



Assessment of the Knowledge of, Attitude towards and Engagement in Plagiarism among Education Postgraduate Students in the University of Benin

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Abstract

This study investigated the knowledge of, attitude towards and the engagement in plagiarism by postgraduate (PG) students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. To carry out this study, three (03) research questions were raised. All PG students in the faculty made up the population of the study. A sample size of 175 PG students was used using stratified proportionate random sampling technique. A questionnaire titled "Plagiarism Based Questionnaire" (PBQ) containing three sub-scales: knowledge, attitude and engagement in plagiarism was used for data collection. The scale was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education. The reliabilities of the sub-scales were established using Kuder Richardson 20 for Knowledge sub-scale and Cronbach's Alpha for attitude and engagement sub-scales. Coefficients of .76 were obtained for knowledge and .81 and .82 for attitude and engagement respectively. The scale was administered to the sample by the researchers and collected immediately. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics and findings revealed that postgraduate students in the faculty of Education, University of Benin have good knowledge of plagiarism, they do not have poor attitude towards plagiarism and that they do not highly engage in plagiarism. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that University of Benin should find ways to curb the use of secondary information as primary information by allowing them cite old and relevant authors.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Knowledge, Attitude, Engagement & Postgraduate Students

Introduction

Plagiarism is a serious global issue that reflects academic insincerity and fraud. Without doubt, knowledge is not static but dynamic and as such, it requires continuous improvement from one level to the other. In academia and majorly in research, the continuity demands of knowledge make it imperative for scholars and researchers to build on already existing ones. However, some of them use that opportunity to copy works previously done by others without properly acknowledging them. University of Oxford (2019) noted that situating one's academic work within the intellectual debates of others in one's area of specialization is very necessary as it will help unveil the progression in knowledge in that field of study. Omorogiuwa (2006) noted that studying previous works of other scholars makes one understands the extent of work that is done in that area which in turn will prevent unnecessary duplication of efforts. Instead, it will provide the individual with the opportunity to build on an already existing knowledge. This is because, academic works majorly research studies involve using and discussing the materials previously written by other scholars or researchers with due acknowledgement and proper referencing.

Writing a research paper according to Enago Academy (2016), involves a lot of challenges in trying to gather sufficient and relevant literature as well as in providing empirical evidence for backing one's own findings in other to produce work of better and stronger quality. More so, building upon already established ideas and values and adding important information to one's work are necessary things that must be done in academics and in researches. However, they need to be done with caution in order not to engage in plagiarism. Enago Academy (2016) advised that while building on works previously published by others, it is very necessary to paraphrase them without altering the structure by carefully reading through the original work. This is with the intention of understanding the context, taking good notes and then expressing it in one's own language without forgetting to acknowledge the original source. Write Check (nd) notes that acknowledging original author is the major way of avoiding plagiarism. Also, when quoting a source, one should ensure that the quotation is not altered but appears exactly the way it was quoted. Consequently, if an author is not correctly cited, it can lead to plagiarism.

Hosny and Fatima (2014) described cheating and plagiarism as some forms of academic dishonesty which many students often commit in order to obtain higher grades than they are capable of. Hawwa (2016) noted that, to plagiarize is to use the work, ideas and words of someone else without attribution. Plagiarism according to Enago Academy (2016) is a practice that involves an author or a researcher using his or her previous words or ideas or those of another author or researcher either planned or accidental without proper acknowledgement. The art of plagiarism is viewed as an offense committed in the academic and intellectual setting which can attract negative consequences such as retractions of papers and loss of credibility and reputation of the author. Carnero et al (2017) described plagiarism as a serious but widespread type of research misconduct which is often undermined in developing countries. University of Oxford (2019) described plagiarism as the act of presenting the works or ideas of others as one's own with or without their consent by incorporating it into one's work without full acknowledgement of the authors. Plagiarism according to the University of Oxford (2019) is a breach of academic integrity. Therefore, they advised that all members of the academic community must wake up to intellectual principle of honesty by acknowledging their indebtedness

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to the originators of the ideas, words and data which form the basis for their own work.

