

Influence of Plagiarism Checker Software on Plagiarism Practices among Postgraduate Students in Public Universities in Abia and Imo States

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the influence of adoption of plagiarism software on plagiarism practices of postgraduate students of universities in Abia and Imo states under three specific objectives. Four public universities in Abia and Imo states were investigated (Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umuidike, Abia State University, Uturu, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, and Imo State University, Owerri). The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study is three thousand, twenty-four (3,024) postgraduate students in public universities in Abia and Imo States. A sample of 341 postgraduate students was drawn using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determination of sample size and further stratified proportionately across the studied institutions. A questionnaire developed by the researchers was used to collect data for the study. Both descriptive and inferential statistics of mean ratings and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient respectively were used to fulfil the objectives of the study. The study indicated that implementation of plagiarism software has a positive impact on plagiarism practices among postgraduate students in universities in Abia and Imo States. The study recommended that universities should collaborate with their librarians to teach postgraduate students academic writing techniques, citation and referencing styles, whilst adopting plagiarism software to curtail plagiarism practices among postgraduate students in their institutions.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Plagiarism Software, Plagiarism Practices, Public universities.

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism has overtime been a widely condemned virus eating deep into the fabrics of institutions of higher learning world over. Higher education especially in the 21st century is experiencing alarming reported cases of plagiarism. It is a contentious issue in higher education perceived by many to be widespread and increasing among university students (Omonijo, Anyaegbunam, Uche, Obiorah & Ogunwa 2017; Oyewole, 2017; Oyewole & Abioye 2018; Khathayut & Walker-Gleaves, 2020). This academic crime committed by students of all ages, levels and specialities appears to be alarming now more than ever because of the use of mobile

devices which have made access and transmission of information easier by students against educational and research ethics. Literature abounds to the fact that the prevalence is traceable to the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in education as well as the plethora of online resources (Berlinck, 2011; Gow, 2013; Oyewole, Rasheed & Ogunsina 2018).

Plagiarism is a popular concept in the academic world. Park (2003) cited in Oyewale, Rasheed and Ogunsina (2018), defines plagiarism as the act of stealing others' ideas and presenting them as one's own thought. He noted further that it is an unethical act that discards the concept of originality but embraces laziness of ideas through claiming of other people's works and ideas. Lending a voice to what constitutes plagiarism; Abioye (2016) noted that apart from works 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. Coventry University's policy document presents a very detailed view on plagiarism, partly based on a definition used by the Higher Education Academy for England and Wales. According to this definition, plagiarism is understood as the unacknowledged use of another person's work (Coventry University cited in Orim, Davis, Borg & Glendinning 2013). In this view, it also includes poor academic practice, which is unintentional.

In the view of Harris (2001) cited in Oyewole et al. (2018), plagiarism could take different forms such as copying from the internet without paraphrasing and due acknowledgement, copying without reference, quoting without acknowledgement, paraphrasing without attribution, using fictitious citations and the act of duplicating one's work known as self-plagiarism. Adeyemi and Oluwabiye (2013) observed 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 set of students are also expected to carry out researches that are novel, failure of which the conferment of a higher degree will not come to fruition.

In the course of carrying out research activities, students sometimes ignorantly plagiarise because it is not clear to them what constitutes a quotation or paraphrase and they are not equipped with how to cite properly. Others however, engage in the act of plagiarism intentionally. We can therefore, discern that whereas some acts of plagiarism could be accidental or unintentional which could be referred to as poor practice, others such as collusion is clearly intentional and unethical (Onuoha & Ikonne, 2013; Olutola, 2016). It must be noted that, the mere fact that plagiarism may be carried out unintentionally does not make the act less serious. This is because students are taught and expected to know ethics associated with carrying out a research.

Institutions engaged in research do not only provide an environment that promotes integrity and innovation, but also establish and implement policies that deal decisively with issues of research breaches. Postgraduate students are students who have already gone through institutions of higher learning and obtained a Higher National Diploma, or Bachelor Degree, but have enrolled again for a higher degree such as Postgraduate Diploma, Master's Degree, or Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD). Adeyemi and Oluwabiye (2013) observed 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 set of

students are also expected to carry out researches that are novel, failure of which the conferment of a higher degree will not come to fruition. This is to say that, critical to the academic success of postgraduate students is the necessity for them to engage and excel in various academic activities like assignment, seminar papers, dissertation/theses research, preparation for and writing of examination as well as their need for independent study.

