

Using Online Reference Management Tools to Combat Plagiarism in Higher Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

Academic dishonesty has always been known to plague institutions of higher learning the world over. However, issues of plagiarism come into limelight with increased access to the internet as more students and faculty rely on it for information. Although many within the academic environment engage in acts of plagiarism knowingly, some get involved unknowingly for lack of citation knowledge. While this may have been a big problem in the past, the story is different today as online reference tools now abound to aid novice researchers, while easing the work of the more experienced. This paper therefore, discusses how the academic community can take advantage of online reference tools as a measure to combat plagiarism.

Introduction

Plagiarism is not a new concept in higher institutions of learning as students have always been known to engage in cheating behaviours. While cheating permeates many areas of academic life, plagiarism is restricted to issues of academic dishonesty dealing with the wrongful use of other peoples ideas. The council of Writing Program Administrators as cited by Quinn (2006) states that plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original materials without acknowledging its source. Cases of plagiarism, however, seem to be on the increase with access to the internet as what most people term *copy and paste*. Fortunately, several reference management tools now abound to assist researchers especially in the area of citation management.

Aims of the study

This study aims to provide means of reducing plagiarism in higher institutions in Nigeria by revealing methods of detecting plagiarism and creating support for academic writing through the awareness of online reference management tools.

Concept of plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty which has been gaining recent attention due to what some authors refer to as the "cut and paste" nature of the internet (Trinchera 2001; Cromwell, 2006; Jocoy and DiBiase 2006). Batane (2010) explains that plagiarism occurs in different forms such as incorrect citation and totally stealing someone else's ideas and work. Plagiarism resource site (2012) asserts that the most common form of plagiarism occurs when one author's words are inserted verbatim in the work of a second author, without quotation, acknowledgement, or attribution. Recent literature according to Wan, Nordin, Halib and Ghozahi (2011) grouped forms of plagiarism into four broad categories. 1. Stealing material from another source and passing it off as ones' own, e.g. a) buying a paper from a research service, essay bank or term paper mill (either pre-written or specially written), b) copying a whole paper from a source text without proper acknowledgement, c) submitting another student's work, with or without that student's knowledge (e.g. by copying a computer disk). 2. Submitting a paper written by someone else (e.g. a peer or relative) and passing it off as their own. 3. Copying sections of material from one or more source texts, supplying proper documentation (including the full reference) but leaving out quotation marks, thus giving the impression that the material has been paraphrased rather than directly quoted. 4. Paraphrasing material from one or more source texts without supplying appropriate documentation.

Reasons for plagiarism

Several authors have suggested different reasons for students/faculty involvement in plagiarism. Among them are: lack of time to complete task (Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead, 1995; Grantham, 2009); lack of awareness and understanding of what constitutes plagiarism (White 1993 as cited by Park 2003); lack of knowledge to do proper academic citation and referencing (Overbey & Guiling, 1999; Insley 2011). Lack of consequences for those who plagiarise and perception of task as boring (Grantham, 2009)

Plagiarism in higher institutions in Nigeria

Although there are few empirical studies addressing issues of plagiarism in Nigeria, Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2003) affirm that incidents of plagiarism among other vices adorn pages of Nigerian newspapers. In a recent

development, *Enogholase* (2008) reports the suspension of a Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Benin over allegations of plagiarism. Adeniyi and Taiwo (2006) while investigating academic dishonesty among Nigerian college of education students found out that 476 (34.3%) of the study respondents have copied material word for word from written source at least once. 407 (29.3%) affirmed that they have fabricated/falsified bibliography at least once. This study further revealed that lecturers down – play the severity of plagiarism by not exposing their students. This corroborates the assertion by Adebayo (2011) which claims that in Nigeria, emphasis of academic dishonesty has been placed more on cheating that takes place during examinations while cheating in other important assessment activities are ignored.

Park (2003), however, indicates that plagiarism is an increasing problem worldwide. According to Selwyn (2008) recent studies in North American, UK and Australian higher institutions have found between 30% and 40% of undergraduate students admitting to importing material from the internet into their assignments without acknowledging the source, and between 10% and 20% admitting to doing so for substantial proportions of an assignment. In a study by McCabe (2005) 73 % of a total 50,000 undergraduates from around 60 campuses in the United States admitted they have committed plagiarism in one form or another.

