to have plagiarised. A noteworthy report published in the very same article showed that 70% of the students doesn’t consider copying common assignment solutions as plagiarism. 27% of the students who reported the above-mentioned as plagiarism considered it a minor offence while less than 5% considered it to be moderately serious offence while no one considered it to be very serious offence. Majority of students consider that it
is plagiarism only when it is copied and pasted in an article as compared to copying assignment from other sources.

In another study conducted on the college students in the Maine state of the USA conducted by Lory G. Power (2009) reported that the students don’t plagiarise just because they are told to do so but have no proper concept or understanding on the same. The students also reported that the concept of plagiarism were introduced to them as a warning rather than any base of understanding and sense of responsibility. According to the students interviewed, the punishment for the plagiarism is according to the university handbook. The interview reported that none of the students have ever read the university handbook completely while just 6% of the interviewee reported that they have just read some parts of the manual.

Another similar study taken up by Mahmud et al. (2019) reported the European student’s perceptions on the Plagiarism policy in higher education. They reported that 83-93% of the students of the UK had access to plagiarism policies and had better understanding on the penalties due to the plagiarism. In comparison, 50-70% of the students from Czechia agreed that they had access to the plagiarism policies and penalties revolving around it. The European countries like Romania and Poland reported even less than 50% of their students have better access and understanding on the plagiarism policies. The stark difference between the proportion of students from the neighbouring countries shows how much the universities actually do care to introduce the concept of plagiarism to their students.

A similar research published by Song-Turner (2008) compared the perception of students on plagiarism and related policies from the students from India (54%), Asia (21%), Europe (13%), South America (3%), Africa (1%), Arabia (1%) and Australia (6%) who were studying in Australia at the time of the research published. The Australian students responded that “using someone else’s exact work for a particular idea or description” as plagiarism. The European students responded that plagiarism meant “writing other person’s ideas as yours, without mentioning the author’s name” while the Indian students described plagiarism as “to copy word by word (verbatim), without referencing, without giving proper credit to the person to whom the article or words belong”. The other Asian nation’s students referred plagiarism as “using other’s sources without citation and references”, the Latin American students concluded it as “plagiarism is to present the knowledge of someone else as your job” and Arabian student referred plagiarism to be “copying the material written by someone without acknowledging”. The African students mentioned “the use of other people’s findings or ideas in published work in one’s own work without acknowledging the source of such ideas or findings in the work”.

Conclusion
The students are supposed to propagate the ideology of an honest work since they will be the future policy makers. Plagiarism acts as an obstruction in the knowledge sphere of students since they find it easier to copy somebody else’s ideas rather than investing their energy in understanding the concepts and putting it in their own words. In a way, plagiarism acts as a source of escapism for the students.

As a result, the students are deprived of acquiring knowledge. Plagiarism also restricts the scope of being provided varied idea and creative skills. There needs to be proper monitoring regarding the work of students. They should be taught to reflect their own ideas and concepts in order to gain knowledge, wisdom and intellectual fame.

Declarations:

Ethics approval and consent to participate
Not applicable.

Consent for publication
Not applicable.

Declaration of Competing Interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Funding support:**
Authors declare that they have not received any funding for the present work.

**References**