Postgraduate students while engaging in assignments, writing of term papers and also in-depth independent study of a phenomenon known as research engage in one act of plagiarism (research breach) or the other. While some acts of plagiarism could be accidental or unintentional which could be referred to as poor practice, others are clearly intentional and unethical (Onuoha & Ikonne, 2013; Olutola, 2016).

Postgraduate students stand the risk of engaging in plagiarism even when they are fully aware of the crime and its consequences because of their busy schedules at their various places of work, business activities and family commitments which are often times combined with their studies for higher degrees. That notwithstanding, it is opined that whether or not students will engage in any form of plagiarism would highly be influenced by the extent to which institution's policy frowns at plagiarism.

In order to arrest this monster, several attempts have been made by the management of various institutions in Nigeria individually and collectively in ensuring that students abide by research ethics and best practices. These policies have led to actions such as; setting up of disciplinary committees, meting out punitive measures to offenders, putting in place anti-plagiarism tools (APT) also known as plagiarism software such as online detection services like Turnitin, Easy Verification Engine (EVE2), Glatt Plagiarism services and Safe Assignment. It is therefore imperative to investigate if the adoption of software for plagiarism detection has impact on plagiarism practises of students.

Statement of the Problem

The act of plagiarism unarguably constitutes a stumbling stone to the growth of genuine scholarship globally. The menace in higher institutions world over and Nigeria in particular has continued to be a source of concern for academicians and management of educational institutions. It is one of the common and most serious acts capable of dragging to the mud the reputation of the educational sector especially university education. Where it is not checked with all seriousness, plagiarism can make a ridicule of a university bringing to question its reputation and value of degrees awarded to students. Graduates of such universities would also be looked down upon, if the institution they graduate from is known to be lenient in handling issues of plagiarism.

Unfortunately, the rate at which the plague plagiarism is eating deep into the academic life of students not exempting the revered postgraduate students is worrisome. Postgraduate students' involvement in acts of plagiarism seems to be on a high rate in this era of internet technology where a myriad of information sources and resources are accessible electronically for academic use more than ever. In addition to easy accessibility of information through the internet, many other factors such as poor research writing skills, poor knowledge of appropriate referencing and citing principles, laziness or bad time management, pressure to meet up with deadlines, pressure

from work or family, low emphasis on honesty and ethical behaviour, lack of punishment for plagiarists also contributes to the prevalence of plagiarism practices among postgraduate students. Consequently, research works carried out by students are put to integrity and honesty test using plagiarism software before they are accepted as fulfilling one of the requirements for award of a degree.

It is believed that, availability of plagiarism policy and strict enforcement of same by university authorities would to a large extent determine whether or not students will engage in the act of plagiarism. This is because when students are aware of policies put in place to curtail plagiarism, they would exercise caution in the course of carrying out researches and innovations so not to be found culpable of plagiarism, and be subjected to penalties attached therein.

But while the above may be a general believe, a thorough appraisal of available literature shows that due attention has not been given to verify the assertion. Thus, no one knows the impact of the adoption of plagiarism software on plagiarism practices of postgraduate students in universities in Abia and Imo States and Nigeria in general, as there is lack of information on whether or not the adoption of this plagiarism detection software can influence plagiarism practices of students, and to what extent it is effective. This is the problem that this study is set to address and falls within the ambit of librarianship.

Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of this study is to examine the impact of plagiarism policies on plagiarism practices of postgraduate students in universities with particular reference to public universities in Abia and Imo States. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Find out the plagiarism practices of postgraduate students in universities in Abia and Imo States.
- ii. Determine the influence of adoption of plagiarism software on plagiarism practices of postgraduate students in universities in Abi and Imo States.
- iii. Examine the relationship between the implementation of plagiarism software and plagiarism practices among postgraduate students in universities in Abia and Imo States.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis was tested in the study at 0.05% level of significance:

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between the implementation of plagiarism software and plagiarism practices among postgraduate students in universities in Abia and Imo States.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite the overwhelming concern about the negative effects of plagiarism, the practice seems to be growing even more rapidly. The effect of plagiarism is devastating and a threat to academic prosperity and therefore needs to be curtailed. According to Gullifer and Tyson (2010), plagiarism is perceived to be a growing problem and universities are being required to devote increasing time and resources to combating it. Gullifer and Tyson, (2010) further emphasised that, failure of academia to fight plagiarism deny students opportunity to master academic writing skills,

making academic writing increasingly difficult as they progress through their degree. Institutions have therefore resorted to many ways to curtail the excesses of students' involvement in plagiarism. Scholars have also suggested numerous ways that could aid in the facing out the plague plagiarism among students.

One of the strategies highly advocated for curtailing the academic dishonesty is plagiarism checks. Several authors are of the opinion that in order to reduce plagiarism, prevention measures must primarily include the detection as well as remedial and disciplinary actions (Cohen, 2010; Singh, Mangalaraj & Taneja, 2011; McCabe, Butterfield & Trevino, 2012; Weber-Wulff, 2014; Doghonadze, Pipia & Parjanadze 2018; Rama, 2019; Adekannbi & Megwaonye, 2020). Detection can be done either manually or technically. Online software abound for effective detection of plagiarism practices. Institutions can subscribe to them for use in checking scholarly works submitted by both staff and students.

There are also some of the plagiarism detector software that are freely available online. Backing the call for use of software for plagiarism detection, a study by Chuda, Navrat, Kovacova and Humay (2012) recommends that software be used to cope with the vast amount of material at hand. They suggest that, while detecting plagiarism is necessary and important, there are too many students and very few staff members to make this easy, automating plagiarism detection would help very much. Thompsett and Ahluwalia (2010) observed that, as a result of explosion of plagiarism among university students, many universities in developed countries have been using technologies to combating deceitful plagiarism behaviour of students. A study by Anney and Mosha (2015) indicates that, the universities involved have honour code and policies for plagiarism detection; however, they do not employ software for checking students' plagiarism, while recommendation by Kokkinaki, Iacovidou and Demoliou (2015) indicates that utilizing plagiarism detection software would deter plagiarism and also enable students to practice on academic writing without plagiarizing.

While there is a prevailing advocacy for adoption of plagiarism software to curb the menace of academic fraud, it is unfortunate that the use of technologies for detecting plagiarism does not present a perfect solution. The disadvantage associated with the use of online software is that it can only match information online and overlook printed sources like; printed books, encyclopaedia or any other printed document. It must also be noted that, there are some sites that write assignments or dissertations for students for a fee. This type of plagiarism cannot be detected by online software because it is written specifically for that student. As a solution to the above deficit, Harris (2017) suggests that manual detection should be adopted to look at clues, such as writing going off-topic, unusual formatting, citation styles, references or quotations, acronyms, anomalies of diction and style, as well as obvious indications of copying.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was used for this study. The area of the study is Abia and Imo States in Nigeria. The population of this study is 3,024 comprising all the Postgraduate Students in public Universities in Abia and Imo States, ranging from Postgraduate Diploma (PGD), Master Degree (M.Sc.) and Doctorate Degree (Ph.D) students in different fields of studies. There

are two public universities in Abia State namely, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umuidike and Abia State University, Uturu; while Imo State has two public universities offering postgraduate courses namely; Federal University of Technology, Owerri, and Imo State University, Owerri.

In Abia State, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umuidike has 374 Postgraduate Students while Abia State University, Uturu has 1,053 Postgraduate students. In Imo State, Federal University of Technology, Owerri has 351 Postgraduate Students, while Imo State University, Owerri has 1,246 Postgraduate students. The total of all these amounted to 3,024 Postgraduate Students in Abia and Imo States.

The sample for the study was 341 postgraduate students selected from a population of 3,024 using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determination of sample size. Furthermore, proportionate stratified simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the sample, so that institutions with higher number of postgraduate students will get appropriate number of representatives. To achieve this and in fair distribution, the sample size (341) was divided by the population (3024) which resulted into 0.11 and was multiplied by number of postgraduate students in each institution to get the appropriate sample size. Consequently, the sample proportion for Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umuidike was 42, Abia State University, Uturu was 119, Federal University of Technology, Owerri was 39, and Imo State University, Owerri was 141; all of which totalled 341.

The research instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire had four-point response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) as applicable. Respondents were required to tick the option considered most appropriate. The researcher used direct delivery technique in the administration of the questionnaire by personally administering the instrument on the Postgraduate Students in the Universities under study. This method provided opportunity for the respondent to get clarifications from the questions they may have difficulty in completing.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were adopted to analyse data collected for the study. To fulfil objectives one and two, the descriptive statistics mean rating was adopted using the four-point rating scales of 4,3,2,1. The decision to use a four-point scale is supported by Igwe (2018) who averred that, four-point scales are used without a neutral/undecided option in consideration that prospective respondents are very familiar with issues under investigation, and therefore must select option(s) of their choice. As a result, any mean that was equal to 2.5 and above was considered as positive or agreed. Conversely, any mean that was below 2.5 was considered as negative or disagreed. To answer objective three and test the hypothesis formulated for the study, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient was adopted at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Demographic Details