The University of Oxford (2019) noted that plagiarism includes the use of published and unpublished materials, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form and that plagiarism may be done intentionally or recklessly, or unintentionally. It was however stressed that whether intentionally or unintentionally done, it requires a disciplinary offence. Hosny and Fatima (2014) noted that the present widespread of internet, mobile and wireless devices usage have enhanced students' access into illegal information which could encourage their engagement in plagiarism. Similarly, Enago Academy (2016) stressed that the digital age contributes immensely to the engagement in plagiarism as researchers have easy access to materials and data online which makes them copy and paste information easily. Also, Nwosu and Chukwuere (2020) noted that the emergence and innovativeness of modern information technologies have made the control, managing and elimination of plagiarism very difficult. Dugan (2018) noted that academic dishonesty and plagiarism has been on the increase and as such, the percentage of Chinese international students that has been expelled in the past 5 years due to plagiarism has also increased. Furthermore, Aba and Agyei (2021) believed that students engage in plagiarism due to poor academic writing skills, laziness, poor time management skills, poor understanding of what plagiarism is all about, ease of downloading the work of other people from the internet as well as pressure to succeed.

University of Oxford (2019) gave the various forms of plagiarism as;

- Verbatim-which means someone using the word of an author exactly the way it was quoted without acknowledging the original writer. To avoid verbatim plagiarism, they advised that one should endeavour to use quotation marks or indentation with full citation of sources.
- Cutting and pasting the work of an original author without acknowledging the author. This includes copying and pasting write ups from the internet. To avoid this type of plagiarism, one should ensure that information derived from the internet and from write ups of other authors be duly cited and referenced.
- Paraphrasing other people's work involves changing and altering the positions of some words of other authors but retaining the structure of the work and presenting it as one's own work without citing the original authors.
- Collusion involves undue collaboration between students/researches without attributing the assistance received or without following the precise regulations on the group work projects. To avoid this, the extent of collaboration must be indicated.
- Inaccurate citation- involves inappropriate citations or citing a secondary source as a primary source. To avoid this, if one cannot gain access to the primary source, it should be clearly indicated that the information was got from a secondary source.
- Failure to acknowledge assistance- involves not including all the assistance or guidance which led to substantive changes in the content or approach of the work.
- Use of material written by professional agencies or other persons- involves making use of professional agencies in the production of your work or submitting the work written by another person as your work. It is advisable to carry out one's study by one own self and not paying anyone

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to help write or giving students the work previously carried out by others to copy and submit as their own work.

- Auto-plagiarism- involves an individual plagiarizing himself/herself by copying and pasting the work previously conducted by oneself partially or fully without citing himself/herself.
- Identical pieces of work submitted at the same time or almost at the same time can also be considered to be auto-plagiarism.

University of Oxford (2019) advised that the best way to avoid plagiarism is to effectively learn and make use of the principles of good academic practice from the onset of one's career. To avoid plagiarism does not only connote providing correct references and effectively paraphrasing but by displaying your academic writing skills to ensure that your work is excellently carried out and presented.

Patch Work (2018) also identified five types of plagiarism;

- *Paraphrasing plagiarism (rephrasing a text without attribution),*
- *Mosaic plagiarism (using text of several sources and combining them),*
- *Direct plagiarism (using a large chunk of text without citation),*
- *Citing incorrectly and*
- *Global plagiarism (using someone else's work)*

Enago Academy (2016) stressed that it is important for researchers to increase their understanding about plagiarism and academic traditions. They advised that writers should not copy and paste the work of others verbatim but rather understand the ideas of the authors and paraphrase with due attribution and that authors should cite their own materials whenever they make use of their previously conducted works to avoid self-plagiarism.

