

Plagiarism: The Mysterious Crime

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Abstract

This paper tackles a very important academic issue that many students do not take seriously-- Plagiarism. It is dishonesty that corrupts and spoils any work; written or oral, and turns it upside down. However, scholars and students, at any stage of study, can get a clear idea about what it means to plagiarize: the bad side of plagiarism, and finally how to overcome all problems to get a very good piece of writing with correct citations and documentations. In order to have a clear and complete idea about this problem, a questionnaire is given to a fourth- year Information Technology-IT- students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences- the Sultanate of Oman. What we have found is that plagiarism is a bad act and a crime, as well, and those who commit it are criminals and should be sent to court. Implications, and suggestions will be highlighted in detail in the article.

Key words: APA, bibliography, citation, court, plagiarism, quotation, theft.

Introduction

When students are asked to write research papers, they normally hurry to the library where there are books and resources that deal with the topic concerned. While working on their papers, they- intentionally or unintentionally- copy some sentences, or even whole paragraphs without giving credit. After they get caught red- handed, some pretend of not being aware of the “Plagiarism” act, while others copy because they very much adore the words of other writers, and would love to show their audience this as if it were their own and personal creation. Plagiarism comes in different kinds: stealing pictures, ideas, videos, etc. The consequences of this bad act damage the reputation of those who commit this crime. Whether plagiarists copy on purpose or not, plagiarism is considered a big crime like theft, or murder, and they should be sent

to court for trial. This paper highlights plagiarism; kinds, causes, consequences, and possible ways to avoid it.

Literature Review

Plagiarism is the practice of taking credit for someone else's words or ideas. It's an act of intellectual dishonesty. In colleges and universities, it violates honor codes and can cause irreparable damage to a person's reputation. It also comes with serious consequences; a plagiarized assignment may lead to a failing grade, a suspension, or an expulsion (Valdes, 2019, para.1).

Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person's literary, artistic, or musical work as one's own" ("the *World Book Encyclopedia*", 2014, p.505). McGinty (1986, p. 50) "Plagiarism is a theft". It is an offence if writers do not refer to the original work and give credit (Lindy, 1952; Mathews, 1988; White, 1963; Hubbuch, 1989).

Plagiarism is a bad habit that should be avoided by all means. Some writers, especially lazy and careless students seek others' help to write their papers and give them a certain amount of money, others; however, may buy from websites, or some offices established for this purpose. To take others' work, word for word, without any credit or quotation marks is plagiarism, as well. This is called a direct way of stealing the effort of others. Sometimes shrewd plagiarists plagiarize using some tricks as taking, or paraphrasing someone's ideas and submit that as if it were their own production. Does citation play an important role in accusing writers of plagiarism?

In fact, following the proper methods of writing essays; giving credit to others, having quotation marks and applying all means of producing an "excellent" piece of literature, but failing to cite the sources required is considered plagiarism. Valdes (2019, para.7) stresses that "Ultimately, if you fail to cite your sources appropriately, you've committed plagiarism-even if you had every intention of giving credit". To avoid unintentional plagiarism, caring and honest writers check their writings themselves before submitting them by means of "online systems" that show the percentage of plagiarism. Teachers, however, have an important role in guiding their students while doing their essays.

Teachers should always urge their students to follow the legitimate and legal ways of writing in order to get used to this habit. Students, on the other hand, should feel the responsibility as they gather and collect information for their research papers. Despite all pieces of advice, a number, though small, of students ignore their teachers' instructions; they plagiarize because of certain reasons; some need to get high marks by any means, others spend the whole semester enjoying themselves: having parties and picnics and just remember to write a term paper the night before the deadline of submission--they rush to plagiarize. We, researchers, have a good experience in dealing with such issues among which is that students, sometimes, copy the work

of others thinking that their teachers cannot catch them. Well, throughout the whole academic semester, teachers are aware of the academic level of their students and know their writing although the online plagiarism checker might not catch them. In this case, they might be asked to present and talk before their classmates about what they had written, which, for sure, will lead to complete failure. What about cultural differences and their effect on plagiarism?

Cultural differences do play a significant role in “Plagiarism”. The reasons behind that might be the lack of understanding what it means to plagiarize and adopt others’ work literally with no credit. Dugan (2018, para.7) states that “Students from India and China, who make up of the international student population in the United States, often come to America without an understanding of plagiarism and how to avoid using another’s work.”. Students might be copying naturally without fear of being caught and penalized, but being unaware of this matter does not give them the right to do so. Their countries, Ministries of Education, in particular, are to blame. Indian and Chinese students are not the only ones who plagiarize, but most international students commit this act. “International students in the United States are more susceptible to plagiarism- using someone else’s academic work as one’s own- and more likely to be caught than American counterparts, studies show” (Dugan, 2018. Para.1). A good number of students around the world do not know well the consequences of committing plagiarism. They either don’t know, or think they cannot be caught. In an article by Gillmore (2017, para.10), he warns that plagiarists face severe punishment.

