

Plagiarism: An Unethical Practice in Research

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ABSTRACT

The practice of plagiarism by researchers and authors in any form intentionally or unknowingly is a mere unpardonable violation of research ethics resulting in punishment. Creative writing with proper and adequate acknowledgement of original author not only enhances the quality of the literature but also give respect to intellectual property rights. However, in reality, in the present day of Information Technology, many scholars and researchers very often engaged in resorting to the practice of plagiarism. In the last few years, how to deal with plagiarism has become an important problem at the university sphere in India. This paper, other than discussing the meaning and nature of plagiarism, tries to analyse the possible solution to this unethical practice. At the epilogue some suggestive measures are given for consideration by concerned agencies and authorities in the process of taking initiatives to curb plagiarism in academic environment in India.

1. Introduction

In the today's digital era with the progress of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and great information source, everyone has access to large number of information sources. The huge amounts of easily available materials in digital form at different platforms entice novice authors to steal ideas of others knowingly or unknowingly and indulge themselves into the corrupt practice of plagiarism; ultimately became one of the most blatant violations of academic honesty and ethics. With the limitless and easy accessibility of research materials on the web and urge for compulsory publishing, plagiarism has become an emergent legal and ethical problem in the field of education.

At the time of using such information sources, every author must take into consideration some essential moral ethics, and the foremost one is to acknowledge the intellectual property right of the original author. However, unfortunately, this golden principle is not followed by researchers and authors. Efforts are being taken by concerned institutions, universities, and organisations (both domestic and international) to curb the menace by way of framing ethical guidelines to be complacent by researchers and authors while they are involved in academic and research writings. They are intended to develop ethical discretion and reflection to clarify ethical dilemmas and to promote good scientific practice. Some of the recent initiatives are used as tools in the assessment of individual cases, in the planning of a research projects, or when reporting and publishing the findings and results of any research (NESH, 2016).

Along the process of conducting research and finally publishing the findings, different ethical challenges come on the way. Irrespective of any odd or conducive atmosphere around or any subject concerned or cultural diversities in societies, conducting ethical research is the primary responsibility of the researcher. UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2006) is considered incognisant of cultural diversities, including religious, spiritual, moral, and philosophical world traditions, to the detriment of "developing" countries (Chattopadhyay & De Vries, 2008). Unlike physical sciences, the social and behavioural sciences are cross-cutting

disciplines; often, social and cultural issues interact with all aspects of research to create ethical issues, challenges, and dilemmas. Take the case of Sarah Baartman, in which three core elements are at play: imperialism, biomedicine, and popular culture (Bandewar S.V. (2016).

2. Research and Research Ethics

Research is a continuous, systematic and socially organised pursuit for finding new and improved or deeper insight on any subject. Research is a creative systematic activity undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge. Western Sydney University defines research as "the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes." (Western Sydney University, (2018). Others define it as an inquiry or examination; especially: investigation or experimentation aimed at discovery, invention, innovation and interpretation of facts and ideas.

The term 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word 'ethos' which can mean custom, habit, character or disposition. Ethics is the systematic study of values, so as to decide what is right and what is wrong (Sanmukhani, & Tripathi, 2011). The principle of ethics relates to "right" and "wrong" conduct of the individual involved in any activity. Ethics are the moral principles that a person must follow, irrespective of the place or time. As a concept, 'research ethics' refers to a complex set of values, standards and institutional schemes that help constitute and regulate scientific activity.

Research ethics focus on the moral principles that researchers must follow in their respective fields of research. Research ethics is primarily related to three aspects- (i) moral issues, (ii) process and methodology of research and (iii) conduct of researcher. Honesty, integrity, originality, respect for intellectual property rights, acknowledgement of source, transparency, scientific validity, confidentiality, social responsibility, no harm to the participants, fair subject selection, informed consent, favourable risk-benefit ratio and protection of

human subject are some of the fundamental principles of research ethics developed by different organisations and statutory establishments (Palaskar, 2018; UCI Researchers, 2018; Jennings, 2015; Hudson & Collins, 2015).

