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**Awareness of Plagiarism Acts and Policy by Postgraduate Students in University of
Ibadan, Nigeria**

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Abstract

Plagiarism is an act that is capable of tarnishing the image of universities and postgraduate students need to avoid it. However, interactions with postgraduate students revealed that some of them did not consider some acts that constitute plagiarism as such due to ignorance. Besides, literature search showed that due attention appears not to have been paid to the issue of plagiarism policy in most universities in Nigeria. Thus, this study empirically examined the awareness of plagiarism acts and policy by postgraduate students in University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research method was used and the study population comprised 26,503 postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The multistage random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 226 and the questionnaire was used to collect data. Findings showed that most of the respondents 171 (86.4%) were aware of what plagiarism is and majority were also highly aware of the different acts that constitute plagiarism. Results also revealed that a significant proportion of the postgraduate students 110 (55.6%) had low level of awareness of existence of a plagiarism policy in their university. Majority of the respondents had high level of research competence in avoiding plagiarism. It was recommended that the postgraduate school and faculties hold workshops every academic session to strengthen the research competence of postgraduate students and train them on how to use other people's intellectual works without plagiarising. The management of the university should also ensure that plagiarism policy is formulated and implemented.

Keywords: Awareness, plagiarism, policy, postgraduate students, Nigeria

Introduction

Universities across the world occupy a unique position in the education and training of high level manpower for different sectors of the society in order to engender socio-economic and technological development through postgraduate studies. Postgraduate students are individuals who have obtained a bachelor and or master's degree from a university but are continuing to study in order to earn an advanced degree. Adeyemi and Oluwabiya (2013) noted that postgraduate students form a significant group of researchers in the university as they are expected to acquire and maintain a broad but also highly detailed knowledge of their subject and related disciplines. These sets of students are also expected to carry out researches that are novel, failure of which the conferment of a higher degree will not come into fruition. The process of acquiring knowledge and conducting research in postgraduate studies is done through various academic activities that might require the students to complete assignments, prepare for lectures and also engage in an in depth independent study of a phenomenon.

It is germane for postgraduate students in the process of engaging in the various academic activities to interact with literature. This is because in order to complete an assignment, it may be necessary to visit the library and consult information resources like reference materials, textbooks and other electronic information resources or access the Internet to retrieve documents through the search engines or in databases. The students might also use these information sources to prepare for lectures and complement what has been taught in the class. Perhaps the greatest exposure of the postgraduate students to literature either through the library or the Internet comes during the course of their project work that will culminate in the writing of a dissertation or a thesis. This is because the students are expected to review related literature and this entails a harvest and logical organisation of many intellectual ideas that will help situate their work within the context of the existing literature.

Postgraduate students could be involved in plagiarism in the course of engaging in this array of academic activities if they are not well informed about the phenomenon. Carroll (2007) defined plagiarism as the act of passing off someone else's work, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as one's own and for one's benefit. Khan (2016) expressed the view that plagiarism can be considered as a kind of breach of academic integrity as it is rightly believed to lessen or sometimes eliminate the real value of a scholarly work. Plagiarism is an academic crime and postgraduate students could be offenders if care is not taken. The propensity of

plagiarising is really high when the ease with which hundreds of electronic documents can be downloaded on the Internet through the search engines with just a click of button is put into consideration. As a result, the issue of plagiarism is indeed on the front burner in literature and academic discussions.

There are different acts that constitute plagiarism. Harris (2001) identified copying a paper from other students which was described as collusion by Park (2004) and collaboration by Roig (2006) as a type of plagiarism. Other acts include; copying from the Internet without proper reference, cutting and pasting from different sources, quoting without acknowledgement, copying whole phrases and changing some words, paraphrasing without attribution, summarising without attribution, use of false citations and duplication of one's work for more than one submission which is also self plagiarism (Harris, 2001). Plagiarism.org (n.d) also identified the following as acts of plagiarism; turning in someone else's work as your own, copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit, failing to put a quotation in quotation marks and giving incorrect information about the source of quotation. Other acts include; changing words but copying the sentences structure of a source without giving credit and copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of one's work, whether credit is given or not. Again, apart from words and ideas taken from someone else without attribution, plagiarism is also committed when tables and figures not generated from primary data but derived from other sources are used without due acknowledgement (Abioye, 2016).