The consequences of being caught plagiarizing—failing an assignment, or in some cases, possibly having to change schools—may make things even more stressful. In college and university, plagiarism is often viewed as the worst academic offence a student may commit.

Moreover, in the United States, if a professor catches a student red-handed plagiarizing, he is likely to put this offence in the students’ personal record. “A record that will follow you when you go from high school into college and, later on, a job”. (Fernandez, 1916, para.2). As experienced in teaching at university level, some students of ours-sometimes- argue that referring to their previous papers is not considered plagiarism; if a certain paper was submitted to a certain professor, and then the same student submits it- as is- to another professor in another course, or takes some lines from it without giving credit, even to himself, that is considered by many professors as a big cheat. “Many colleges and universities strictly prohibit self-plagiarism, or what they often call *recycling*.”(Baldwin, 2018, para. 7). No matter how professors teach, advise, or preach, students still have tricks to maneuver and get what they can in sneaky ways. It is, above all, a matter of ethics and good intentions that remain the clean-cut way that controls actions; the inner voice inside ourselves that gives a certain alarm when committing a bad behavior.

Wrong deeds remain wrong even if done by so many people. Dishonesty pollutes and spoils all areas of life, particularly education, as it is supposed to be the source and backbone of all

sorts of development in any society. Talbert (2006, para. 6) has a valuable say about academic dishonesty: “Academic dishonesty assumes that the end justifies the means and that the grade is the most important thing”. It is true that obtaining a high grade is the ultimate aim for students, but what really matters is that grades should be obtained by hard work and efficiency. Professors do urge their students to follow the correct ways and procedures while working on their essays, despite that, some plagiarize. Berryhill (2019, para. 3) sets a good example in decreasing plagiarism during his teaching experience. He hates plagiarism and considers it frustrating:

In twenty years of teaching, I have found ways to decrease plagiarism, but I have yet to eliminate it. Plagiarism frustrates me not only because it is cheating but also because it makes me feel as though my teaching has fallen short.

Another professor expresses his bad feeling about plagiarism; gets mad when students cheat and use unethical ways to get their assignments done.

I do get mad when students plagiarize. Very. A student once whined that he did not think he deserved to fail my course for plagiarizing on just one paper. I responded that I did not think he deserved that punishment either but they don't allow tarring and feathering any more. (Parsons, 2015, para.3).

Do famous writers, occasionally, plagiarize? This is really a serious question that requires a frank and direct answer. The audience can tell whether their favorite writers or authors plagiarize or not. We, researchers, are keen on uncovering this bad act. “even professional writers and researchers can be sloppy in their note taking, leaving them confused about what they wrote themselves and what they copied down from a source”.(Cleary, 2017, para. 17). They cannot continue plagiarizing, and once they are caught, the price is their “**Reputation**”. Plagiarism seems like plague; it has no boundaries and no limits; spreads in all fields of life. In addition to universities, colleges, schools, etc., plagiarism has reached the military environment and affected its supreme prestige. In the U.S Army College, John Walsh was found guilty of committing plagiarism. “The U.S. Army College has revoked the master's degree Sen. John Walsh(D-Mont.) earned there after reviewing evidence he plagiarized a research paper.” (Sullivan, 2014, para.1). It is a matter of giving credit to the original writers. Though Walsh was accused of plagiarism, he has behaved in a smooth way; he apologized and admitted this bad act. This appears in his confession: “I apologize to all Montanans for the plagiarism in my 2007 paper, and I am prepared to live with its consequences (Sullivan, 2004, para.4.). He regrets and feels sorry for that act. The U.S, however, is not the only country to have some plagiarists; Germany has also a good number of high- ranked and prestigious people who have committed this bad act. One of the German ministers had to quit and leave his job as a politician for he was caught for plagiarism. This is really embarrassing; politicians should be trustworthy and bear the responsibility of their countries and be as honest as possible. It is a wave of irresponsibility.

A wave of plagiarism in German politics was seen when the German Minister had to lose his job because he was caught for plagiarism. He is not the only German politician who had to face such kinds of disgrace and embarrassment, but there are few other politicians as well that have been caught for being the plagiarists. (Millan, 2018, para.1).