3. Plagiarism: What, How and Why?

The word "plagiarism" is derived from the Latin term "plagiare", this means to kidnap or abduct (Webster Dictionary). Plagiarize is copy of another person's idea, words or works and pretend that they are your own. (Legal Service India, 2018). To explain it further, plagiarism is an act of using the language, processes, results and thoughts of another author without proper attribution and the depiction of that author's work as one's own. Plagiarism refers to any one of the followings or combinations:

- Stealing and passing off the ideas or words of another and posing as one's own.
- Copying words or ideas from someone else work without giving proper credit.
- Failing to put the borrowed statements in quotation marks.
- Giving incorrect citation or information about the original source.
- Copying the sentence structure but replacing with synonymous words from a source without giving credit.
- Copying so many words or substantial part from a single source, whether credit is given or not.
- Copying or buying a paper/research work and presenting it as one's own.
- Failing to credit and cite someone else's thoughts or ideas when paraphrasing.
- Creating false citation that doesn't exist.
- Using other's work without giving credit; knowingly/intentionally or unknowingly/unintentionally.

4. Types of Plagiarism

Plagiarism, on the basis of its nature, may be classified into following broad categories:

- **Global plagiarism** - Presenting the entire text of someone else as one's own work. Translating the whole work in different language and publishing with change of author's name also comes under this category.
- **Paraphrasing plagiarism** - Rephrasing (using different words) someone else's ideas without citation.
- **Verbatim plagiarism** - Directly copying a passage of a text and producing in own work without any alteration and citation.
- **Mosaic plagiarism** - Combining text and ideas from different sources without citation. This is a common practice among novice authors as feasible because of digital materials and technologies.
- **Self-plagiarism** - Reusing passages and ideas from your own previously published work without citation.

5. Why Plagiarism is in debate?

The act of plagiarism is not new either to academic world or to the society. It is a very old practice. However, this has emerged as an important issue in the university and academic

circle in the recent years in India because of some technological development and administrative arrangements. In the last one decade or so, universities under the policy of UGC has started linking research and publication to appointments and promotions which posed a situation where people in academics are left with no choice other than going for research and publication. Plagiarism is a product of such efforts of uncommitted and untrained researchers. This unethical tendency was further supported by the fake and sub-standard publication industry that has mushroomed in last decade. Lastly, information technology, particularly easy access to internet, has been instrumental in making a plethora of research materials and information easily available to such scholars.

6. Plagiarism and its Impact on Research and Academic World

Plagiarism is not acceptable in literate society and considered as a serious breach of accepted norms of research ethics. Practice of plagiarism in any form and at any level whether done intentionally or unintentionally, violates the ethical codes of research. The very basic ethical principles of research and publication such as honesty, integrity, originality, respect for intellectual property right, acknowledgement of sources and transparency in research are blatantly violated due to plagiarism. The bad consequences of this unacademic act, besides violating ethical norms, is realised broadly on three spheres- (i) quality of research, (ii) reputation and career of researcher and (iii) academic (research) institutes and funding agencies.

The fundamental objectives of research that we have discussed before are defeated when this unethical practice is resorted by the researchers. Innovation and creation of new knowledge through research can never be materialised when old research findings are reproduced again and again through different methods of plagiarism. The end product of plagiarism is unproductive and un-innovative knowledge. The plagiarism results in publishing a research finding which is just a repetition of old ideas. The quality of research is compromised and authenticity of research is also questioned which has dangerous consequences particularly in the field of biological and medical research.

The frequent revelations of cases of plagiarism badly damage the reputation of research institutions and universities. Secondly, as a statutory responsibility to ensure quality of education and research, universities and other academic institutions are legally bound to check this malpractice. Plagiarism increases the administrative responsibilities of the institutes as they are involved in checking plagiarism and instituting process for punishing plagiarisers. The above is true for funding agencies also as they value for their money. Lastly, the dishonest, unproductive and uncreative research and publications is nothing more than wastage of public money and resources.

