



## PREVALENCE OF PLAGIARISM AMONG EDUCATORS: AN ANALYSIS ON PRIMARY DATA

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### Abstract:

**Statement of the Problem:** A human capital with positive attitude to life and work and pertinent skills for an original and innovative knowledge economy with knowledge ‘to learn to learn’ but also socially responsible and accountable is becoming crucial in today’s fast changing global society. Research projects have become constituent of all levels of learner –centred education. Learner’s academic assignments, research or project reports which contain copies of other’s writings, ideas and work without duly recognizing the original author or source are examples of academic thieving or plagiarism. **Approach:** This paper strongly stresses the urgent need of introduction of specific life skills for college and university level educators as important pre-requisite for developing the right strain of human capital. Questions were asked to randomly selected sample academicians who are engaged in college and university teaching about learning environment, training on plagiarism, barriers in learning process and essential supporting climate for the same. **Results:** This paper tries to draw attention to the concern that plagiarism is becoming a worsened problem that poisons the knowledge economy by derailing originality and creativity. Hence, learners ought to be pioneered through formal and deliberate grooming on skills for freezing off plagiarism as a substantive skill for imparting higher education.

**Key Words:** *Human Capital, Plagiarism, Higher Education, Knowledge Economy, Academician etc.*

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## 1.0: INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, educational institutions have been charged with the responsibility of equipping learners with knowledge and skills to move to the next higher level in their knowledge development and to prepare them for the social and working world which include entrepreneurship. The political and economic challenge in the present century demand that educational institutions must also prepare learners to behave as responsible citizens by bravely meeting the challenges of unemployment and poverty. Developing human capital without the requisite life skills is now considered as a waste of money and time. Learners need to be equipped to 'learn to learn'. Education contributes to the growth of national income and individual earnings. While land was the main source of wealth and income in agricultural societies, capital and machinery became important in industrial societies. In today's information societies, knowledge drives economic growth and development. Higher education is the main source of that knowledge – its production, dissemination and its absorption by any society. However, opportunities for fraud and corruption in higher education are well known: rigged admission rules, cheating in examinations, falsification of research results, etc. Recent trends in higher education are contributing to a renewal of such practices.

As one of the major participants in knowledge economy higher education institutions have become increasingly under pressure to be both competitive and top-drawer in research and teaching. This implies that higher education institutions are expected to produce works that are new and bestow meaningfully to knowledge advancement. However, excellence in research and teaching would be delusive in the face of plagiarism that is being witnessed globally.

### 1.1: DEFINITION OF PLAGIARISM AND COMMON REASONS FOR PLAGIARISING:

Plagiarism includes the use of "ideas and/or quotes from other writers without citing the source, turning in an assignment for a class (unchanged) that you've already used for another class, borrowing ideas or work from another student, and cutting and pasting information from a site on the Internet without citing the source" (Rouse, A. M., & Gut, D. M. 2001). In this digital age, where so much tractable information is promptly available, plagiarism has become an issue of greater sensitivity and relevance to academia. It is the



difficult task of universities across the globe to detect, address and prevent the growing incidence of plagiarism, increasing with direct proportion to the ubiquity of new media technologies for study resources and course delivery.

Reasons for committing plagiarism vary from fairly innocent and accidental mistakes to the deliberate intention to deceive. Some of the most common reasons students plagiarize include:

- lack of understanding
- time constraints
- pressures to get and maintain a high GPA
- temptation to take the easy way out
- the unlikeliness of getting caught by the instructor
- social acceptance of peers to engage in a certain level of academic dishonesty
- the ease and availability of Internet sources (James, R., McInnis, C. & Devlin, M. 2002).

Further, being unclear about what plagiarism is, having insufficient time management skills or being idle – e.g., being too disorganised with deadlines to undertake and submit original work, having an ineffective method of note-taking – e.g. not always recording the source of information, Feeling under extreme pressure to pass or succeed – whether it be financial, parental, cultural, etc., having different cultural values / practising different academic conventions, Mistakenly believing that it will be easy to get away with, are also commonly cited reasons for plagiarism.

## 1.2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The existent literature also suggests that a number of individual and contextual traits exert an important influence on the likelihood of committing plagiarism. For example, studies based on student self-reports generally indicate that younger students, males, those engaged in more extracurricular activities and those with weaker academic performance are more likely to engage in academic misconduct (McCabe and Treviño, 1997). Several studies also examine the relationship between psychological traits and academic misconduct. For example, Lau et al. 2005 find that a measure of psychopathy along with low verbal ability were strongly predictive of an objective measure of plagiarism.



A review article by McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2001) underscored the empirical relevance of related but broader contextual factors such as the perception of cheating by peers and the perceived severity of penalties. The literature on the apparent relevance of contextual factors lends credence to the consensus view that "cheating can be most effectively addressed at the institutional level" (McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield 2001). Another complicating factor that supports this view is the somewhat indifferent role that may be played by faculty. College instructors do not generally view either educating students about avoiding plagiarism or policing instances of plagiarism as a primary responsibility. