

AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF PLAGIARISM AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF SELECTED HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Plagiarism has eaten deep into the fabrics of higher institutions worldwide and it has continued to be a global concern. A lot of measures have been put in place by organization/institutions to curb this menace. Some had even subscribed to plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin. This crime is so common among the undergraduate students, some go to the Internet or textbook to copy and paste without acknowledging the source. The understanding of various perspectives and attitude towards this issue is critical to finding a lasting solution. This study therefore investigated the awareness and perception of plagiarism among final year students of Faculty of Education in Rivers State University and Final year – HND2 students (Accredited departments) in Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study, the study employed a descriptive survey research design and correlational study while using a well-structured questionnaire and rating scale as data collection instrument. The sample size of the study is 310, the instrument was designed into two sections. Section A covers the background data of the students while section B covered the research questions. Descriptive statistical techniques like table of frequency counts and percentages were employed in the analysis of the background data, mean score, standard deviation and correlation coefficient were used in answering the research questions while regression was used in testing the hypotheses. The result revealed that $p\text{-value of } .211 > .05$ which means that there is no significant relationship between awareness and perception of plagiarism among the students. It also shows that every one of the discussants were aware of what plagiarism is and most students plagiarize without even realizing the implications. It was recommended that there should be penalties from institution and other relevant authorities to punish students who do plagiarism.*

KEYWORDS: awareness of plagiarism, perception of plagiarism, plagiarism, undergraduate, students.

INTRODUCTION

Institution of higher learning all over the world are supposed to be a centre of knowledge and information creation generated from research. Based on that, students' expectation is high regarding access and use of information to write assignment, examination or even carry out academic research. However, it has been observed that undergraduate students of higher learning are highly engaged in plagiarism which has been a major concern and issue today. Incidents of plagiarism has been on the increase hence; much attention is given to it in recent times globally.

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made information to be more easily accessible without geographical constraints; hence researchers can now lay their hands on documents in any part of the world. Although, this is a laudable development considering that scholars develop new ideas while learning from the writings of others (Coulthard, 2004), some researchers, however, prefer to steal the ideas of others rather than learn from their work. In as much as the use of ICT has the potential of assisting students/researchers in retrieving electronic documents for research activities, it could also expose them to the trap of plagiarism. Students and researchers are turning to the Internet for cooked solutions and shortcuts for writing assignments, research papers and thesis. Oyewole (2017) states that the Internet is a useful tool and at the same time it could become detrimental if the ethics guiding the use of other people's words and ideas are jettisoned. Park (2003) states that plagiarism is a type of cheating where students present the work of others as their own for the purpose of academic credit. He further defines plagiarism as an act or instance of using or closely imitating the language and thoughts of another author without authorization and the representation of that author's work as one's own, as by not crediting the original author.

Findings carried out by Hosny and Fatima (2014) Amiri and Razmjoo (2015) and Babalola (2012) revealed that students' plagiarism in higher institutions seems to be on the increase. The implication of this is that the issue of plagiarism is indeed a menace that management of institution of higher learning should be concerned about. Oyewole and Abioye (2016) noted that if drastic actions are not taken to address the issue of plagiarism, quality assurance of the education provided could be called into question. However, in order to assist the undergraduate students to avoid plagiarism, they need to be aware of what plagiarism is and display the ideal perception towards the act. This will provide insights into what should be done by the management of higher institutions, librarians and course facilitators in promoting academic integrity (Oyewole, Rasheed and Ogunsina, 2018). It is based on this that the researchers deem it fit to study the awareness and perception of plagiarism among undergraduate students of institutions of higher learning in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