In order to detect cases of plagiarism done by students, detection software of different types are being deployed by universities. However, the use of detection software has its own challenges. One of the challenges was raised by Martin (2004) who averred that some software for detecting plagiarism can only detect word-for-word plagiarism of documents captured in their database and not plagiarism of ideas and sources. Olutola (2014) also indicated that lack of knowledge in using plagiarism software by academics and the inability of the software to detect phantom papers also constitutes challenges to the detection of plagiarism.

In view of the shortcomings of plagiarism detection software, it seems necessary to pay more attention to the ways of preventing students from plagiarising, which should be complemented with the use of detection software. This brings to the fore the need to identify the reasons why students plagiarise with a view to addressing those reasons as measures of plagiarism prevention. Even though a lot of reasons have been provided as to why students

plagiarise, issues of awareness on the part of the students as to what constitutes plagiarism, availability of plagiarism policy in universities and competence of students are factors that should be given adequate attention. Saeed, Aamir and Ramzan (2011) expressed the view that the students' act of academic deceit could be due mainly to lack of awareness, especially when institutions fail in their responsibility to create awareness about plagiarism. Ellery (2008) and Council of Writing Program Administrators (2008) observed that some students plagiarise because they do not know how to integrate ideas and also how to cite those ideas appropriately in their texts. Babalola (2012) also opined that students plagiarise due to poor knowledge of appropriate citing principles and poor awareness of correct referencing norms. This proves that lack of competence could make students plagiarise unintentionally.

Awareness of the availability of a plagiarism policy in the university by the students could also determine whether they will plagiarise or not. Oyewole and Abioye (2016) defined a plagiarism policy as a formal document that presents the framework of action on issues regarding plagiarism. Contained in the policy are the acceptable standards and behaviours expected from the students in keeping academic integrity and how it can be achieved. Onuoha and Ikonne (2013) stated that the availability of a plagiarism policy acts as a prevention mechanism. This is because when students are aware of the existence of a plagiarism policy that will not be compromised, they would be careful while writing not to plagiarise (Oyewole & Abioye, 2016). Thus, if cases of plagiarism are to be reduced among postgraduate students, their level of awareness of plagiarism acts and policy, coupled with their competence level should be considered. It is in the light of this that this study examines the awareness of plagiarism acts and policy among postgraduate students in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Plagiarism is an act that is capable of tarnishing the image of universities by calling into question the reputation and value of the degrees conferred on students. As such it is important for this academic crime to be checked especially among postgraduate students who are expected to be serious minded and focused. However, interactions with some postgraduate students revealed that some of them did not consider some acts that constitute plagiarism as such because of their general ignorance about plagiarism. Apart from awareness issues, observations revealed that some faculty members seem to expect postgraduate students to have the required competence in

proper referencing, paraphrasing and summarising ideas taken from others. As a result, they seem to downplay this aspect during research methods class and focus more on the nitty-gritty of research methods. Consequently, some postgraduate students do not have the competence that will ensure that they do not run foul of plagiarism. Besides, the required attention appears not to have been paid to the issue of plagiarism policy in most universities in Nigeria. It is based on this backdrop that this study sets out to empirically examine the awareness of plagiarism acts and policy by postgraduate students in University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Research questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of acts that constitute plagiarism by postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of awareness of plagiarism policy by University of Ibadan postgraduate students?
3. How competent are the postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan in using intellectual works in such a way as to avoid plagiarism?