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Postgraduate Students in Universities in Abia and Imo States, Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Male	203	59.5%
Female	138	40.5%
Total	341	100%
Universities		
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike	42	51.0%
Abia State University, Uturu	119	19.9%
Federal University of Technology, Owerri	39	16.1%
Imo State University, Owerri	141	12.9
Total	341	100%
Level of Study		
PGD	124	36.4%
M. Sc	140	41.1%
PhD	77	22.6%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 1 above shows that 203 (59.9%) were male while 138(40.5%) were female. This shows that majority of the postgraduate students in Abia and Imo States respondents were male. The Table 1 also shows that 42(51.0%) of the respondents were from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, 119(19.9%) of respondents were from Abia State University Uturu, 39(16.1%) of the respondents were from Federal University of Technology, Owerri and 141(12.9%) of respondents were from Imo State University, Owerri. In terms of their level of study, 124(36.4%) of the respondents were PGD students, 140(41.1%) were MSc students, while 77(22.6%) were Ph.D students.

Plagiarism Practices

Table 2: Plagiarism Practices of postgraduate students

S/N	Description	Mean	Decision
1.	Paraphrasing without acknowledging original Author	2.73	agreed
2.	Summarizing text without acknowledgement	2.99	agreed
3.	Copying text word by word without acknowledgement	2.35	disagreed

4. Using quotation marks without proper citation or acknowledgement	2.36	disagreed
5. Omitting quotation marks in direct quotes	2.25	disagreed
6. Presenting secondary citation as if the original source had been consulted	2.24	disagreed
7. Copying work from internet and submitting it as one's own	2.34	disagreed
8. Submitting someone's work without their permission	2.25	disagreed
9. Inventing data	2.65	agreed
10. Altering data	2.09	disagreed
11. Inventing references	2.50	agreed
12. Inventing bibliography	2.34	disagreed
13. Engaging someone to write for another	2.36	disagreed
14. Presenting an old work or data as a new one	2.25	disagreed
15. Collaborating with others to carry out a work meant to be done individually	2.24	disagreed
Total Mean	35.95	Agreed

Source: Field survey, 2023

Data in Table 2 shows the respondents reaction on the plagiarism practices of postgraduate students in the university. Majority of the respondents disagreed with plagiarism Practices of postgraduate students in the University as shown thus; paraphrasing without acknowledging original author ($\bar{x}=2.73<2.50$), summarizing text without acknowledgement ($\bar{x}=2.59>2.50$), copying text word by word without acknowledgement ($\bar{x}=2.35 <2.50$), using quotation marks without proper citation or acknowledgement ($\bar{x}=2.36 <2.50$), omitting quotation marks in direct quotes ($\bar{x}=2.36 <2.50$), presenting secondary citation as if the original source had been consulted ($\bar{x}=2.64 >.50$), copying work from internet and submitting it as one's own ($\bar{x}=2.34 <2.50$), submitting someone's work without their permission ($\bar{x}=2.25 <2.50$), inventing data ($\bar{x}=2.65 >2.50$), altering data ($\bar{x}=2.59>2.50$), inventing references($\bar{x}=2.10>2.50$), inventing bibliography($\bar{x}=2.34 <2.50$), engaging someone to write for another ($\bar{x}=2.36<2.50$), presenting an old work or data as a new one ($\bar{x}=2.25<2.50$) and collaborating with others to carry out a work meant to be done individually ($\bar{x}=2.24<2.50$).

Influence of Adoption of plagiarism software on plagiarism practices

Table 3: The use of plagiarism software in my university helps to curtail the following plagiarism practices

S/N	Description	Mean	Decision
1.	Paraphrasing without acknowledging original Author	2.61	agreed
2.	Summarizing text without acknowledgement	2.09	disagreed
3.	Copying text word by word without acknowledgement	2.48	disagreed
4.	Using quotation marks without proper citation or acknowledgement	2.33	disagreed
5.	Omitting quotation marks in direct quotes	2.36	disagreed
6.	Presenting secondary citation as if the original source had been consulted	2.24	disagreed
7.	Copying work from internet and submitting it as one's own	2.22	disagreed
8.	Submitting someone's work without their permission	2.31	disagreed
9.	Inventing data	2.24	disagreed
10.	Altering data	2.63	agreed
11.	Inventing references	2.07	disagreed
12.	Inventing bibliography	2.48	disagreed
13.	Engaging someone to write for another	2.33	disagreed
14.	Presenting an old work or data as a new one	2.36	disagreed
15.	Collaborating with others to carry out a work meant to be done individually	2.24	disagreed
Total Mean		34.99	Agreed

