

Addressing the Root Causes of Plagiarism: Strategies For Promoting Originality and Critical Thinking in Student Writing at Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract. Plagiarism is a common problem in institutions of higher learning and defeats the very purpose of higher education, which is to develop critical thinking and enhance intellectual integrity. The study aims to explore the various causes of plagiarism and strategies for promoting originality and critical thinking among students in tertiary institutions. The study evaluates different types of plagiarism, including accidental, self-plagiarism, and intentional plagiarism, while identifying the root causes among students, such as family pressure, lack of self-control, poor attitude towards learning, poor time management, and inappropriate usage of digital resources or technology. The research also indicated that addressing and mitigating all these factors requires a dynamic approach, utilising plagiarism detection tools, educating students on the importance of academic integrity, and creating awareness of plagiarism as an unethical academic practice. The paper also emphasises the need for originality and critical thinking through active learning, peer collaboration, and continuous assessment. By encouraging students to use original content and actively develop their thoughts, institutions can reduce the rate of plagiarism. In conclusion, institutions must create an environment that fosters originality and critical thinking in writing.

Keywords: Plagiarism; Students; Education; Originality; Critical Thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an essential part of an educational career [1]. From simple jotting of notes to completing continuous tests, assignments, examinations, projects, and thesis, every student writes something or the other at every level of education. In term papers and research projects, students can use the works of other scholars or writers to strengthen their ideas. However, academic integrity policies require that, in case of any helpful information available from verified sources, a student must pay due references presenting proper in-text citations along with the total list of references [2]. Not giving due credit to the information in the written work is a serious breach of academic conduct and is termed plagiarism. Plagiarism, naming the act of using the ideas or work of another person without proper credit, sometimes described as intellectual theft, basically consists of a lack of due credit to the creator of the ideas included in one's work.

According to the author [3], there are several reasons for the prevalence of plagiarism in ter-

tiary institutions. The immense pressure to do well academically makes plagiarism an attractive option for students. Furthermore, insufficient training in academic writing, citation skills, and paraphrasing further perpetuates the problem [4]. Educators must address the roots of plagiarism by promoting originality and critical thinking skills, which are crucial for developing academic integrity and enhancing student learning. Originality is not merely about creating new ideas but entails properly integrating and using existing knowledge to develop creative arguments [4].

Educational institutions should play a critical role in developing an academic environment that promotes originality and discourages plagiarism. Proper citation training should be integrated into curricula, fostering a culture of academic honesty, and formative assessments are suggested to help students understand the value of producing original work for sustaining academic integrity [5]. The paper attempts to investigate the causes of plagiarism in tertiary institutions. It ex-

plores how the lack of critical thinking and original thought can significantly contribute to it. It will also suggest practical strategies that students and institutions can adopt to promote originality and academic integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Plagiarism. There are various types of plagiarism, such as Accidental plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and intentional plagiarism. Each type of plagiarism violates the integrity of the academic process. These variations are discussed in the following sections, giving insight into how they come about and their consequences.

Accidental Plagiarism. Accidental plagiarism is when one fails to attribute a source properly due to a citation misunderstanding. In most cases, this kind of plagiarism happens when an individual has misquoted a source and utilises the exact meaning of the original document without proper acknowledgement of the source [6]. Although this form of plagiarism is not intentional, accidental plagiarism carries the same weight as if the plagiarism were deliberate. Academic institutions penalise both equally because their regulations consider any negligence in citing others as a breach of academic integrity. It also underlines the necessity to learn how to give citations fully and do so habitually in writing original work to avoid making innocent mistakes that turn out to be instances of cheating [7].

Self-plagiarism. According to authors [8], self-plagiarism is when a student submits their previously completed work for credit in a new assignment without permission from all relevant instructors. The practice can include entire papers or segments of earlier works combined as original content for multiple academic evaluations. Self-plagiarism is considered an ethical issue because it distorts the educational process by misrepresentations of the originality of the work. Educational institutions take self-plagiarism as seriously as any other forms of academic cheating and emphasise the importance of clear communication between a student and instructor regarding the use of previous work [9].

