

The Digital Shadow: A Global Review of Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

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Abstract- Keeping high standards in publishing is very important to make sure academic work is reliable, to build trust with the public, and to share knowledge in a responsible way. Plagiarism is a big problem around the world. It is serious academic misconduct leading to hamper academic integrity. It often happens in research papers written by scholars. Sometimes, researchers use someone else's ideas or words in their own work without giving them credit. It's important for students and researchers to know about plagiarism so they can avoid it. In this paper, I have explained what plagiarism is, the different types of plagiarism, how to find it, how to stop it, and which tools are good for checking plagiarism. These tools help to find out which parts of a work are real and which are not. To deal with this issue, we need to value original work and understand the problems caused by plagiarism, like losing reputation, facing legal issues, and losing trust. Colleges and publishers can help by setting clear rules, teaching about ethical research, and taking strong actions when rules are broken. By creating a setting where honesty, openness, and strong values are important, the academic world can maintain high ethical standards and help knowledge grow in a trustworthy way.

Keywords: Plagiarism; Academic misconduct; Research scholar, Academic integrity, Ethical standards

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism is a big issue in the academic world today. Many books, research papers, dissertations, and theses are losing their unique value and impact because of weak writing skills and a lack of ethical behaviour. In the realm of academic publishing, upholding the highest standards of publication ethics is of paramount importance (1). To stay honest in studies and do real, reliable, and genuine research, we need to follow certain ethical rules. These rules help people trust the research and the methods used

to make it. This includes respecting the privacy, consent, and safety of the people who help create the work. Also, research should follow a code of integrity and be open, so others can trust the work. Researchers should be honest and show respect for other people's ideas. This helps keep the scholarly record honest, builds public trust, and makes sure knowledge is shared responsibly and in an ethical way. Not following these research ethics can lead to research misconduct, which comes in three forms: fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism.

The prevalence of plagiarism

The frequency of publications on cheating and plagiarism increased (80%) in the post-COVID period compared to the pre-COVID period (20%). This could be due to various factors, such as changes in educational settings, increased reliance on online learning, or other pandemic-related challenges(2). Most of the participants reported having engaged in academic fraud. In the academic dishonesty questionnaire, 5.4% stated that they always cheated, and only 50.2% stated that they never cheated. That is, approximately half of the participants who answered the questionnaire did not oppose academic fraud and actually engaged in academically fraudulent behaviour(3). According to Satterth Waite, the percentage of plagiarism in America is 30%. According to one study, 94 percent of students engaged in research misconduct at least once, while another found that the incidence was 91 percent(4). Dordoy reports that the rate of copying a paragraph from a book or a website was 73.9 percent among students at an English institution.

Definition of plagiarism

The term plagiarism is described as “the act of plagiarizing, “which derives from the Latin word

plagiarism, which means “kidnapper”(5). Oxford University describes plagiarism as presenting someone else’s work or ideas as one’s own without proper acknowledgment, whether the original material is published or unpublished, in any form (manuscript, printed, or electronic)(6). This includes material generated using artificial intelligence unless prior authorization is given, such as to compensate for a student’s disability(7). Plagiarism also encompasses reusing one’s own work without citations. Whether intentional or unintentional, it involves the copying of text, ideas, images, or data(8). Plagiarism is not limited to the misappropriation of words, it constitutes intellectual theft.

Prevalence of plagiarism

Plagiarism is becoming more and more common in educational and scientific community, according to studies. Plagiarism rates vary depending on the field of study. Plagiarism is prevalent in 78 percent of organizational studies students and 63 percent of humanities students(9). In a meta-analysis, it was found that medical researchers reported misconduct more frequently than respondents in other fields. From 2001 to 2010, the number of manuscripts accepted by listed medical journals increased by 44%. The number of retracted papers over the same period went up 19 fold(10). In terms of research integrity, journal editors often find themselves in the grey zone of publication ethics.

Factors responsible

Some research scholar plagiarize accidentally because they are not familiar with correct quoting, paraphrasing, citing, and referencing techniques. Some plagiarise to improve their grades and to save the time. Some research scholar finds no reason why they shouldn't plagiarize or do it because it makes them feel good, or because they think short cuts are creative and appropriate. The prevalent culture of “publications at any cost” and “publish or perish” appears to be responsible for this(11). Scientific merit of a person and the funding of research projects are often analysed by number of published articles by a researcher, making this a vulnerable target for manipulation(11). Digitalization has made copy-paste easy also inappropriate reuse of sources from the websites, online journals, and other electronic media. Some other causes are deficient training in ethical scientific writing, lack of statutory controls and policies to deal with scientific

misconduct in academics. In India, the pressure to publish was the commonest reason (55%) which drove academicians to plagiarize and the lack of essence of writing in English (35%) was a key factor accountable for increased plagiarism(12). Sometimes journal editors may also be responsible for the occurrence of some forms of plagiarism.