Literature review

Plagiarism is an act that has been given adequate attention in literature because of its prevalence among members of the academic community, postgraduate students inclusive. Studies have been conducted on awareness of plagiarism acts and policy among postgraduate students in other jurisdictions and these studies have provided valuable insights into the subject matter. Riasati and Rahimi (2013) studied why Iranian postgraduate students plagiarize through a qualitative investigation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven masters and PhD students studying at two different universities in Shiraz, Iran. Having analyzed the interview data, the researchers came up with eight categories of reasons for plagiarism as expressed by the respondents and one of the key reasons was lack of awareness of the acts that constitute plagiarism.

Similarly, Orim, Glendinning and Davies (2013) explored Nigerian postgraduate students' experience of plagiarism in a phenomenographic study. Semi structured interviews were conducted with eighteen Nigerian students who just arrived the United Kingdom for their

masters degree programme in engineering. These students included 85% males and 15% females, twelve of them were interviewed in groups, while six were interviewed individually. Results from the data collected showed lack of awareness of plagiarism. While the two studies already cited revealed a total lack of awareness, some studies have either revealed insufficient awareness or average level of awareness of plagiarism by postgraduate students.

Gomez, Nagesh and Sujatha (2014) did an assessment of the attitude of respondents which included 140 postgraduate students in Bapuji Dental College and Hospital, Davangere, India toward plagiarism. The questionnaire was the data collection instrument and from the findings which revealed a moderate attitude towards plagiarism, it was concluded that the level of postgraduate students' awareness of plagiarism was insufficient and as such must be improved upon. Idiegbeyan-Ose, Nkiko and Osinulu (2016) also examined the awareness and perception of plagiarism of postgraduate students in selected universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study was a survey and stratified random sampling technique was used to select 338 respondents that included PGD, masters, MPhil/PhD and PhD students from federal, state and private universities. Results showed that 156 (46.2%) were aware of plagiarism and its acts and the conclusion was that they had an average level of awareness.

However, in a study conducted by Tahiri and Eslam-Navez (2014), the respondents stated that they were aware of plagiarism and its acts, the researchers studied the perception of English First Learners (EFL) graduate students of physical education who were in the Departments of Sport Physiology, Sport Management, Corrective Exercises and Sport Pathology at the University of Guilan, Iran. Results showed that 75% of the participants were aware of the concept of plagiarism and considered it as an important problem in an academic context in Iran. It can be deduced from the studies presented on awareness of plagiarism by postgraduate students that there seems to be a gradual improvement in the level of awareness of plagiarism by the postgraduate students as the years progressed.

On postgraduate students' awareness of plagiarism policy, the study by Orim et al (2013) also revealed that the postgraduate students studied were not aware of the existence of plagiarism policies in their various universities in Nigeria before arriving in the United Kingdom for postgraduate studies. Results also showed that a few students went on to express that the awareness that they had on plagiarism was not as a result of institutional systems in place but due to the personal effort of their lecturers. The study by Gomez, Nagesh and Sujatha (2014) which

considered the attitude of postgraduate students of the Bapuji Dental College in India towards plagiarism also revealed that the respondents were not aware of the plagiarism policy. As a result it was concluded that the plagiarism policy should be made to come into effect in order to ensure strict rules are set by the university to prevent plagiarism.

On the contrary, the study carried out by Kokkinaki, Demoliou and Iakovidou (2015) on students' perception of plagiarism and relevant policies in public and private universities in Cyprus showed that majority of the respondents that included postgraduate students agreed about the existence of policies dealing with plagiarism. However, findings further showed that only one third of the students agreed that the policies were available to them, while a significant number does not even know how the policies applied to them. This reveals that it is one thing for postgraduate students to be aware of the existence of a plagiarism policy in the university, and another thing entirely for them to have access to and understand the content of the policy. The purpose of plagiarism policy formulation will be defeated if the users do not understand its content.

