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Towards Curbing Plagiarism in Higher Institutions of Learning: The Strategic Role of the Library

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Towards Curbing Plagiarism in Higher Institutions of Learning: The Strategic Role of the Library

By

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ABSTRACT

Lack of academic integrity has frustrated the attainment of educational objectives especially in tertiary institutions in recent times. Perhaps, one of the most prevalent fraudulent practice among students, academics and researchers today is plagiarism. This paper examines the concept, nature and intricacies of plagiarism. It notes the devastating effects of plagiarism on the individual, academic institutions and the society at large. The paper argues that libraries by their assigned and inherent functions have a strategic role to play in curbing plagiarism. The roles include awareness creation, teaching of referencing and citation skills, information literacy programmes among others. The paper concludes with further recommendations for dealing with the menace of plagiarism.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Academic Institutions, Libraries, Plagiarists, Researchers, Students, Academic Integrity

INTRODUCTION

Higher Institutions all over the world are battling with the ‘plaque’ of plagiarism. Management and designated authorities of institutions are concerned with the need to devise means to curb these ugly trends. For instance in Nigeria, the Committee of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities in 2012 contacted the United Kingdom (UK) based academic integrity software company called Turnitin for discussions and technical collaborations on dealing with plagiarism. Today, many universities in Nigeria have access to the Turnitin system and they can now conduct originality checks of diverse publications to ensure genuine intellectual contributions to scholarship (Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko and Osinulu 2016). The Nigerian experience appears to be the trend around the world. However, the conduct of originality checks has not considerably reduced the occurrence of plagiarism in institutions; though it has created some levels of awareness (Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko and Osinulu 2016).

Plagiarism is a threat to the founding philosophy of research – which is to arrive at new facts or get additional information to the existing one; plagiarism if not curbed will hinder the main aim and objective of Universities - that is to solve the problem of mankind through research.

Alluding to the research function of tertiary institutions especially Universities, Agu, Olibie and Anyikwa (2009) explained that higher institutions are supposed to produce research findings and innovation that will contribute to the advancement of nations. Plagiarism has become a great risk to the attainment of this objective. This paper therefore examines the concept and intricacies of plagiarism and the vital roles libraries could play in curbing the ugly trend.

THE CONCEPT OF PLAGIARISM

According to Berlinck (2011), ‘plagiarism has come to occupy a greater space in society, probably due to access to electronic documents.’ Plagiarism is interlinked with other fraudulent practices like ‘copy and paste’, ‘inadequate referencing’, etc. According to the Ethics Committee

of Editors of the British Journal of Surgery, "plagiarism ranges from the unreferenced use of others' published and unpublished ideas, including research grant applications to submission under "new" authorship of a complete paper, sometimes in a different language. This can occur at any stage of writing, such as planning, research, writing, or publication; this applies to both print and electronic versions of articles" (Skandalakis and Mirilas, 2004).

According to Masic (2012), the word plagiarism emanated from the Latin word "Plagium" meaning "Kidnapping a man", which implies stealing another person's work and presenting it as yours, whether intentionally or unintentionally. According to Maxel (2013), in spite of the differences in definitions of plagiarism, the general understanding about plagiarism or copyright infringement is that it happens when the materials that have been written need creativity, or lack originality, poor reference or citation of materials utilized, non-acquisition of authorization from the original authors, extension of materials of others without affirmation, use of writings, figures and whatever other exceptional materials that are not original. Plagiarism is scholarly deceptive in nature, unscrupulous, lacks uprightness, encroaches on copyright laws and legislation, and encourages a procedure of moral decay in academics, and all types of scholarly work.

The act of using other individuals' work as an original work of lecturers, students and other persons in academia like its new is plagiarism and copyright infringement. The act of plagiarism is generally not acceptable worldwide; conventionally, untruthfulness of any shape is disregarded by everyone. Office of Research Integrity (2011) opined that "a source used in writing a paper must be acknowledged even if the content is paraphrased or summarized rather than directly quoted". Proper citation and acquisition of proper permission from original authors of a work, likewise words used verbatim from previously used works should be cited and quoted

TYPES OF PLAGIARISM

The first type of plagiarism is the 'lazy' plagiarism. This is usually carried out by lazy students and /or researchers who do not want to go through any form of academic stress and rigor but rather want cheap results, hence they are referred to as 'lazy plagiarists'. This group of plagiarists simply copy the write up of another student/researcher verbatim, that is, they make

little or no changes to the content of the work except their names. Eassom (2017) in her article on plagiarism in research referred to 'lazy' plagiarism as complete plagiarism. She noted that 'it is an extreme scenario when a researcher takes a manuscript from another researcher and resubmits it only changing the name'. These kinds of plagiarists are usually not common but however they exist.