Plagiarism, though bad and disgusting, does not only mean copying sentences word for word without giving credit, but also failure to write names and surnames correctly. Spelling of authors' names should be correct and written clearly. The following is another example from Germany:

According to VroniPlag, Von der Leyen's doctoral thesis in genealogy, written at Medizinische Hochschule Hannover in 1990, allegedly contains passages with citations lacking source references, incorrect citations and the formulation of passages cited not corresponding to the original passages. Also, some of the authors referred to in the sources are wrongly spelt. Five pages contained more than 75% plagiarized text, VroniPlag alleges. (Gardner, 2015, para. 6).

In the age of modern technology, many things have been uncovered about others' works. The plagiarism checker-generally- gives accurate information about lots of things, whether academic or non-academic. Could T. S. Elliot have been accused of plagiarism?

T.S. Eliot, one of the best-known American poets, plagiarized much of his work "The Waste Land" which, according to the Cracked article was "Most of 'The Waste Land' was just cobbled together out of quotes from other writers," which is a fairly apt description. (Bailey, 2009, para.13).

Not only does Eliot plagiarize, but also boasts of doing so. He has a well-known say: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal". (Bailey, 2009, para.13). Martin Luther King was accused of plagiarism, as well.

Martin Luther King was awarded his doctorate from Boston University. After he had passed away, his wife donated documents, doctoral thesis, and all papers related to King to Stanford University, which formed a panel to check, sift, and organize all that material. The organizing group discovered that parts of his writing, as well as his doctoral thesis were plagiarized with no credit given to the real authors. Moreover, his famous speech; *I have a Dream* is said to have been plagiarized. "I have a Dream" "speech", which was allegedly stolen from another pastor, Archibald Carey." (Baily, 2015, para.10). What decision did Boston University take regarding King's case?

In the end though, Boston University did investigate the allegations of plagiarism and, in 1991, found that King's dissertation did contain plagiarism. However, while the school

appended a note to the dissertation, it declined to revoke his degree saying that the dissertation, despite its shortcomings, still contributed to the field. (Baily, 2015, para.11).

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Survey Result

A survey was conducted among 20 final year IT students at the College of Applied Sciences, Ibri- the Sultanate of Oman. The purpose of the survey is to measure students' awareness on a very important issue that many don't take seriously; Plagiarism.

The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire given to the students to complete.

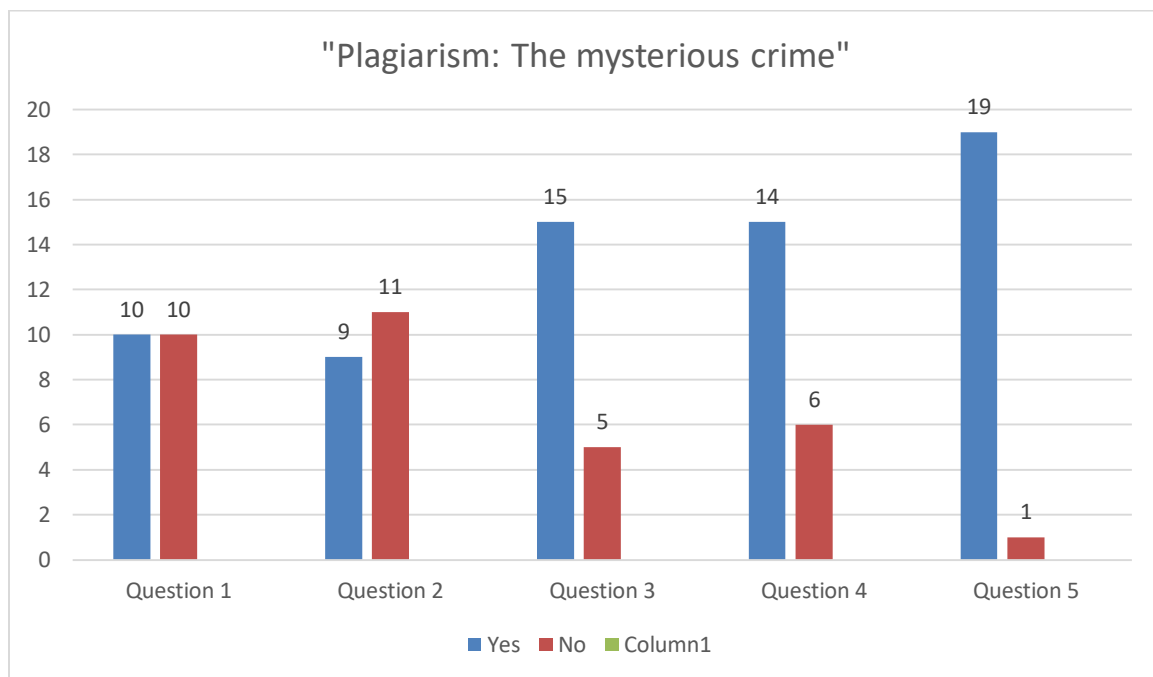


Table1: Shows students' responses to their knowledge about Plagairism.