Zafarghandi et al in Selemani et al (2018) found in their study that paraphrasing without citing the sources, neglecting to insert quotation marks when they quote authors directly, engaging in patch-writing and presenting second citation as if they consulted the original source are some of the common forms of plagiarism students commit. They also found ghost writing and purloining to be the least prevalent forms of plagiarism among Iranian University master's students. Selemani et al (2018) noted that students engage in plagiarism mainly because they fail to adhere to rules and standards of academic writing. This was asserted because they found in their study that students claimed to have intentionally and unintentionally committed plagiarism despite the fact that they have conceptual understanding of it. It was found by Selemani et al (2018) that students mostly engage in plagiarism by not acknowledging authors after paraphrasing, when they summarize other author works as well as not using quotation marks when they directly cite other authors. All these according to them, students claimed to have engaged in plagiarism due to pressure to obtain good grades, laziness and poor time management as well as lack of good academic writing skills. Ramzan et al in Selemani et al (2018) found that majority of Post Graduate (PG) students plagiarize because they have poor understanding of what plagiarism is all about. Hence, they concluded that PG students unintentionally engage in plagiarism due to lack of knowledge. However, Hawwa (2016) noted that students even though they are

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aware of what academic dishonesty is and the consequences of engaging in it, still go ahead to engage in it. Thus, Willson (2022) noted that the occurrence of plagiarism can be intentional or unintentional.

Hosny and Fatima (2014) found in their study that both cheating and plagiarism are common among Saudi Arabians' students irrespective of the fact that most of them believe that they are not ethical and against religious values. Tsekea et al (2021) in the study they carried out in Zimbabwe found that students had both limited and low awareness of plagiarism, poor academic writing skills and lack of referencing conventional skills. Aba and Agyei (2021) found that students generally had a basic understanding of the concept of plagiarism as well as demonstrated a universal awareness of what it is all about majorly through the information they received by their lecturers. In the study carried out by Hawwa (2016), it was reported that 83% of Australians and 82% of Asians were engaged in some forms of plagiarism at least once. He however noted that the frequency of plagiarism was higher in the Australians than the Asians.

Batane; De-Jager and Brown; Idiegbeyan-Ose et al; Kwong and Mark; Park; Riasati and Rahimi; and Ryan et al in Selemani et al (2018) also found that students engage in plagiarism due to pressure to meet up with deadlines, lack of knowledge, lack of good academic writing skills, convenience in copying and pasting from the internet, high cost of studying, pressure from family members, too much academic demands, pressure to earn high grades, laziness on the part of the students, poor design of assignment by lecturers as well as inconsistencies in implementing due penalties on defaulters. Students revealed according to Carnero et al (2017) that poor awareness of high tolerance to plagiarism, poor academic performance, widespread writing deficiency, patch writing as well as copy-pasting are the causes of their engagement in plagiarism. They also added that such factors as; lack of development of students analytical and writing skills, may lead them to engage in plagiarism as a maladaptive compensatory writing strategy. Vasconceles et al; Heitman and Litewka in Carnero et al (2017) lamented that the problem is worsened by the widespread tolerance to plagiarism throughout the educational system in Latin America. Carnero et al (2017) however noted that students who engage in plagiarism and cheating possess similar characteristics including poor awareness of research integrity, widespread inadequacies in writing and referencing skills, poor academic performance of students as well as high tolerance to plagiarism.

Also, Davis; Martin et al, Vasconceles et al; Heitman and Litewka, Rodriguez and Lolas; Cameron et al; Dans in Carnero et al (2017) noted that students engage in plagiarism for so many reasons but they however pointed out among others that the level of tolerance displayed by educational and professional institutions by not putting policies in place to fight plagiarism could be responsible for the wide spread of plagiarism. In addition to the afore mentioned reasons, the non-cognizance of academic and journal publishing bodies in detecting plagiarism was also pointed out as an encouraging factor to the engagement of researchers in plagiarism. Davis; Martin et al, Vasconceles et al; Heitman and Litewka, Rodriguez and Lolas; Cameron et al; Dans in Carnero et al (2017) also acknowledged that differences that exist in the perceptions of people about intellectual property and misconduct, the destructive effect that could be caused by corruption as well as differences that also exist in people' value system are factors that could make people to engage in plagiarism.