This in a sense raises the issue of competence of the postgraduate students especially when it comes to their knowledge of plagiarism issues. Some scholars have identified lack of competence as a major issue to consider as far as preventing plagiarism is concerned. Orim et al (2012) in phenomenographic exploration of the perception of plagiarism by Nigerian students in a United Kingdom university discovered that the level at which students were taught the rudiments of writing scholarly papers in Nigerian universities was low or totally non existence in some places. This type of situation could expose the students to plagiarism. In the same light, Riasati and Rahimi (2013) also reported that some of the postgraduate students in the two universities in Iran that were interviewed stated that they plagiarised because they did not possess the necessary skills for writing and carrying out research.

Khan (2016) viewed lack of competence on the part of the postgraduate students as academic factors that could account for the reasons why they plagiarise. Specifically, the factors include; lack of writing and research skills, problems evaluating Internet sources, confusion between plagiarism and paraphrasing and misconception of plagiarism. If postgraduate students do not possess these skills and cannot differentiate between what plagiarism is and what it is not, they may even plagiarise without knowing that they have done so. Olutola (2016) puts it more succinctly by stating that failure to teach students the rudiments of academic writing and how to

avoid plagiarism pitfalls by academics is recognised as an underlining factor driving much cases of plagiarism in higher institutions in Nigeria.

The review has established that despite the fact that awareness of plagiarism by postgraduate students seems to have improved, awareness could still be an issue. Plagiarism policies also need to be viewed as a necessity in universities, especially in Nigeria and the competence level of some postgraduate students leaves little to be desired. Not much work seems to have been done in investigating the level of awareness of plagiarism acts and policies by postgraduate students in universities in Nigeria, particularly the University of Ibadan. It is this gap that the study has set out to fill.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The population of study comprised the postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. According to the data collected from the Academic and Planning Unit of the University, there are 26,503 postgraduate students in 23 faculties/centres and institutes. In order to determine the sample size, the multistage random sampling technique was used. At the first stage, 60% of the 23 faculties/centres and institutes was selected, thus with the use of the simple random sampling technique, 14 faculties/centres and institutes were selected. The second stage of sampling involved the use of systematic random sampling to select an Nth term of 4, that is every 4th faculty/centres and institutes out of the 14 were selected in the sample. At the last stage, a sampling fraction of 5% was used resulting in a sample size of 226 (Table 1). The questionnaire was the research instrument used for data collection. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts was used to analyze the data.

Table 1 Selected faculties and the sample size for the study

Faculty/centre/institute	Number of students	Sample size (5%)
Faculty of Education	3,401	170
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	665	33
African Regional Institute for Information Science	210	11
Centre for Petroleum, Energy, Economics and Law	12	12
Total		226

Results

Questionnaire administration and return rate

A total of 226 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria who were in two faculties, one institute and one centre. However, 198 copies were returned and found useful for analysis, giving a response rate of 87.6% (Table 2).

Table 2: Questionnaire administration and return rate

Faculty/centre/institute	Number of students	Distribution	Return
Faculty of Education	3401	170	155
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	665	33	29
African Regional Institute for Information Science	210	11	7
Centre for Petroleum, Energy, Economics and Law	12	12	7
Total		226	198

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 3 presented the results on the demographic characteristics of the respondents and findings showed that most of the postgraduate students 131 (66.2%) were on their masters degree programme, while 11 (5.6%) were either on their Mphil or Mphil/PhD programs. A significant proportion of the respondents 95 (48.0%) indicated that they were between 25-29 years of age, as only 2 (1.0%) claimed that they were between 45-50 years old. The postgraduate students that participated in the study included more males, 110 (55.6%) than the females 88 (44.4%). Results on marital status also revealed that majority of the respondents 143 (72.2%) pointed out that they were single, and the rest 55 (27.8%) were married.