From the analysis of table 1, the most significant items for the first question are as follows. The bar graph clearly states that 10 students said that their teachers at school had highlighted and fully discussed "Plagiarism", whereas 10 said the opposite. This means it is necessary to have more focus and awareness of this serious issue. For the second question, 9 students admit they have taken the words of other writers without giving credit which shows that they were among students with no knowledge about plagiarism as a crime. But 11 students have given credit to the words of other writers. For the third question, however, 15 admit that "Plagiarism" is a theft and

one who plagiarizes should be taken to court. Very few students with a number of 5 replied negatively.

In the fourth question, 14 students say that people who say they have never plagiarized are neither honest nor telling the truth, while 6 said there are some who genuinely work hard and give credit to author's work. In the fifth question, 19 students say it is necessary to conduct workshops and conferences, distribute leaflets and brochures to make full awareness of "Plagiarism" and its bad consequences.

To conclude, as per the analysis of the data, it is clear that students are aware of plagiarism as a mysterious crime. Plagiarism is not only a very severe crime, but also an unethical conduct that spoils the whole academic arena. In spite of the awareness, Plagiarism remains a very important issue for those who don't take it seriously.

Recommendations

-writers have to bear in mind that plagiarism is a crime. Plagiarists could be taken to court if they publish others' materials under their own names.

-the reader has the right to read correct, original, and high-quality articles, sifted and checked.

-when in doubt, do without. Students should refer to their instructors if they encounter any problem that may hinder the flow of their writing.

-always remember that quality is better than quantity: one short documented and well-cited piece of writing is worth a hundred plagiarized ones.

-once one plagiarizes, nobody would ever trust their writings.

-though terrible, teachers' plagiarism is more terrible than the students'.

-the only device to control plagiarism is one's inner conscience. Once there is conscience, there is honesty.

-plagiarism equals dishonesty.

Conclusion

Plagiarism ruins clean societies and causes failure to the whole academic arena, in particular. It should be highlighted at the national and international levels for those who plagiarize with good intentions. Plagiarism is more of a crime; plagiarists should be sent to court for trial for what they steal.

Writers and researchers have to be careful when referring to sources and reference books because any mistake or accusation of theft could destroy all their glorious past. There are many

issues that affect plagiarists; losing their high-ranked jobs and positions and failure to get back their reputation. So, all people should work -hand in hand- against this issue: **“Plagiarism”**

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Appendices

Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information for an article titled “Plagiarism: the mysterious crime.”

This information will not be misused and you will not be identified.

Thank you for your co-operation.

عندما كنت طالبا في المدرسة، هل حدث وان مدرسك قد سلطوا الضوء على موضوع الانتحال الادبي وناقشوه باستفاضة ؟

1. When at school, was “Plagiarism” ever highlighted and fully discussed by your teachers?

A. Yes

B. No

شخصيا، هل حدث وان اخذت – وبشكل حرفي- كلمات او اعمال كتاب اخرين دون توثيق ذلك داخل البحث او في صفحة المراجع؟

2. Personally, have you ever taken- literally- the words or works of other writers without giving credit?

A. Yes

B. No

ان الانتحال الادبي يعد سرقة، وان من يقترفه يجب ان يحال الى المحكمة.

3. Plagiarism is a theft, and one who plagiarizes should be taken to court for trial.

A. Yes

B. No

هل تعتقد ان من يقولون انهم لم ينتحلوا شيئا من اعمال الآخرين، هل تعتقد انهم غير صادقين ولا يقولون الحقيقة؟

4. Do you think people who say they have never plagiarized are not honest and not telling the truth?

A. Yes

B. No

هل تعتقد انه من الضروري عقد ورش العمل والمؤتمرات، وتوزيع المنشورات لتعريف الطلبة بالانتحال وآثاره السيئة؟

5. Do you think it is necessary to conduct workshops and conferences, distribute leaflets and brochures to make students fully aware of plagiarism and its bad consequences?

A. Yes

B. No