It is believed that the goals of higher education are more than merely imparting knowledge and expertise since society charges higher education with the task of developing moral, spiritual and emotional responsiveness, and of expanding social responsibility, vocational interests and personal life. As such, it has been observed that academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism, is a threat to the very mission of institutions of higher learning (Dickinson, 2011). Plagiarism has eaten deep into the fabrics of higher institutions worldwide with emphasis on Rivers State, Nigeria. A lot of measures have been put in place by management of the institutions to curb this menace. Some institutions had even subscribed to plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin specifically for Postgraduate students. This crime is so common among the undergraduate students, some go to the Internet or textbook to copy and paste without acknowledging the source. Could it be the undergraduate students are not aware that they are committing an academic crime which could possibly make them to have a negative perception towards plagiarism. Although, a lot of research has been carried out on the issue of plagiarism in institutions of higher learning, preliminary investigations revealed that much of the studies carried out focused on postgraduate students. There seems to be a dearth or no literature on the issues associated with plagiarism of undergraduate students in Rivers State. Hence, this study is driven to fill a gap in examining the awareness and perception of plagiarism among undergraduate students of Rivers State University and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the awareness and perception of plagiarism among undergraduate students of Rivers State University and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the level of awareness of the various acts that constitute plagiarism by undergraduate students under study.
2. Ascertain the perception of the undergraduate students on plagiarism.
3. Find out the reasons why undergraduate students plagiarize.
4. Ascertain if there is relationship between awareness and perception of plagiarism among the students.

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of the various acts that constitute plagiarism by undergraduate students under study?
2. What are the perceptions of undergraduate students on plagiarism?
3. Why do undergraduate students plagiarize?
4. What is the relationship between awareness and perception of plagiarism among the students?

Hypothesis

The Null hypothesis below was formulated and tested at 0.05 of significant level.

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between awareness and perception of plagiarism among the students.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of literature will be discussed in three subheadings: the concept of plagiarism, awareness of plagiarism by undergraduate students and the perception of undergraduate students towards plagiarism.

Concept of Plagiarism

According to Reitz (2004), plagiarism is from a Latin word *plagiarius*, meaning “kidnapper”. Copying or closely imitating the work of another writer, composer, etc without permission and with the intention of passing the results off as original work. Tripathi, Sekar, Nithyanandam and Malliga (2015) in Masic (2012), also posits that plagiarism literally means theft, taking material authored by others and presenting as someone else. Plagiarism has existed for a long time but one of the major challenges in combating plagiarism is the identification of a universal definition (Liu, Yang, He, Li, and Doss, 2016). Pritchett (2010) defines plagiarism as “the presentation of another person’s words, ideas, data, artwork or designs – unless considered common knowledge – as one’s own, without referencing the true author”. From the above definition, it means a text can be considered plagiarised when the original author has not been acknowledged or cited. Plagiarism is an illicit activity synonymous with cheating, it can be described as corruption of the process of independent and critical thinking that is essential to adding to the body of knowledge. It is also an academic malpractice; and a breach of academic integrity (Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko and Osinulu, 2016 in Gow, 2013; Orim, Borg and Awala-Ale, 2013).

At most colleges and universities, plagiarism is considered a moral and ethical issue and instructors impose penalties on students who engage in it. Plagiarism can be avoided by expressing a thought, idea or concept in one's own words. When it is necessary to paraphrase closely, the source should be documented in a footnote or endnote, in the same manner as a direct quotation. The cut-and-paste capability of most word processing and web browser software has facilitated plagiarism. Smith, Ghazali, and Minhad, (2007) suggests that factors contributing to plagiarism include lack of awareness, lack of understanding, lack of competence, and personal attitudes. Similarly, Michalska (2012) reveals that students blame their ignorance on issues related to plagiarism. Gullifer and Tyson (2010) explain that students plagiarise because they believe that they will not be caught.

Awareness of Plagiarism by Undergraduate Students

Awareness according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is having or showing realization, perception or knowledge of a situation, condition or problem exists. It also refers to the knowledge about an object or event, the competences or skills as well as the methods of operation; it has to do with background knowledge about the object, event or any other phenomenon. (Reinhardt, Mletzko, Sloep and Drachsler, 2015.). Oyewole, Rasheed and Ogunsina (2018) in their work titled awareness, perception and attitude towards plagiarism by distance learners in University of Ibadan, Nigeria states that it will be difficult for University students to avoid plagiarism if they are not aware of what constitutes plagiarism. The work further revealed that the level of awareness on plagiarism of the distance learner was high. Some studies have also reported an average and low level of plagiarism awareness by university students. One of such is the one conducted by Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkikoand Osinulu, (2016) that focused on the awareness and perception of plagiarism by postgraduate students in federal, state and private universities in Ogun State Nigeria. Findings of the study showed that the postgraduate students had an average level of plagiarism awareness. Rhodes et al. (2011) in Oyewole, Rasheed & Ogunsina (2018) in their own study on the awareness of plagiarism of business students in a university in the United States of America shows that the level of plagiarism awareness of the students was low. From the above, it is evident that the awareness of plagiarism by the undergraduate students under study could either be high, moderate or low. The level of awareness of plagiarism is very important as it could determine if they would commit the act or not.