Source: Field survey, 2023

Data in Table 3 shows the respondents reaction on the impact of adoption of plagiarism software on plagiarism practices of postgraduate students in the universities. Majority of the respondent disagreed with the impact of the use of plagiarism software on plagiarism practices of postgraduate students in the University as shown thus: paraphrasing without acknowledging original author ($\bar{x}=2.61 >2.50$), summarizing text without acknowledgement ($\bar{x}=2.09 <2.50$), copying text word by word without acknowledgement ($\bar{x}=2.48 <2.50$), using quotation marks without proper citation or acknowledgement ($\bar{x}=2.33 <2.50$), omitting quotation marks in direct quotes ($\bar{x}=2.36 <2.50$), presenting secondary citation as if the original source had been consulted ($\bar{x}=2.24 <2.50$), copying work from internet and submitting it as one's own ($\bar{x}=2.22 >2.50$), submitting someone's work without their permission ($\bar{x}=2.31 <2.50$), inventing data ($\bar{x}=2.24 <2.50$), altering data ($\bar{x}=2.63 >2.50$), inventing references ($\bar{x}=2.07 >2.50$), inventing bibliography ($\bar{x}=2.48 <2.50$), engaging someone to write for another ($\bar{x}=2.33 <2.50$), presenting an old work or data as a new one ($\bar{x}=2.36 <2.50$) and collaborating with others to carry out a work meant to be done individually ($\bar{x}=2.24 <2.50$).

Relationship between the implementation of plagiarism software and plagiarism practices

Table 4: Show of relationship between the implementation of plagiarism software and plagiarism practices among postgraduate students in universities in Abia and Imo States.

Variables		N	R	Df	Sig	Remark
Software		341	.885	340	.000	Significant
Plagiarism practice						

Table 4 shows that the result is significant, with $r(340df) = .885, P < .000$. Hence, there was a significant relationship between implementation of plagiarism software and plagiarism practices among postgraduate students in universities in Abia and Imo States.

Discussion

In this study, postgraduate students accepted to involve in the plagiarism practices of paraphrasing without acknowledging original author, summarizing text without acknowledgement, inventing data, and inventing of references, corroborating the submission of Harris 2001 (cited in Oyewole et al. 2018). Apparently, the implementation of plagiarism software in the universities studied showed a cumulative impact on plagiarism practices among postgraduate students. The findings further reveal that there is a significant relationship between implementation of plagiarism software and plagiarism practices among postgraduate students in universities in Abia and Imo States. This finding supports the recommendation of Chuda *et al.*, (2012) that software should be used for checking cases of plagiarism so as to cope with the vast amount of materials at hand. Kokkinaki *et al.*, (2015) also recommended the use of plagiarism detection software to deter plagiarism and to also enable students to practice on academic writing without plagiarising. This result also agrees with Thompsett and Ahluwalia (2010) where it was observed that because of explosion of plagiarism among university students, many universities in developed countries have been using technologies to combat deceitful plagiarism behaviour of students. But, it contradicts the study of Anney and Mosha, (2015) which argue that universities can implement honour codes and policies for plagiarism detection, yet do not employ software for checking students' plagiarism.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to fill a lacuna in plagiarism research whilst adding to the relative few studies that examine the impact of adoption of plagiarism software on plagiarism practices by students in higher institutions of learning. Findings of this study reveal that universities in Abia and Imo state have put in place plagiarism policies to curtail plagiarism practices by students. Also, the institutions have put in place plagiarism software for testing of research works by its students. This measure has deterred some students from indulging in certain plagiarism practices. This study concludes that formulation and implementation of institutional plagiarism policies and adoption of plagiarism software for testing of research works of students would help to curtail plagiarism practices among students in universities in Abia and Imo states.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The study recommends that universities should collaborate with their librarians to teach postgraduate students academic writing techniques, citation and referencing styles.
2. The study recommends that universities and their library institutions should deploy plagiarism software to curtail plagiarism practices among their postgraduate students.
3. University authorities in Nigeria should double down on the relationship found between plagiarism software and practices and intensify efforts in deploying plagiarism software to curtail plagiarism practices in their universities.

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