Intentional Plagiarism. Intentional or deliberate plagiarism indicates the conscious act of claiming ownership of work one knows was entirely created by another individual. Author [10] suggests that this type of plagiarism covers many deceptive activities, such as copying and pasting text

from online encyclopedias or some other electronic source and presenting this material as one's own. Other examples of intentional plagiarism include using photographs, videos, or audio files without proper permission and acknowledgement of ownership. Also, deliberate plagiarism involves citing sources that have never been consulted and patchwriting, which may include minor and superficial changes to the lifted text [11]. Additionally, submitting the same paper for different classes without acquiring permission from both instructors is also a form of intentional plagiarism.

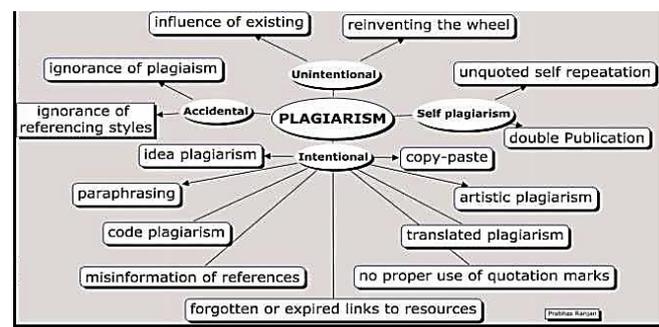


Figure 1 – Types of plagiarism [11]

Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Plagiarism. According to the author [11], plagiarism is an act of deliberate cheating. However, it can be due to various underlying factors, ranging from personal attitudes and pressures at the surface to technological advancement and poor understanding of academic procedures at higher levels. Any effective action against plagiarism and for academic integrity should, therefore, address the causes of plagiarism. The sections highlight the major contributors to plagiarism and demonstrate why students would commit it despite its ethical implications.

Attitude and Self-control. Authors [12] noted that attitude contributes to a student's disposition towards plagiarism. The study also proved that drivers such as self-control factors and attitude towards academic assignments play a key role in determining whether one will engage in plagiarism. Students who feel an assignment is unimportant, unchallenging, or irrelevant are more likely to plagiarise because they are less motivated to complete the work ethically. Also, a poor attitude toward learning can lead to an outcome-oriented mentality focusing on results, such as grades, rather than the learning process itself

[13]. Furthermore, students with low self-control may revert to shortcuts like plagiarism when the academic load is high or when they feel there is a low likelihood of being caught. Such learners would have low academic integrities and likely see plagiarism as an easy option in achieving such course requirements without putting forth the required effort.

To mitigate the lack of self-control among students, which could lead to plagiarism, instructors can design a more engaging curriculum and relevant assignments that focus on students' interests and make the work meaningful and worth doing, reducing the motivation to take shortcuts. Authors [14] stated that incorporating academic integrity courses and the importance of ethics from a long-term standpoint will remain significant in changing the student's orientation from grades to learning. Organised time management supported by periodic responses from an instructor is another path to self-discipline development through which students can reduce stress from schoolwork, which eventually leads to unethical behaviour such as plagiarism.

Language Proficiency. Language proficiency is another decisive factor in students' tendency to plagiarise, especially among non-native speakers. Students who are poorly capable of mastering the English language would have very little ability to paraphrase and articulate intricate ideas properly; thus, they have higher chances of committing accidental plagiarism [15]. These high-level linguistic operations involve rephrasing and synthesising without distortion in meaning, which may not come naturally to many non-native speakers. Consequently, the latter group of students may unconsciously duplicate text verbatim, thinking their attempts at paraphrasing have cleansed the text.

According to authors [16], the higher the number of students with high-level proficiency in the English language, the less their disposition to plagiarise since they already possess the means of expression to put forward ideas in words. Consequently, plagiarism would more likely be associated with international students; to solve this problem, institutions should provide focused academic support to reduce plagiarism among non-native English speakers; this may involve language development programs and writing workshops that enhance their paraphrasing skills and summarising ideas in their own words [17]. Also, access to an academic mentor or writing centre

would ensure personalised guidance, offering the student linguistic means to avoid unrequired plagiarism when navigating academic writing requirements.