Perception of Plagiarism by Undergraduate Students

Perception is the way one think or the ability to understand something using sense organs. It is the process of recognizing, organizing and interpreting sensory information, it deals with the human senses and generate signals from the environment through the five sense organs: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. (Human Perception and Information Processing, 2015 in Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko and Osinulu, 2016).A study carried out by Isiakpona (2012) on Undergraduate Students' Perception of Copyright Infringement: A Case Study of the University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria shows that the students have a positive perception towards copyright infringement. From the foregoing, it is clear that the students are aware of copyright infringement which can be likened to plagiarism. Similarly, Oyewole, Rasheed and Ogunsina (2018) revealed in their study on the awareness, perception and attitude towards plagiarism by distance learners in University of Ibadan, Nigeria that the respondents have a positive perception of the need to be conscious of plagiarism as an academic crime. The favourable perception could be as a result of their understanding of what plagiarism is. Since they had the knowledge that failure to abide by the ethical principles guiding scholarly writing comes with sanctions, they had to develop a positive perception towards its avoidance.

On the contrary, Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko and Osinulu (2016) in their study on the awareness and perception of plagiarism by postgraduate students in federal, state and private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria shows the students have a wrong perception about what plagiarism is all about. The review of literature has revealed a variation in the perception of plagiarism. Thus, it is expected that the undergraduate students' perception of plagiarism could be one that favors plagiarism or one that repels it.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a descriptive survey research design and correlational study while using a well-structured questionnaire and rating scale as data collection instrument. Final year students of Faculty of Education in Rivers State University and Final year – HND2 students (Accredited departments) in Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic were the targeted population for the study. They are currently six hundred and fifty-four (654) final year students in the Faculty of Education in Rivers State University and one hundred and twenty eight (128) HND2 students in Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed randomly to respondents. Out of 350, 323 were retrieved and 310 completely filled. Therefore, the response rate is 89% which is a good response. The instrument was designed into two sections. Section A covers the background data of the students while section B covered the research questions. Descriptive statistical techniques like table of frequency counts and percentages were employed in the analysis of the background data, mean score, standard deviation and correlation coefficient were used in answering the research questions while regression was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

DATA ANALYSIS

The results of the analyses obtained are presented as follows:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	118	38
Female	192	62
Total	310	100
Department		
Business Education (RSU)	56	18
Library and Information Science (RSU)	12	3.9
Vocational/Technology Education (RSU)	38	12.3
Science Education (RSU)	35	11.3
Adult and Community Development (RSU)	51	16.5
Accountancy (CEAPOLY)	28	9.0
Computer Science (CEAPOLY)	27	8.7
Statistics (CEAPOLY)	1	0.3
Public Administration (CEAPOLY)	43	13.9
Banking and Finance (CEAPOLY)	19	6.1
Total	310	100

The distribution of the respondents by gender revealed that 118(38%) are males and 192(62%) are females. The analysis of the respondents by departments in the Faculty of Education in Rivers State University revealed that 56(18%) are of Business Education, 12(3.9%) are Library and Information

Science students, 38(12.3%) are of Vocational/Technology Education, 35(11.3%) are in Science Education while 51(16.5%) are of Adult and Community Development. For Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, 28(9.0%) are of Accountancy, 27(8.7%) are in Computer Science, 1(0.3) is of Statistics, 43(13.9%) are in Public Administration while 19(6.1%) are in Banking and Finance department respectively.

Research Question 1: What is the level of awareness of the various acts that constitute plagiarism by undergraduate students under study?