Another common form of plagiarism is the 'cunning' plagiarism. This is quite different from the 'lazy' plagiarism which is a more deliberate form of plagiarism. The 'cunning' plagiarist is a researcher who is well informed about the term plagiarism and what it entails. He therefore tactically tries to copy small pieces of various researchers' works to make a new whole document for himself, this is what could be referred to as the 'cut and paste' kind of plagiarism (Handbook for Economics Lecturers, 2017). This kind of plagiarist still maintains the original idea of the plagiarized researcher but fails to cite the fellow and acts like the paraphrased sentence or paragraph is his own idea. Gordon, Simmons and Wynn (2017) noted that some researchers cleverly paraphrase sentences from various authors all in a bid to escape plagiarism but this is unethical; they however unequivocally noted that 'original work demands original thought and organization of thoughts'. It is therefore imperative that researchers and students should avoid manipulating another individual's idea as this is a form of plagiarism.

Besides the two kinds of plagiarism discussed, another form of plagiarism is the accidental plagiarism. Just as the name depicts, this kind of plagiarist lacks the prerequisite knowledge on the practice of plagiarism so he carries out plagiarism ignorantly and as a result of inexperience. It is however pertinent to note that the issue of accidental plagiarism undergoes the same consequences as any other kind of plagiarism; so ignorance or lack of requisite knowledge is not an excuse. Hogle (2016) clearly noted that this kind of plagiarism occurs whenever a student, researcher or a writer uses the words, images and ideas of another person available in public domain without proper acknowledgement/ citing of the owner of that intellectual material. The RMIT University (2005) aptly summarized accidental plagiarism as:

- Forgetting to identify the source of material consulted
- Making use of the exact words of another individual without quotation marks even though the author(s) are cited

- Ignoring the source of your materials and putting other writers' ideas into your own words.

Another common type of plagiarism being practiced among academics today is self plagiarism. This kind of plagiarism occurs when an author re-uses the same text or even data of his own work in a different journal outlet without properly citing or making reference to the original work (Eassom, 2017). It is simply duplicating an article and despite the fact that it is from the same author, it is still termed as plagiarism. Most authors usually carry out this practice as a result of the 'publish or perish' syndrome in academic institutions while some of them purposely send out research manuscripts to more than one journal outlets. It is paramount that even when making use of your own text, proper citations of the original published source should be made to avoid plagiarism. iThenticate (2011) defines self plagiarism as 'a type of plagiarism in which the writer republishes a work in its entirety or reuses portions of a previously written text while authoring a new work. A similar definition was given by Roig (2015) as 'the practice by which authors reuse their own previously disseminated content and pass it off as a "new" product without intimating the reader that this material has appeared previously.'

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF PLAGIARISM

The act of plagiarism carried out by students and researchers can be caused by a number of factors, one of which is ignorance. The level of knowledge possessed by an individual on the subject of plagiarism could go a long way in determining if or not the act would be committed. An individual who possesses no knowledge about the subject of plagiarism may carry out plagiarism without even knowing it. Hence ignorance is seen as one major cause of plagiarism. Some authors carry out self plagiarism because they are ignorant of the fact that the act is actually plagiarism. Sridhar, Selvan and Prabhu (2013) noted that the low level of knowledge possessed by students on referencing, referencing styles and citations is a factor that brings about increase in plagiarism today. A lot of students are not well groomed on issues pertaining to citation hence they plagiarize ignorantly. In the same vein Onuoha and Ikonne (2013) citing Insley (2011) and Wan et al. (2011) noted that some students engage in acts of plagiarism ignorantly because they possess low level of knowledge on the intricacies of proper citations and referencing.

The present digital and information age has also brought about an increase in the level of plagiarism. Easy access to information on the internet by just a single click has encouraged the act of plagiarism. It has encouraged intellectual laziness among students and researchers. Some students just download materials and copy as their own intellectual property. Onuoha and Ikonne (2013) supported this by stating that the ease in copying available materials from the internet makes it tempting for students to cheaply ‘cut and paste’ when given academic work to do.

Another common factor that causes plagiarism is time constraint. A lot of students and researchers have little or limited time frame to turn in an assignment or a research paper as the case may be, hence they are tempted to do it the crooked way- plagiarizing other people’s research. Instead of going through the rigor of downloading academic materials, perusing and internalizing the materials to produce their own papers, they would rather plagiarize. Most researchers and academics also have the pressure of meeting deadlines hence they are tempted to plagiarize. This was corroborated by the findings of the study carried out by Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko and Osinulu (2016) on plagiarism by postgraduate students. They reported that 35% of the respondents attributed their reason for plagiarizing as pressure to meet deadlines while 32% noted that they plagiarize as a result of lack of adequate skill.

Some other factors that have increased the level of plagiarism today include less stringent penalties for offenders, the desire for quick fix solutions, unavailability of mechanisms and software to check plagiarism, etc.

The whole activity of plagiarizing has negative effects on the researcher, original owner of the plagiarized work and even the society as a whole. This act of plagiarism could go a long way in discouraging authors to write because they find out that their intellectual property is being misused by other researchers or students.

An adverse effect of plagiarism is the decline in the level of knowledge. The continuous practice of plagiarism brings about an obvious recycling of the same available knowledge; no new idea is created but rather already existing ideas are just being used over and again.