Table 3 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Program		
Masters	131	66.2
Mphil	11	5.6

Mphil/PhD	11	5.6
PhD	45	22.7
Age		
20-24	39	19.7
25-29	95	48.0
30-34	45	22.7
35-39	12	6.1
40-44	5	2.5
45-50	2	1.0
Gender		
Male	110	55.6
Female	88	44.4
Marital Status		
Married	143	72.2
Single	55	27.8

N=198

Answers to research questions

Research question one: What is the level of awareness of acts that constitute plagiarism by postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Table 4 captured the responses of the postgraduate students on their extent of awareness of the various acts that constitute plagiarism.

Table 4 Extent of awareness of the acts that constitute plagiarism by postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan

Plagiarism acts	Highly aware		Moderately aware		Slightly aware		Not aware	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Copying a paper from another student	120	60.6	45	22.7	23	11.6	10	5.1
Copying from the Internet	118	59.6	47	23.7	26	13.1	7	3.5
Cutting and pasting from different sources	141	71.2	43	21.7	13	6.6	1	0.5
Quoting without acknowledgement	143	72.2	28	14.1	21	10.6	6	3.0
Copying whole phrases and changing some words	94	47.5	38	19.2	49	24.7	17	8.6
Paraphrasing without attribution	67	33.8	118	59.6	5	2.5	8	4.0
Summarising without attribution	108	54.5	67	33.8	12	6.1	11	5.6
Use of false citations	115	58.1	54	27.3	18	9.1	11	5.6

Duplicating work for more than one submission	118	59.6	37	18.7	25	12.6	18	9.1
Writing without references	126	63.6	38	19.2	25	12.6	9	4.5
Failing to put a quotation in quotation marks	81	40.9	43	21.7	35	17.7	39	19.7
Changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit	50	25.3	134	67.7	7	3.5	7	3.5
Copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of one's work, whether credit is given or not	103	52.0	57	28.8	20	10.1	18	9.1
Turning in someone else's work as your own	151	76.3	34	17.2	11.	5.6	2	1.0
Using tables and figures that are not derived from primary data without giving acknowledgement	136	68.7	45	22.7	9	4.5	8	4.0
Using a picture or a video that was not captured by you without acknowledgement	133	67.2	43	21.7	11	5.6	11	5.6

Findings showed that most of the respondents were highly aware of the acts that constitute plagiarism as 151 (76.3%) acknowledged that turning in someone else's work as one's own is plagiarism. In addition, a significant number of the postgraduate students, 143 (72.2%) and 141 (71.2%) noted that quoting without acknowledgement and cutting and pasting from different sources are acts of plagiarism. However, majority of the respondents, 134 (67.7%) indicated that they were moderately aware that changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit constitutes plagiarism. Similarly, majority of the respondents 118 (59.6%) also noted that they were moderately aware that paraphrasing without attribution is an act of plagiarism.

Research question two: What is the level of awareness of plagiarism policy by University of Ibadan postgraduate students?

Table 5 presented the findings as regards the postgraduate students' awareness of the existence of a plagiarism policy in their university.

Table 5 Postgraduate students' awareness of the existence of a plagiarism policy in the University of Ibadan

Question	High		Moderate		Low		Not Aware	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
How can you describe your level of awareness of the existence of a plagiarism policy in your university	32	16.2	48	24.2	110	55.6	8	4.0

Results showed that most of the respondents 110 (55.6%) rated their awareness of the existence of a plagiarism policy as low, while the least 8 (4.0%) noted that they were not aware of the existence of a plagiarism policy.

Table 6 showed the responses of the postgraduate students on their awareness of the contents of the plagiarism policy.