Table 2: Answer to Research Question 1

S/No	Plagiarism Acts (Awareness)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1	Cutting and pasting from different sources without acknowledgement	310	2.7032	1.05618	Agree
2	Copying from the Internet	310	2.6355	1.13535	Agree
3	Copying a work from another student	310	2.7935	1.39572	Agree
4	Quoting without acknowledgment	310	2.6226	1.25585	Agree
5	Quoting without paraphrasing and changing some words	310	2.8839	1.13180	Agree
6	Paraphrasing without reference to source	310	2.7097	1.04490	Agree
7	Use of fake citation	310	2.7129	1.31637	Agree

Table 2 above shows in item 1 mean score of 2.7032 and SD 1.05618 indicate that the respondents agreed that they cut and paste from different sources without acknowledgement. In item 2 mean score of 2.6355 and SD 1.13535 shows that the respondents agreed that they copy and paste from the internet. In item 3 mean score of 2.7935 and SD 1.39572 indicate that the respondents agreed that they copy a work from another student. In item 4 the respondents equally agreed with mean score of 2.6226 and SD 1.25585 that they quote without acknowledgements. In item 5 mean score of 2.8839 and SD 1.13180 proves that the respondents agreed that they quote without paraphrasing and changing some words and in item 7 mean score of 2.7129 and SD 1.31637 equally proved that the respondents agreed that they use fake citations.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of undergraduate students on plagiarism?

Table 3: Answer to Research Question 2

S/No	Plagiarism Perception	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1	I don't see anything wrong with plagiarism because almost everyone does it.	310	2.2355	1.19574	Disagree
2	Plagiarism is an indication of smartness	310	2.2387	1.32969	Disagree
3	Plagiarism is an intellectual crime	310	2.7484	1.06485	Agree
4	It reduces one's integrity and lacks moral	310	2.1452	1.12986	Disagree
5	Plagiarism is an indication that one is lazy.	310	1.1935	.39572	Disagree

Table 3 above shows in item 1 mean score of 2.2355 and SD 1.19574 which indicate that the respondents disagreed that they don't see anything wrong with plagiarism because almost everyone does it. In item 2 mean score of 2.2387 and SD 1.32969 equally indicate that the respondents disagreed that plagiarism is an indication of smartness. In item 3 mean score of 2.7484 and SD 1.06485 showed that the respondents agreed that plagiarism is an intellectual crime. In item 4 mean score of 2.1452 and SD 1.12986 shows that the respondents disagreed that it reduces one's integrity and lack of moral similarly in item 5 mean score of 1.1935 and SD .39572 indicate that the respondent disagreed that they plagiarism is an indication that one is lazy.

Research Question 3: Why do undergraduate students plagiarize?*Table 4: Answer to Research Question 3*

S/No	Reasons for plagiarism	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1	Pressure to meet deadlines with assignment and other research related works	310	2.5226	1.25585	Agree
2	Lack adequate knowledge to equip one engage in in-depth research	310	2.8839	1.13180	Agree
3	Lack of adequate knowledge on how to properly cite and reference the right sources	310	2.0839	1.22517	Disagree
4	Inability to construct the sentence in my own words	310	1.3548	.47924	Disagree
5	Lack of interest in developing the habit of in-dept study	310	2.6645	1.22885	Agree
6	Lack of knowledge that copyright law exists	310	1.2290	.42089	Disagree
7	There is little emphasis that proper citation is a criteria for assessing academic work.	310	2.5226	1.25585	Agree
8	Academic work load	310	2.019	1.2436	Disagree
9	Sometimes students lack interest in the topic of study	310	2.0935	1.22842	Disagree
10	Sometimes the topic of study is too difficult to understand.	310	1.4548	.67997	Disagree
11	Laziness on the part of students	310	2.6290	1.18300	Agree
12	Merchandising (buying and selling) of assignments by business centres or student's patronage of unqualified or approved research consulting centres	310	1.3710	.72034	Disagree