CURBING PLAGIARISM: THE EMERGING ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

Looking at the increasing incidences of plagiarism and its consequences on intellectual property rights and academic integrity, there is need to quickly find solutions to the emerging trend.

Gibson and Chester-Fangman (2011) posited that though it will take the involvement of all stakeholders to deal with the problem of plagiarism, the library has a major role to play. Libraries are involved in intellectual property creation, accessibility, protection and preservation.

Plagiarism negates the protection of intellectual property rights. It therefore poses a great challenge to libraries. Burke (2004) opined that in dealing with plagiarism, libraries should not only be concerned with detection; they should also take proactive steps in preventing occurrence of plagiarism. Prevention measures range from information literacy and correct citations campaigns, research clinics and advocacy programmes.

Specifically, in preventing and detecting plagiarism, libraries could play the following roles:

Teaching of Citation Methods and Skills

Lampert (2008) noted that if students, faculties and researchers are not well informed on proper citation methods, the tendency for plagiarism becomes higher. An important characteristic of research and intellectual works is the citing of information and references consulted and used in writing the work. Failure to correctly make references and proper citations is called plagiarism.

Lampert (2008) opined that some plagiarists are victims of circumstance who probably were ignorant of proper citation methods. Sciammerella (2009) noted that many students are not aware of the correct procedure for documenting information sources. Herein comes the role of the librarian.

In most schools, librarians are usually giving the responsibility of library instruction and information literacy. In carrying out this responsibility before now, librarians only concentrate on library use and information search. There is the need to include citation methods and skills in the curriculum. This could take the form of college approved courses (elective or required) for a semester or session. It could also be included in periodic orientation programmes for new students and faculties. Librarians should also collaborate with faculties in carrying out library instruction to students. Opportunities like seminars and workshops should be provided for faculties and researchers who need to refresh their citation skills. A potential challenge to librarians' involvement in these roles is the lack of adequate time either on the part of the

librarian or those to be trained. For example, the role may conflict with the librarians' core duties. In most institutions, students have very tight schedules, such that they hardly have time for other assignments other than their core academic work. In some climes, a specific librarian is charged with these responsibilities (Burke, 2004); this helps to promote effectiveness and efficiency. Libraries should advocate for the inclusion of library instruction in the students' official timetable. The curriculum for teaching citation skills should include, but not limited to meaning of citation, citation and referencing styles and practical work and assignments on citation. Other information resources that can further enlighten users like citation manuals may be provided after the class. Librarians must be acquainted with current citation and referencing styles, if they must teach others. They therefore need to be abreast with current trends in citation and referencing styles.

Development of Plagiarism Policy

Organizations and institutions thrive on policies. For an important phenomenon that borders on academic integrity and ethics, there is need for institutions to formulate policies. A policy on plagiarism is therefore very important. Librarians who are knowledgeable on intellectual property and copyrights are very useful in drafting such documents. Their knowledge of standards and best practice become very useful to their institutions in drafting policies on plagiarism. The policy should address issues on what constitute plagiarism, procedures for plagiarism checks and penalty for defaulters.

Plagiarism Checks

Libraries could designate one or more librarians to check on citations and references of intellectual works of members of their immediate academic community. This will help to forestall attempts of plagiarism. Fortunately, there are now standard and effective online plagiarism checkers. Libraries could easily subscribe to them. Arguably, the most popular commercial software for plagiarism checks in academic institutions are Turnitin and WriteCheck. There are also some that are freely available on the internet. Librarians must be able to interpret the result of the online plagiarism check. Generally, online plagiarism checkers indicate overall plagiarism index and the sources that were plagiarized. One of the limitations of online plagiarism checkers is their inability to check plagiarized sources that are not available on

the internet; for example, Turnitin software scans the internet for plagiarized sources of any submitted document and then returns an originality report.

Awareness Creation

Libraries are known as property/copyright rights campaigners. In a bid to stop plagiarism, academic libraries should embark on awareness campaigns using various platforms. One veritable platform for such campaigns is social media. Students, academics and researchers are very active on social media platforms, so constant reminders on the evils of plagiarism using comics, posters and captions could be very useful. The use of billboards around campus is also a very useful platform for awareness creation.

CONCLUSION

Plagiarism is a menace that has eaten deep into our educational system. It should be addressed immediately so as to curb its negative effects on the individual, the educational system, the society and the world at large. Parent institutions and academic libraries should wake up to their responsibilities so as to eradicate this ugly trend in the educational system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the various points discussed in this paper, the following are recommended.

- Academic libraries should take the issue of training of the faculty, staff and students on proper citation and referencing more seriously so as to curb the incident of plagiarism in our educational system.
- The parent institutions (Management) should develop a written plagiarism policy and make it available to their faculty, staff and students.
- The institutions that do not practice plagiarism checks should acquire plagiarism checks software and enforce its use.
- Academic libraries should educate their patrons (faculty, staff and students) on the negative effects of plagiarism on individual, educational system, society and the world at large; this may definitely curb the incident of plagiarism in our educational system.

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