To curb plagiarism according to Devlin in Selemani et al (2018), offenders should be given corresponding penalties, University officials should put formal policies in place and that students should be

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well taught the rules and standards of academic writing. Gomez et al (2013) also supported the idea of regulating plagiarism at the University. Ana et al in Carnero et al (2017) advised that developing countries should critically engage in studies that can explore plagiarism. Davis; Martin in Carnero et al (2017) noted that cultural and economic factors may influence the perception of students about plagiarism and their engagement in it.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, plagiarism has been a global issue in educational setting: among researchers and students. Some researchers and students go as far as hacking into hidden files to copy and paste the works of other researchers. Supporting this assertion, Hosny and Fatima (2014) noted that some students who plagiarize, copy the information from the internet or other students' answers just to earn acceptable grades not necessarily for knowledge. Some travel to other universities to pick previously conducted researches to copy, paste and submit to their own institutions. More so, some also translate the researches carried out in other non-related language speaking countries to their countries' official language and submit to their institutions. Hawwa (2016) specifically noted that some scholars use plagiarism as a source of income to fill their pockets by providing students/researchers with already published works instead of teaching them how to write academic papers. At the end, the researchers (post graduate students) who engage in plagiarism earn undue grades from research work they never undertook or ineffectively carried out. Efforts made by some institutions to curb this serious academic fraud have not yielded a desirable result and the issue is perceived to be very common among researchers and students. Nwosu and Chukwuere (2020) emphasized that the availability of internet facilities have made the control, management and elimination of plagiarism very difficult.

Research is a very important aspect of academic pursuit in tertiary institutions. It is aimed to engage the students in the art of project writing in order to investigate the causes of problems so as to empirically proffer possible solutions, to make an inquiry into the unknown as well as to build on already existing body of knowledge for advancement. Thus, the engagement of undergraduate and postgraduate students in research is not negotiable due to its importance. Students are therefore supposed to take it very seriously and engage in all the processes with honesty. However, despite the role of research to the advancement of knowledge, findings of some research studies have proven that some researchers and students still engage in plagiarism. Consequently, the researchers of this study deemed it necessary to investigate if the postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin have knowledge of what plagiarism is, if they engage in it, as well as to find out their attitude towards it.

Purpose of the study

The study aimed to investigate the level of knowledge possessed by postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, to determine their attitude towards plagiarism as well as determine their extent of engagement in plagiarism.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following questions were posed;

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1. What is the level of knowledge possessed by postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin?
2. What is the attitude of postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin towards plagiarism?
3. To what extent do postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin engage in plagiarism?

Methods

In this study, descriptive survey research design was employed. This design was chosen because The population of the study comprised all 875 postgraduate students (M. (Ed) and Ph.D) from the eight (08) departments in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin from 2016/17 session for M (Ed) students and from 2014/15 for the Ph. D students. Different sessions were used for both M (Ed) and PhD because they have different duration to complete the degrees. The departments of Adult and Non-Formal Education had 40 PG students, CIT (Curriculum and Instructional Technology) had 154 PG students, DEF (Department of Educational Foundations) had 35 PG students, DEM (Department of Educational Management) had 68 PG students, EECF (Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology) had 320 PG students, HKS (Human Kinetics and Sports Science) had 53 PG students, HSE (Health, Safety and Environmental Education) had 111 PG students, and VTE (Vocational and Technical Education) had 94 PG students. A sample size of 175 postgraduate students was used. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed for sampling.