Various forms of plagiarism

Plagiarism is not a single act that can be divided into several types one uses to take the shortcut to get work done. It can be divided into two parts,

1. Plagiarism, where the source is not cited
2. Source cited but still plagiarized

These types are either based on different methods of plagiarism.

- a. Direct Plagiarism: It is also known as complete plagiarism or verbatim plagiarism where word to word copying of a section of text from another person's work without any quotation or credit to original author.
- b. Paraphrasing Plagiarism: In this type, any sentence, paragraph or piece of text is rephrased or rewritten by changing its tense, phrasing or arrangement of words and later presenting it as their own work, without any quotation or credit to original author.
- c. Mosaic / Patchwork Plagiarism: Here one copies ideas or thoughts from different sources and combines them all to create a new text or a new paragraph and then presents it as their own idea. The text from several sources is weaved together to create unique content obviously without any quotation or credit to original author.
- d. Self-Plagiarism: Submitting own previously published article or submitted work (partially or entirely) as entirely a new assignment or publication without disclosing it. In India, a notice was published by UGC in 2020 explaining self-plagiarism where it said, "Self citation do not add any number to the individuals' citation index or h-index in global academia, and if you are publishing some work that has promotions, selections, credit allotment, award of research degree"(13).

Self-plagiarism has four subtypes(14).

1. Duplicate (redundant) publication: It occurs when an author submits identical or almost identical manuscripts to two different journals.
2. Augmented publication: It occurs when authors add additional data to already published data and submit the new manuscript with new, recalculated results often with different title and adjusted study aims. As it is not a case of verbatim word plagiarism, this type of plagiarism is difficult to detect.
3. Segmented (Salami) publication: It occurs when two or more papers are derived from the same experiment. This form of plagiarism is also difficult to detect.
4. Text recycling: Using large portion of one's own already published work in new manuscript comprises this type of plagiarism and is easily detectable by plagiarism detection tools and software.
- e. Accidental Plagiarism / Inadvertent Plagiarism: When plagiarism is committed without the intention of plagiarizing. When researcher write any text or paraphrase which unintentionally matches with already existing text or republished content called accidental plagiarism.
- f. Structural Plagiarism: Another author's ideas are used without giving him appropriate credit, even without using the exact form of the words is called as structural plagiarism. This includes the sequence of ideas making up the argument, background sources, experimental design, or even complete findings.
- g. Translational Plagiarism: Translational plagiarism occurs when one attempts to translate a text from another language like Marathi, Hindi, or Sanskrit and then claims as if it is his or her original work. It is very difficult to trace as all languages of the globe are not compatible with anti-plagiarism detection tools.
- h. Source-Based Plagiarism: When the text or inspiration is taken from some published material, but instead of providing the source information, it is decided to hide or provide incorrect source information in the references.
- i. Computer Code Plagiarism: Copying or adapting the source codes freely available on the web without proper referencing.

Contract Cheating

If researcher lacks the necessary writing skill, he will search for a helping hand who may work on his

behalf on a payment basis or free in some cases. Now, one will claim it as their own creative outcome rather than revealing the truth (15) Simply researcher outsource work to third parties (essay mills, peers, or AI) and submit it as their own. It is contracting someone else to do the work.

Contract cheating is different from plagiarism. Plagiarism, as explained earlier, is researcher is taking credit for ideas or work that he has not created. This can be done accidentally or intentionally Contract cheating means researcher has done no work at all. Someone else is doing all the work on his behalf. And this cannot be done accidentally; it is "deliberate, pre-planned and intentional"(16).

Implications and consequences of plagiarism

Ethical implications

Plagiarism severely undermines the ethical standards of academic and professional communities and affects authors in the following ways(17).

- a. Compromises integrity and author's reputation
- b. Erodes trust
- c. Impacts originality

Legal consequences

- a. Retractions and career damage
- b. Employment consequences
- c. Funding and grants

Levels of plagiarism

Levels of plagiarism are used to quantify the severity of copying, often leading to consequences like mandatory revision, manuscript withdrawal, or suspension of publishing rights. Plagiarism levels are commonly categorized by similarity percentage, ranging from minor, acceptable similarities to severe academic misconduct, with increasing penalties.