Table 6 Postgraduate students' awareness of the contents of the plagiarism policy in University of Ibadan

Contents of plagiarism policy	High		Moderate		Low		Not Aware	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Clear definition of those who should abide by the policy e.g. students and members of staff	32	16.2	63	31.8	100	50.5	32	16.2
Definition of the various acts that constitute plagiarism	26	13.1	55	27.8	113	57.1	4	2.0
Explanation of the various levels of plagiarism	23	11.6	47	23.7	122	61.6	6	3.0
Detailed description of the avenues where members of the university community can learn about plagiarism like seminars/workshops	26	13.1	60	30.3	91	46.0	21	10.6
List of all the courses that address the issue of plagiarism like research methodology, information literacy and information ethics	14	7.1	42	21.2	125	63.1	17	8.6
Clear indications of the penalties that will be meted out to violators of the policy based on the level of plagiarism like outright cancellation of marks, resubmission of thesis, no opportunity for resubmission, disciplinary hearing, suspension,	18	9.1	43	21.7	122	61.6	15	7.6

rustication and the likes.				
Identification of the plagiarism detection software that the institution uses like Turnitin	18 9.1	30 15.2	140 70.7	10 5.1

Results revealed that most of the respondents had a low level of awareness of the contents of the plagiarism policy. Majority of the postgraduate students 140 (70.7%) rated their awareness of the part of the policy that should deal with the identification of the plagiarism detection software that the institution uses like Turnitin as low. Also, the majority of the respondents 125 (63.1%) also pointed out that they had a low level of awareness of the part of the plagiarism policy that should list all the courses that address the issue of plagiarism like research methodology, information literacy and information ethics. Moreover, 122 (61.6%) indicated that they were aware of the part of the plagiarism policy that explains the various levels of plagiarism.

Table 7 presented results on access to plagiarism policy by the postgraduate students.

Table 7 Access to plagiarism policy by postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan

Question	Yes		No	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Do you have access to the plagiarism policy of your university	29	14.6	169	85.4

Findings showed that most of the respondents 169 (85.4%) noted that they do not have access to the plagiarism policy of their institution, as 29 (14.6%) responded in the affirmative that they had access.

Postgraduate students' responses on the awareness of the procedures for dealing with students that plagiarise were captured in Table 8.

Table 8 Postgraduate students' awareness of the procedures for dealing with students that engage in plagiarism in the University of Ibadan

Question	Yes		No	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Are you aware of your university's procedures for dealing with students that engage in plagiarism?	90	45.5	108	54.5

Results showed that most of respondents 108 (54.5%) indicated that they were aware of such provision, while 90 (45.5%) pointed out that they were aware.

Table 9 presented the results on the source of access for the respondents who indicated that they were aware of the existence of a plagiarism policy in the university.

Table 9 Source of access to plagiarism policy by postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan

Source of access to plagiarism policy	Freq.	%
Hard copy from the postgraduate school	13	6.6
Hardcopy in the university library	6	3.0
Hardcopy in the departmental library	4	2.0
Online	2	1.0
Others (Through seminars/from supervisors)	4	2.0
Not applicable	169	85.4

Findings showed that even though majority 169 (85.4%) ticked not applicable, among those that noted that they were aware, 13 (6.6%) indicated that they had access to the plagiarism policy through the hard copies provided by the postgraduate school and 2 (1.0%) indicated that they had access online.

Research question three: How competent are the postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan in using intellectual works in such a way as to avoid plagiarism?

Table 10 presented results on the competence of the respondents in avoiding plagiarism acts.

Table 10 Competence of postgraduate students in avoiding plagiarism acts in the University of Ibadan

Statements	High		Moderate		Low	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
I know how to paraphrase words	94	47.5	101	51.0	3	1.5
I know how to summarise words and ideas	103	52.0	92	46.5	3	1.5
I can properly quote an author(s)	118	59.6	79	39.9	1	0.5
I can correctly cite the works I use	127	64.1	68	34.3	3	1.5
I can correctly reference the sources I use	128	64.6	68	34.3	2	1.0
I know the correct places where to put quotation marks around quoted materials	94	47.5	96	48.5	8	4.0
I give full reference information of all the sources of information I use whether print or electronic	109	55.1	82	41.4	7	3.5

Findings showed that most of the postgraduate students 128 (64.6%) noted that they had high competence in correctly referencing the sources they use, while 127 (64.1%) also indicated that they high competence in correctly citing the works that they used. On the other hand, a significant proportion of the postgraduate students 101 (51.0%) and 96 (48.5%) were of the view that they had moderate level of competence in paraphrasing words and in placing correctly quotation marks. However, it could be deduced from the overall results that most of the respondents had a high level of research competence in avoiding acts that constitute plagiarism.