The population was stratified by department and 20% of PG students were sampled from each of the eight departments. The choice of 20% was to have a considerable number of respondents. A questionnaire titled "Plagiarism Based Questionnaire" was developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was composed of three sections; knowledge sub-scale, attitude sub-scale and engagement sub-scale. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation in the faculty of Education by critically examining the content and the suitability of the scale. The reliability of the instrument for knowledge sub-scale was determined by Kuder Richardson because the scale was a 'Yes' and 'No' measure while the other two were determined by Cronbach's Alpha statistics. Reliability estimates for the three sub-scales were .76 for knowledge, .81 and .82 for attitude and engagement respectively. The knowledge sub-scale had 'Yes' and 'No' option response type which was score 1 for correct response and 0 for an incorrect response. The items were actually based on what plagiarism is all about. Hence, the items had correct and incorrect options. The number of items gotten was totaled and later converted to 100%. The test value for Knowledge scale was 50% as 50% is the mean score of the scale total weight. The other two had four point Likert Scale response format. All the items of Attitude and Engagement were negatively worded. Therefore, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) were scored 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively with mean score of 2.5. The researchers personally administered the instrument to the postgraduate students in the Faculty of Education and collected them immediately after completion. All the research questions were answered using basic statistics of mean and standard deviation. Mean score of 50% was the bench mark. Mean score above

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50% shows that students have good knowledge of what plagiarism is all about. Decision rule was made thus as, any mean score less than 2.5, for both attitude items and engagement items shows that the postgraduate students have poor attitude towards plagiarism as well as they engage in plagiarism while any mean score above 2.5, shows that they do not have poor attitude towards plagiarism and that they do not engage in plagiarism. These decisions were reached due to the mode of the calibration of the instrument.

Findings

Research Question 1: What level of knowledge do postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin have about plagiarism?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Knowledge of Postgraduate Students about Plagiarism (Test value = 50)

	N	Mean	Std. dev	%	Total
Knowledge	175	65.0286	17.48149	65.0	100

From Table 1, mean score of 65.03 which is approximately 65.0% out of a total of 100 was obtained for the level of knowledge of postgraduate students about plagiarism. This shows that postgraduate students in the University of Benin do have knowledge of what plagiarism is.

Research Question 2: What is the attitude of postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin towards plagiarism?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Attitude of Postgraduate Students toward Plagiarism (Test value = 2.5)

S/N	Item	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	I always desire to copy direct words/ideas of other authors without making use of quotation marks	175	3.023	.976	Disagree
2	I sometimes take delight in copying and pasting the work of others without citing the authors	175	3.131	.994	Disagree
3	I am fond of changing or rephrasing words/ideas of others	175	2.646	1.051	Disagree

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	and using them in my work as my own ideas			
4.	If I cannot lay my hands on the original source of words/ideas of an author, I take delight in copying them from materials they are cited in and copy the reference from the reference section of the material	175 2.160	.963	Agree
5.	Anytime I make use of my previous studies, I do not bother to cite myself	175 2.446	.974	Agree
6.	Anytime I use the words/ideas of people, I take it as a normal thing not to cite the authors	175 3.269	.911	Disagree
7.	I often change old dates of cited words to recent ones, as my lecturers will prefer recent dates	175 3.337	.868	Disagree
8.	I always combine the ideas of many people and present them as my own ideas	175 2.914	1.077	Disagree
9.	I often copy my friends' work when we are given assignment if I cannot meet up with the deadline for submission	175 3.206	.924	Disagree
10.	For convenience sake, I sometimes take delight in copying and pasting several information from the internet without necessarily citing the sources	175 2.971	1.031	Disagree
Summary	General attitude towards plagiarism	175 2.9003		Positive attitude

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From Table 2, only items 4 and 5 had a mean score that is lower than the test value of 2.5. All other items had mean scores above the 2.5 test value. It means that postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin have positive attitude towards avoiding plagiarism.