- a. Similarities up to 10% excluded
- b. Similarities above 10% to 40%
- c. Similarities above 40% to 60%
- d. Similarities above 60%

Penalties for student's plagiarism(18)

- a. Level 0: Minor Similarities (Up to 10%): Generally acceptable, no penalty.
- b. Level 1: Moderate Similarities (10% to 40%): Authors must withdraw manuscripts and may be barred from publishing for one year.

- c. Level 2: High Similarities (40% to 60%): Requires manuscript withdrawal, a one-year publishing ban, and often a two-year ban on supervising research students.
- d. Level 3: Very High Similarities (Above 60%): Severe penalties, including withdrawal, a three-year publishing ban, and a three-year ban on supervising students.

Is plagiarism a crime?

Plagiarism is not a criminal offense, but it is an ethical violation and a serious academic or professional misconduct. It is not defined in criminal law, but it can become illegal if it violates copyright law or intellectual property rights. There are no

criminal penalties on the civilian side of the law until the plagiarized work is utilized to earn a profit; otherwise, the only thing that can be done is to take it to a civil court and claim for damages or copyright infringement at the worst.

Plagiarism and copyright infringement

Plagiarism and copyright infringement are distinct, though they may overlap. Both involve the improper use of someone else's work, but they differ in nature and consequences. Plagiarism is an ethical violation, whereas copyright infringement is a legal violation that occurs when a copyrighted work is used, reproduced, or distributed without the permission of the copyright holder(19).

Table 1 Key differences between plagiarism and copyright infringement(20)

Aspect	Plagiarism	Copyright infringement
Nature	Ethical violation (not illegal)	Legal violation (governed by copyright law)
Offense against	The original author (lack of credit)	The copyright holder (unauthorized use of the work)
Scope	Applies to ideas and intellectual credit	Applies to specific expressions of ideas (e.g., text, images)
Consequences	Academic or professional penalties (no legal action)	Legal penalties, including fines and lawsuits
Focus	Proper attribution and intellectual honesty	Maintaining control and revenue from a work

How to deal with plagiarism?

Urgent and concrete action is needed on two fronts viz. improving the knowledge of medical professionals and strengthening mechanisms to identify and weed out publication misconduct(21). Editorial associations, such as COPE, International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), and World Association of Medical Editors have given guidelines on the responsibility of journal editors when research misconduct is suspected or confirmed in published or submitted articles(22). Council of Science Editors in 2012 has defined misconduct and suggested how journals should treat it(23). The COPE recommends that in case of suspected plagiarism, journals should reprimand the authors, by not accepting the offending author's articles for a span of say 2-5 years, and by simultaneously informing their heads of department and dean of the author's medical school(23). But many editors educate their authors by just rejecting the tainted manuscript and presenting to them the evidence that there is plagiarism in their submission.

Strategies to avoid plagiarism (24)

- a. Understand what is plagiarism
- b. Properly cite sources
- c. Paraphrase correctly(rewrite the original text entirely in own words)
- d. Conduct original research
- e. Organize your research in a proper way
- f. Review and revise
- g. Use plagiarism detection tools to review work before submission

Anti-plagiarism software

Plagiarism detection tools or software help find any accidental copying in the text by comparing it with already published content. These tools check how similar the new text is to existing material and show the percentage of matching content. These tools use smart computer programs to find if someone's work is similar to other content online or in databases. They are now very important in colleges and publishing places to make sure that research and writing are honest. But these tools work best when they are used correctly and when colleges,

universities or publishers are ready to follow strict rules against copying others' work.

CONCLUSION

Even though people have copied others' work since ancient times, it has become much more common now. The quick growth of the internet has made it easier for plagiarism to happen. New digital tools have made it easier for people to use others' work without realizing it, which makes it harder to catch and stop this kind of cheating. Keeping academic honesty is important because it helps build trust and makes sure that knowledge grows properly. Avoiding plagiarism is not just the right thing to do it's also required by law. Being honest, fair, and respectful in scholarly work helps keep research trustworthy and ethical. Everyone in the academic world needs to be careful with how they do their work, respect others' ideas, and help create a culture where honesty is valued. If we start giving appropriate credit to other authors the same will be repeated in our case. By following this, we make sure our work is original, ethical, and follows the law, which helps knowledge keep moving forward.

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