Detecting plagiarism

Harris (2012) suggested various means of detecting plagiarism. According to the author, there is need to look out for mixed citation styles; smoking guns (e.g labels left at the end of term papers such as “thank you for using TermPaperMania); lack of references or quotations; unusual formatting; strange margins, skewed tables, lines broken in half, mixed subhead styles and other formatting anomalies. Similarly, the author adds that if parts of the paper do develop the subject, but other parts seem oddly off, the product may be a cut and paste. Appleton and Carroll (2001) also suggest comparing the grammatical style of various sections of the work for internal consistency. While most of the strategies mentioned above offer a manual method of detecting plagiarism, Grantham (2009) notes that anti-plagiarism software tools such as <http://www.tumitin.com> and phrase searching using free online search engines such as Google can help track down copied works. Harris (2012), however, suggests that in using free online search engines, exact phrase searches should be carried out from a suspect part of the paper.

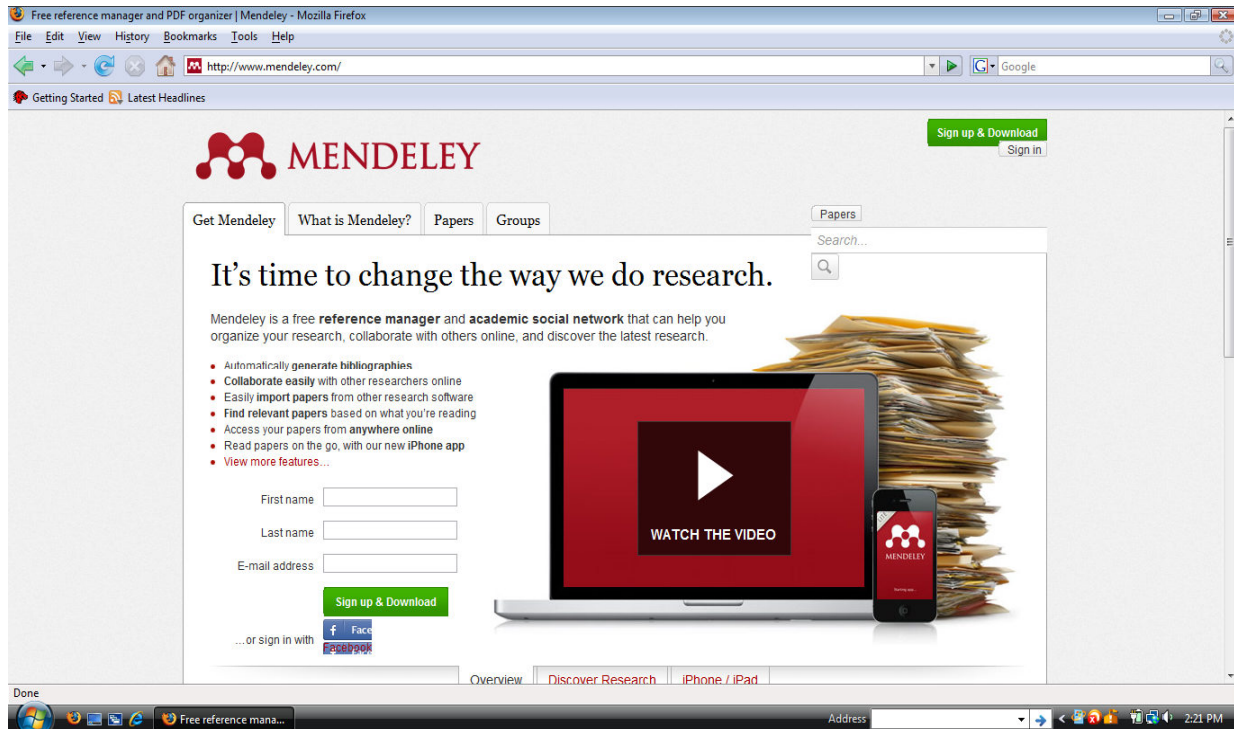
The role of online reference management tools

Online reference management tools play a great role in combating plagiarism as these tools help manage resources as well as create instant bibliographies in different formats. Typical functions of reference management softwares according to Jose and Jayakanth (n.d.) include: importing references from a variety of sources like bibliographic databases; searching, editing, sorting and sharing references; rendering references in a variety of formats; selecting references to incorporate them in a word-processed document and formatting them automatically; storing links to documents or copies of them within database. A quick search on the internet reveals the abundance of several reference management tools. Spiro (n.d.) however provides a list of some reference management tools including notes on terms of access as: BibDesk: (Free), BibMe: (Free), Bibus: (Free), Bookends: (Commerical), Citeline: Free), CiteULike: (Free), Connotea (Free), EndNote: (Commercial), Mendeley: (Free), NoodleTools: (Free and Subscription), OttoBib: (Free), OWL at Purdue: (Free), Sente: (Commercial), Zotero (Free).