Other than compromising the quality of research and creating various problems for academic institutions, the act of plagiarism has damaging impact on the career of person committing this offence. Besides losing her/his reputation in the institute and society at large, she/he might be subjected to institutional punishment which varies depending on the degree of plagiarism and the position of the person (Viper, 2018).

Research scholars and students may be expelled from the institute; one may be removed from the job and financial penalties and other forms of punishment may be accorded for minor violations.

At last, the rampant practice of plagiarism leads to violation of principles of merit and justice. The honest and hardworking students and researchers suffer in this system as undeserving people adopting the practice of stealing put the former to backseat. Most importantly, society at large loses its faith and confidence on the genuineness of the research findings and publications.

7. Measures to Check Plagiarism

There is no renunciation of fact that the practice of plagiarism is an unethical and illegal act, but no specific law has developed to declare this act illegal and an offence punishable under legal provision. It is still considered as an ethical issue being governed by code of conduct and research guidelines. These guidelines primarily serve as tools for researchers. However, some of the activities, not all, under plagiarism are being controlled by various laws such as The Copyright Act, 1957 as amended in 1999 and 2017, The Patents Act, 1970, as amended in 1999, and in 2002, The Trademarks Act, 1999, etc. The limited legal provisions that exist in various laws are found to be inadequate to check this unethical practice. Secondly, sometime it is difficult to prove the acts of plagiarism.

In the absence of anti-plagiarism law, efforts are being taken at the administrative level to check it. The University Grants Commission (UGC), in last couple of years has taken the following initiatives to check this act at university level:

- **Shodh Ganga**– Submission of Ph. D theses to UGC-INFLIBNET and uploading that to the Shodh Ganga open access digital repository.
- **UGC Regulations, 2018** – Students will be asked to withdraw the manuscript with similarity above 10% content.
- **Plagiarism Detection Software (PDS)** – the UGC now working on a resolution through which all universities will be provided with free online access to an international Plagiarism Detection Software.

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Most of the academic institutions and research organisations have come out with strong anti-plagiarism guidelines; violation of which invites strong institutional actions. Plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin, iThenticate, Urkund, DupliChecker, PaperRater, PlagiarismChecker, are now commonly used to check this practice.

It is difficult to imagine the situation of zero plagiarism as consultation of previously existing materials from various sources is a necessity of every research. However, two important factors need to be considered here: (i) minimising plagiarism and (ii) avoiding plagiarism by developing the practice of proper citation and references. There is no consensus among academic communities or clear-cut-rules framed by any agency on what percentage of plagiarism is acceptable in a manuscript. It varies from country to country, university to university, and journal to journal. The UGC's new anti-plagiarism policy allows up to 10% content similarity. The description reads as "Level 0: Similarities up to 10% - Minor similarities, no penalty". Every researcher be cautious while referring the original sources and honestly give citation according to international standard.

8. Looking Beyond legal Provisions and Administrative Guidelines

A well-developed system of research ethics and maintaining ethical literacy among researchers is fundamental to the enhancement of research integrity at all levels. A proper training of research methodology and citation/referencing should be imparted to the researcher. Most importantly, there is a need to develop a culture of research in our universities and research institutes by providing adequate financial and logistic support along with required amount of leave to carry out research. Mechanism should be developed to make a proper balance of teaching and research in every teacher's workload besides promoting a system of recognition and incentives for good and innovative research work. In addition to rigorous peer review, there is a need of strengthening plagiarism test and stringent institutional actions against plagiariser. No plagiarism status would be possible in India, in the absence of anti-plagiarism law, only with the collective and honest efforts from researchers/authors, universities, research institutions, funding agencies and regulatory bodies.

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