Discussion of the findings

Results showed that most of the respondents noted that they were aware of what plagiarism is, and majority were also highly aware of the various acts that constitute plagiarism. This high level of awareness on plagiarism on the part of the postgraduate students could be as a result of the renewed attention drawn to it by the Postgraduate School and lecturers in the faculties, institutes within the university. This supports the findings of Tahiri and Eslam-Navez (2014) that studied English First Learners (EFL) graduate students at the University of Guilan, Iran and reported that most of the participants were aware of the concept of plagiarism and considered it as an important problem in an academic context in Iran. On the contrary, the findings by Riasati and Rahimi (2013) who studied why postgraduate students plagiarise in different universities in Shiraz, Iran and that of Orim, Glendinning and Davies (2013) who explored plagiarism experience of Nigerian postgraduate students' who just arrived the United Kingdom for their masters degree, disagree with that of this study as most of their respondents were not aware of the acts that constitute plagiarism.

Findings revealed that majority of the respondents rated their awareness of the existence of a plagiarism policy in the university as low. This also translated into a low level of awareness of the contents of the policy, lack of access to the plagiarism policy and lack of awareness for the procedures for dealing with students that engage in plagiarism by most of the postgraduate students. This indicates that the university seems not to have a clear cut policy on plagiarism but a semblance in the intellectual property rights. This agrees with the findings of Orim et al (2013) where they reported that the postgraduate students studied were not aware of the existence of plagiarism policies in their various universities in Nigeria before arriving in the United Kingdom for postgraduate studies. However, results of the study carried out by Kokkinaki, Demoliou and Iakovidou (2015) on students' perception of plagiarism and relevant policies in public and private universities in Cyprus disagreed with that of this study as majority of the respondents indicated their awareness of the existence of policies dealing with plagiarism.

The results also indicated that most of the postgraduate students had a high level of research competence in avoiding acts that constitute plagiarism. With this competence level, it is expected that the postgraduate students would be able to uphold academic integrity and avoid the acts that constitute plagiarism. This result on research competence is contrary to the findings of Riasati and Rahimi (2013) who reported that some of the postgraduate students in the two

universities in Iran that were interviewed did not have a high level of research competence as they noted that they plagiarised because they did not possess the necessary skills for writing and carrying out research.

Conclusion and recommendations

Postgraduate students' level of awareness of the acts that constitute plagiarism seems to be improving as attention is being drawn to the issue at official gatherings and other informal settings by the management of the university and faculty members. This high level of awareness might ensure that the postgraduate students try as much as possible to uphold the ethics of academic writing and avoid plagiarism. However, a low level of awareness of the existence of a plagiarism policy by the postgraduate students could hinder their resolve to avoid plagiarism, as it may give the impression that the university does not have an official document that specifies how plagiarism issues are to be treated.

In order to sustain the postgraduate students' high level of awareness on the acts that constitute plagiarism, it is recommended that the Postgraduate School and faculties hold workshops every academic session to strengthen the research competence of postgraduate students and train them on how to write without plagiarising. In addition, the low level of awareness on the existence of a plagiarism policy should be addressed. It is important for the management of the university to ensure the formulation and implementation of an official plagiarism policy for the university. The existence and implementation of such policy will enhance awareness and raise consciousness on acts of plagiarism among postgraduate students in the university.

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