Most online reference management tools are easy to use. Example of how to use Mendeley is illustrated below:

To start using Mendeley go to <http://www.mendeley.com/>. Register to download Mendeley.

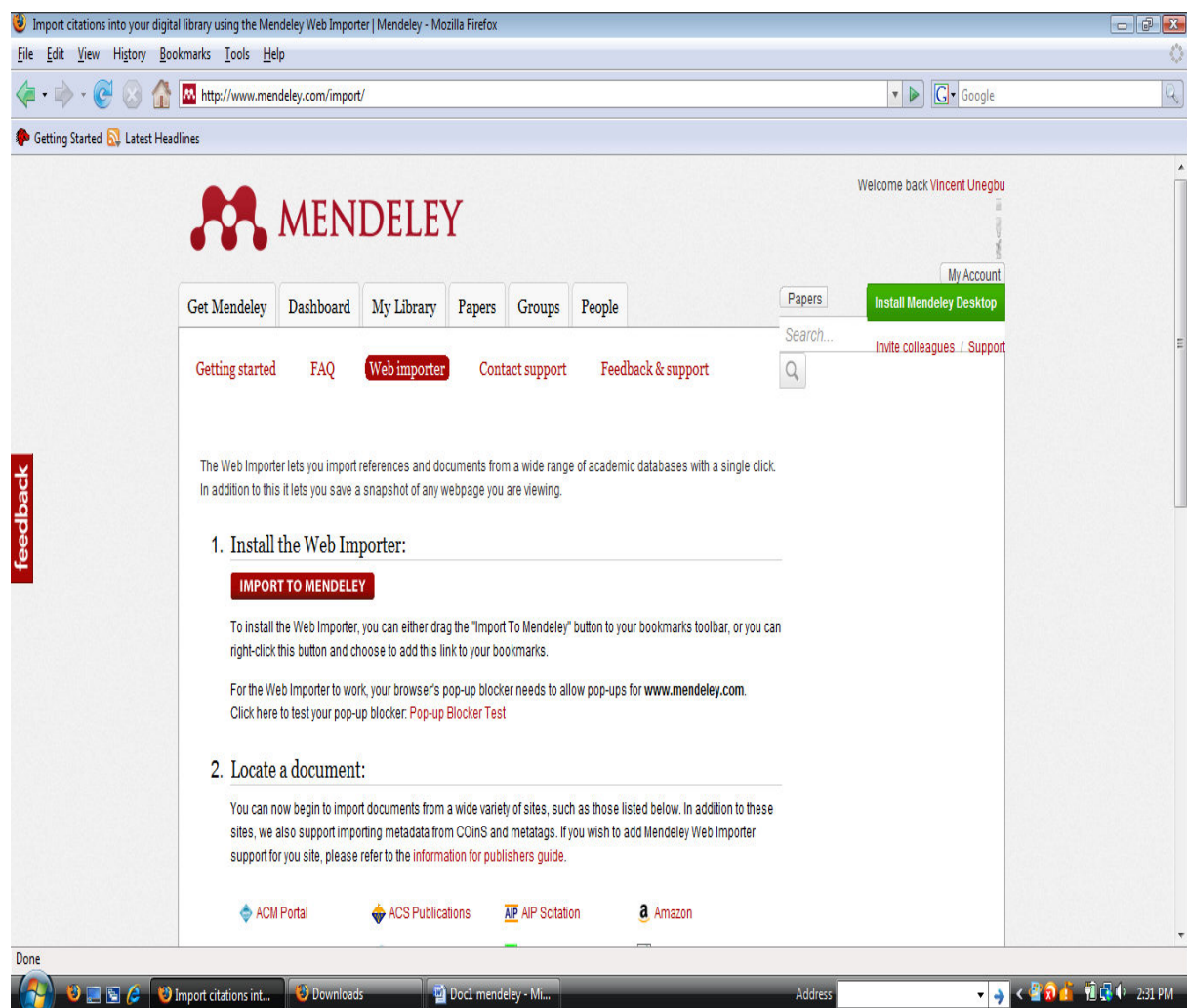
**Fig. 1: Mendeley
registration**



Source: Mendeley.com (2012)

Follow instructions to complete registration. Once registration is completed and Mendeley is downloaded, add documents to your Mendeley library by clicking the Add Document button on the far left of the toolbar. Alternatively, you can drag and drop documents into the content pane or do a web import. However, to import from the web, there is need to first install the Web Importer. To do this simply click tools, a dialogue box appears, click install web importer.

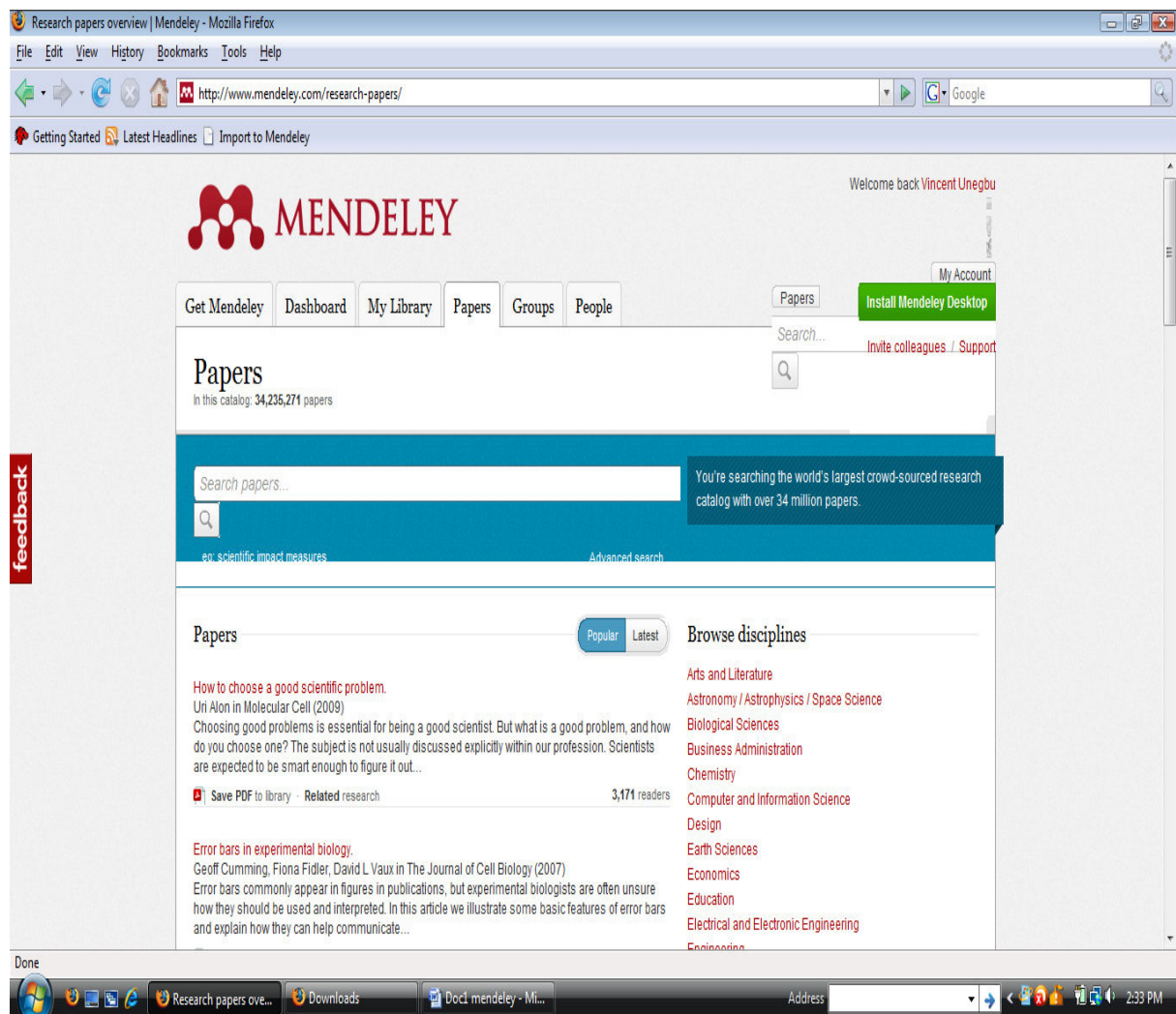
Fig 2: Installing web importer



Source: Mendeley.com (2012)

Mendeley offers a database of information materials, from which document selection can be made. To get resources from the database click on papers at the top of the menu to select papers from different academic disciplines

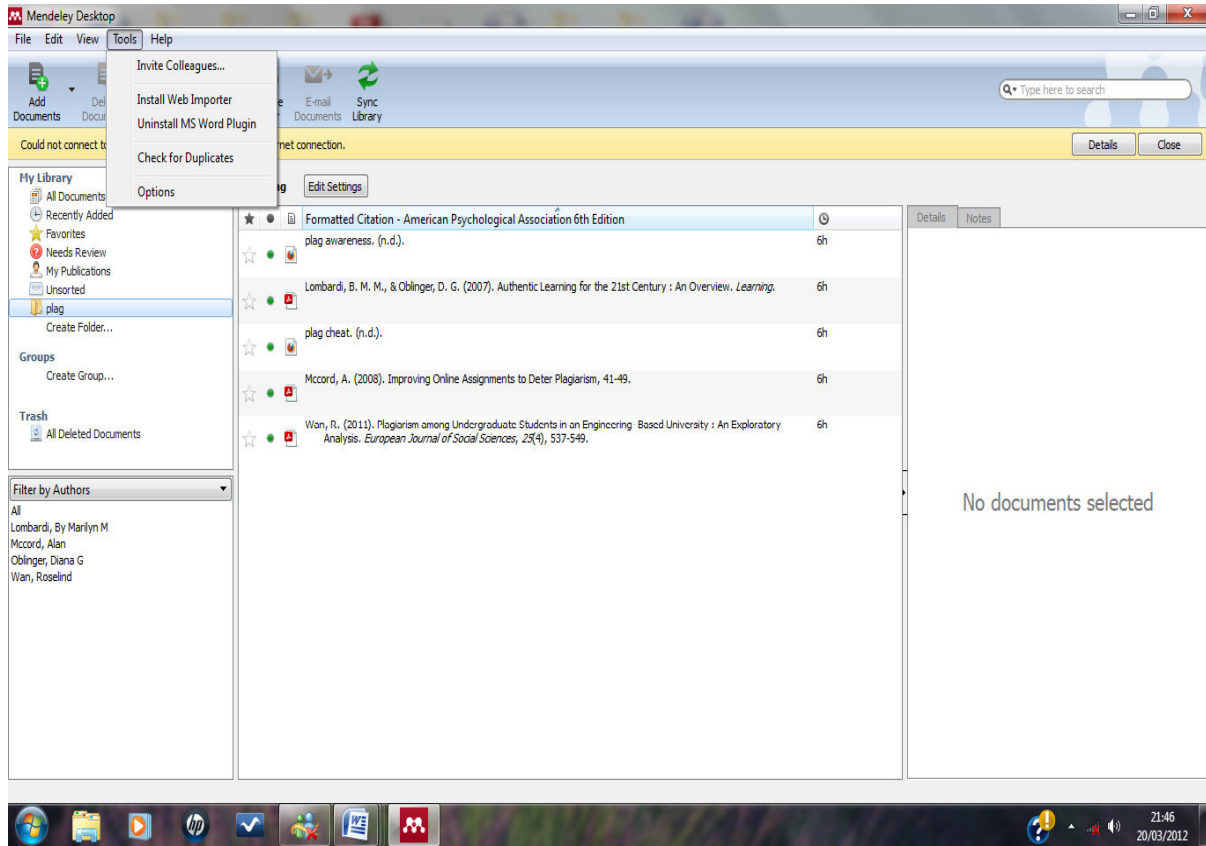
Fig 3: Getting papers from Mendeley database



Source: Mendeley.com (2012)

Having developed your Mendeley library, you can work on MSword while citing and creating references from materials stored in your Mendeley library. To do so, click **tools** on the menu bar. A dialogue box appears where you click **install MS Word Plugin**.