Time Management and Academic Pressure. Poor time management is one of the most common causes of students committing plagiarism [18]. Students tend to underestimate the hours and effort spent completing an assignment requiring research. As a result, they delay work until deadlines are close at hand; this leads to pressure on the students, which may propel them to perceive plagiarism as the last hope of meeting the submission requirements of their work [18]. Since senior students have the extra stress of graduation with substantial multiple academic commitments, the tendency of plagiarism is high. Students can easily feel overwhelmed by their workload as they work around competing deadlines and personal responsibilities that leave little time for creating original work. In this regard, authors [16] asserted that fear of failure coupled with the need to succeed academically provides the impetus for students to solve an assignment through plagiarism quickly.

Poor time management may result in plagiarism, as students who hasten to complete assignments are more likely to copy others without appropriate citations [19]. The students should, therefore, develop robust organisational abilities such as making schedules that are deemed realistic for studying, breaking down complicated assignments into manageable tasks, and thus avoiding procrastination. The institutions should support this through workshops on time management, giving more apparent timelines for assignments, and encouraging students to seek help upfront when difficulties arise.

Technological Factors. Technological advancements in effortless access to the internet have facilitated an increase in plagiarism [20]. The abundance of online information, which students can easily access, has encouraged many to plagiarise by copying and pasting content without citing sources [16]. Many students believe that anything found online is free to use in assignments without consequence. This misconception is fueled by a lack of understanding about properly citing online sources, often leading students to unintentionally commit plagiarism because they fail to recognise the source [21].

Using search engines, digital libraries, and online academic databases, it has become relatively

easy for students to gather considerable information within seconds. While these technologies benefit research, they also enable students to indulge in lazy habits of copying complete texts verbatim, thus increasing the incidents of "copy-paste" or verbatim plagiarism [21]. To solve this issue, educational establishments should focus on teaching digital literacy so that students can use online resources responsibly and ethically. Integrating workshops on the correct way to paraphrase, referencing digital materials, and avoiding the misuse of technology could also motivate more responsible academic behaviour [22]. Institutions should also encourage using plagiarism detection software as a pre-emptive measure that allows students to check for accidental plagiarism in their work before submission.

Family and Cultural Pressure. Family and cultural expectations are major contributors to students' decisions to plagiarise. In most cultures, there is a great emphasis on academic success as a measure of personal and family honour; this creates an intense urgency for high grades at whatever cost. Author Doro [23] revealed that, in their quest to impress parents, families sometimes place unrealistic pressure on students to excel academically. This pressure can lead them to plagiarise to meet those expectations [24]. The issue intensifies when society closely ties academic success to financial stability or social status, prompting students to prioritise grades over genuine learning.

Cultural background may also play a meaningful role, as some cultures emphasise achieving as highly as individuals. In that case, students may completely disregard ethical questions regarding academic dishonesty. The family expectations of not being disappointed or the urge to live up to the cultural expectations of success could force students to plagiarise as a fast way to attain these expectations [23]. The driving factors of plagiarism due to family and cultural pressures can only be restricted if the educational facilities give learning and ethical skills greater prominence than mere academic success. They might do this by emphasising the long-term benefits of acquiring knowledge and skills rather than grades. The institutions should, therefore, involve the students and their parents or guardians in awareness programs on the essence of academic integrity and the penalties resulting from plagiarism. In this regard, creating an environment with openness to talk over academic challenges will

ensure students ask for help rather than being stressed to take shortcuts to unattainable standards.

Strategies for Promoting Originality and Critical Thinking. Educators and institutions can foster academic integrity and enhance the learning experience by actively promoting originality and critical thinking among students through practical pedagogical approaches, clear institutional policies, and consistent individual practices.

Educating Students on Academic Integrity. Educating students on academic integrity is one of the core strategies to promote originality and reduce plagiarism. Workshops and seminars on this subject could be a critical catalyst in increasing students' awareness of the importance of producing original work and the possible consequences of academic dishonesty or unethical behaviour. These study groups should not only define plagiarism but also outline the different forms it can take to prepare students better to deal with the intricacies and complexities of academic writing [25].

In addition to the interactive workshops, the institutions can provide generic materials to the students detailing citation practices, guidelines on ethics in writing, and institutional policies on plagiarism, which would form a basis of reference for students during their tenure in school [26]. Online tutorials and e-learning modules also enhance access, allowing students to go through at their own pace and revisit key concepts repeatedly. Online resources like these should be user-friendly, attractive, and supported by multimedia to meet a wide range of learning styles.

Encouraging Critical Thinking Skills. Authors [27] noted that it is essential to integrate critical thinking skills across the curriculum to enhance students' information analysis and encourage high-level creativity; this can be done by encouraging inquiry-based learning and the development of problem-solving strategies, in which educators guide students to engage with course materials on a deeper level and to develop their perspectives. Courses designed around open-ended questions create room for deep exploration, allowing this more profound understanding and prohibiting superficial engagement [28].

Assessments involving elements of reflective analysis and personal interpretation are also necessary in this process. Projects requiring students to critically analyse viewpoints regarding a

subject matter or successfully investigate a multi-layered case study tend to incite their use of critical thinking methods. Such assessment further encourages creative thought and the capacity to synthesise multiple pieces of information into more intricate, multidimensional conclusions [29].

Additionally, developing critical thinking involves creating an inquiring and questioning atmosphere. Instructors can create an atmosphere in class whereby students ensure that their thoughts, opinions, assumptions, and the investigation of different perspectives are satisfactorily considered [27]. Instructors or teachers can encourage a discussion-based atmosphere in small groups and group projects for the students to learn from each other; through this collaboration process, students will appreciate the importance of diverse perspectives and understand the importance of critical investigation or evaluation.

Utilisation of Technology for Plagiarism Detection. Originality among students and reduced cases of dishonest behaviour in educational institutions are facilitated by adopting plagiarism detection software [30]. Computer-based plagiarism detection tools, such as iThenticate, Turnitin, Grammarly, Quetext, and the like, are widely used to highlight potential plagiarism situations and, at the same time, serve as teaching aids. The technology helps provide immediate feedback to students regarding their writing, thus enabling them to locate those areas where they may have failed to cite sources otherwise or adequately used uncredited material.

These tools offer more than just detection services; they also give students essential insights into acceptable citation methodologies and paraphrasing. For instance, besides highlighting similarities between existing sources and where a student's work has been found to contain, Turnitin provides links to those sources so that the student can go through them and understand how to correctly attribute their references [31].

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This educational aspect makes using plagiarism detection software not punitive but rather one of opportunity- to learn and be more considerate during one's learning process.

Moreover, plagiarism detection software may help nurture a culture of integrity and responsibility in a student's writing practice. Guidelines requiring students to submit their drafts through such platforms before finalising their work will provide an enabling environment focusing on ethical writing practices. This approach ensures that students appreciate originality in their work and are motivated to take full responsibility for their academic integrity.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the study indicates that plagiarism in higher education is a multidimensional issue with its causes, implications, and possible solutions. Also, plagiarism is brought into focus due to several causes, such as unawareness, academic pressure, and the growing ease of access to information in the digital age. The research also emphasises the need for educational institutions to inculcate a better realisation of academic integrity in their students and staff. Plagiarism policies should not end with punishment but address and develop critical thinking. Educational institutions should also encourage awareness programs on plagiarism and how it can be prevented.

Furthermore, new advances in artificial intelligence and plagiarism detection tools have changed how plagiarism is detected and integrated into broader educational strategies. The finding has further supported that a balanced approach involving collaborating technological tools/innovations and educational initiatives would favourably foster a culture of originality, responsibility, and academic integrity in higher education.

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