Research Question 3: To what extent do postgraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin engage in plagiarism?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Engagement of Postgraduate Students in Plagiarism (Test value = 2.5)

	N	Mean	Std.dev	Decision
Engagement	1700	2.8647	.94986	No

From Table 3, the mean score of approximately 2.86 which is higher than 2.5 test value was obtained. It means that post graduate students of the University of Benin do not highly engage in plagiarism.

Discussion of Findings

It was found in this study that postgraduate students in the faculty of Education, University of Benin have knowledge of what plagiarism is all about. In line with this study, Selemani et al (2018) found in their study that students have conceptual understanding of plagiarism. Contrary to the finding of this study, Ramzan et al in Selemani et al (2018) found that majority of Post Graduate students have poor understanding of what plagiarism is all about hence, they plagiarize. Also, in the study carried out by Tsekea et al (2021) in Zimbabwe, they found that students had both limited and low awareness of plagiarism, The finding of this study could be because all post graduate students in the University of Benin especially the Faculty of Education, are subjected to carrying out plagiarism test before they are slated for thesis defense. Afterwards, only those who meet the required standard are granted the opportunity to defend their research work as well as continue with their studies. Thus, their subjection to plagiarism test could create the knowledge of what plagiarism is all about in them. This is possible because it was found in the study conducted by Aba and Agyei (2021) that students got to be aware of what plagiarism is all about and shown basic understanding of the concept of plagiarism majorly through the information they received by their lecturers.

In this study, it was found that the postgraduate students in the faculty of Education, University of Benin do not have poor attitude towards plagiarism. However, it was found that, if they cannot lay hands on the original source of words/ideas of an author, they take delight in copying them from materials they are cited in and they copy the reference(s) from the reference section of the material in disguise that they laid their hands on the primary source of the information. It was also found that they plagiarize themselves by making use of their own previous studies without citing themselves. In line with these findings, Zafarghandi et al in Selemani et al (2018) found in their study that presenting second citation as if they consulted the original source are some of the common forms of plagiarism students commit. Contrary to the finding of this study, Selemani et al (2018) found that students mostly engage in plagiarism by not citing authors after paraphrasing, when they summarize other authors work as well as not using quotation marks when they directly cite other

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authors. The findings of this study could be because, the use of secondary source as primary source is not flagged as plagiarism as the plagiarism test does not have the capability to detect if the researcher used first source of information or not. More so, it is possible that PG students who engage in self-plagiarism have not published their previous studies on-line hence it cannot also be flagged by the plagiarism test. Hence, these points could be the reason PG students still exhibit these attitudes in the course of carrying out their studies or their research work.

Findings also revealed that generally, post graduate students in the faculty of Education, University of Benin do not engage in plagiarism. Contrary to this finding, Hawwa (2016) found that a very high percentage of Australians and Asians students engaged in some forms of plagiarism at least once and noted that even though students are aware of what academic dishonesty is and the consequences of engaging in it, they still commit the offense. Also, Selemani et al (2018) found that PG students intentionally and unintentionally committed plagiarism despite the fact that they have conceptual understanding of it. This finding could be due to the fact that the University officials have put formal policy in place to curb plagiarism among PG students in the University of Benin by stepping down the theses which do not meet the rules and standards of academic writing in the University. More so, since most plagiarism studies use self-report scale to collect data, some students may provide unreliable information about their engagement in plagiarism. Supporting this, Colella-Sandercock (2016) emphasized that it is common for some students to under-report the level of their engagement in dishonest behaviour even if they are informed that their responses are anonymous.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that postgraduate students in the faculty of Education, University of Benin have knowledge of what plagiarism is all about, they have positive attitude towards avoiding plagiarism and they do not highly engage in plagiarism.

Recommendations

It can be recommended from the findings of the study that:

1. The University should find ways to curb the use of secondary information as primary information by allowing them cite old and relevant authors.
2. The University should make PG students publish their previous studies in reputable journals so that their studies can be made available on-line which would allow for flagging when they self-plagiarize.

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