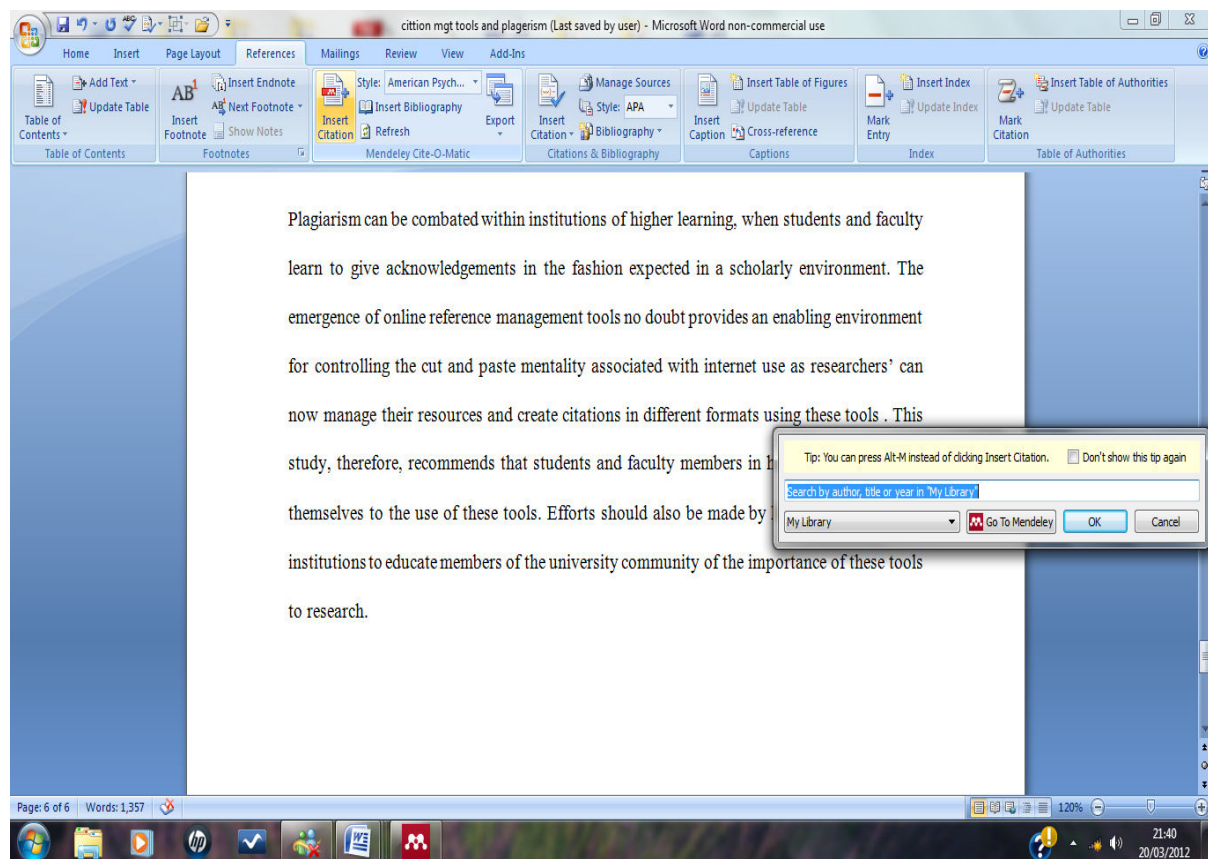
Fig 4: Installing MS Word Plugin



Source: Mendeley.com (2012)

To insert citation within your text, place your cursor where you want the citation to appear. Select **References** from MS word menu bar, Click **Insert Citation** in the Mendeley tool bar within Word and Mendeley pops up. Select what you want or click go to Menedely. This takes you to your Mendeley library where you select the desired reference. Click on **send citation to word processor** for citation to move to your Word document.

Fig. 5: Inserting citation



Source: Mendeley.com (2012)

To insert references, return to **Reference** on the MSword menu bar and click on **insert bibliography** from Mendeley tool bar within Word. Select the **citation style** in the drop down menu and the list of references you used within your Mendeley library appears in your word document.

Although Mendeley is a reference management tool, it is also a social network where researchers can create profiles, upload their articles, and connect with other researchers. Using Mendeley researchers can learn which articles are the most widely read and compare their personal publication statistics with other researchers in the same field.

Conclusion and recommendation

Growing incidents of plagiarism in higher institutions of learning have been attributed to several factors among which are the lack of knowledge to do proper academic citation and referencing. The advent of online reference management tools provides an enabling environment for novice and even experienced researchers to manage their resources and create citations in different formats thereby cutting down on incidents on plagiarism. This study, therefore, recommends that students and faculty members in higher institution avail themselves to the use of these tools. Efforts should also be made particularly by libraries within higher institutions to create awareness and educate members of the university community of the importance of online reference management tools.

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