Table 4 above shows in item 1 mean score of 2.5226 and SD 1.25585 which shows that the respondents agreed that pressure to meet deadlines with assignment and other research related works. In item 2 mean score of 2.8839 and SD 1.13180 indicate the respondents agreed lack of adequate knowledge to equip one engage in in-depth research. In item 3 mean score of 2.0839 and SD .47924 showed that the respondents disagreed that lack of adequate knowledge on how to properly cite and reference the right sources. In item 4 mean score of 1.3548 and SD .47924 showed that the respondents disagreed that the inability to construct the sentence in my own words. In item 5 mean score of 2.6645 and SD 1.22885 showed that the respondents agreed that lack of interest in developing the habit of in-dept study. In item 6 mean score of 1.2290 and SD .42089 showed that the respondents disagreed that lack of knowledge that copyright law exists. In item 7 mean score of 2.5226 and SD 1.25585 shows that the respondents agreed that there is little emphasis that proper citation is a criteria for assessing academic work. In item 8 mean score of 2.019 and SD 1.2436 shows that the respondents disagreed that academic work load lead them to plagiarism. In item 9 mean score of 2.0935 and SD 1.22842 showing that the respondents disagreed that sometimes students lack interest in the topic of study lead them to plagiarism. In item 10 mean score of 1.4548 and SD .67997 shows that the respondents disagreed that Sometimes the topic of study is too difficult to understand. In item 11 mean score of 2.6290 and SD 1.18300 showed that the respondents agreed that laziness on the part of students lead them to plagiarism. In item 12 mean score of 1.3710 and SD .72034 showed that the respondents disagreed that merchandising (buying and selling) of assignments by business centres or students patronage of unqualified or approved research consulting centres.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between awareness and perception of plagiarism among the students?

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between awareness and perception of plagiarism among the students.

Table 5: Testing of Hypothesis 1
ANOVA

Variables	No of responses	No of items	Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Awareness of Plagiarism	310	7	Regression	154.193	11	14.018	21.927	.000 ^b
Perception of Plagiarism	310	5	Residual	190.504	298	.639		

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The above shows a regression testing of hypothesis 1 showing p-value of $.211 > .05$ which means that there is no significant relationship between awareness and perception of plagiarism among the students. The null hypothesis is therefore, accepted. The stance of the respondents is that there is no significant relationship between perception of plagiarism and awareness among students. This implies that awareness and perception may not stop students from doing plagiarism. The position of the respondents agrees with Oyewole, Rasheed and Ogunsina (2018) stating that awareness, perception and attitude towards plagiarism by distance learners in University of Ibadan, Nigeria states that it will be difficult for University students to avoid plagiarism if they are not aware of what constitutes plagiarism. The work further revealed that the level of awareness on plagiarism of the distance learner was high. Okere et al. (2016) studied the awareness of plagiarism as copyright violation with implications for intellectual property education in Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria and Redeemers University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. The results of the study showed that every one of the discussants indicated that they were aware of what plagiarism is and what it stands for. They also acknowledged that plagiarism has really become a menace within academic institutions, and that most students plagiarize without even realizing the implications.

CONCLUSION

Plagiarism is an issue that is on the front burner in the world of academics due to its prevalent rate among students and researchers. Irrespective of the awareness and perception of its consequences, students still indulged in plagiarism. Plagiarism like any other deviant behavior in the society might be difficult to eradicate, but with increased awareness creation and favorable perception, it can be deduced to the barest minimum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the tested hypothesis and answered research questions, the following have been recommended:

1. Management of every institution should come up with a policy as matter of urgency that will impose heavy sanction on students and any business or consultancy firm including business centres and operators that indulges or encourage any act of plagiarism.
2. Librarians should use different electronic platforms that are accessible to the students in providing instructions on how to write without plagiarizing. This could enhance the capacity of the students in academic writing and also assist them to have a negative mental image of plagiarism.

3. Faculty/department and the entire institution should organize orientation/workshop for students at all levels from time to time on the awareness of plagiarism.
4. Lecturers should make it a point of duty that every assignment should have a proper citation and referencing procedures. By this, student will cultivate the habit of proper citation and would reduce the likelihood of plagiarism.
5. Since most of the respondents accepted that laziness is responsible for plagiarism the lecturers should find ways of curbing tasks that may lead to plagiarism and engage students in more supervisable tasks.

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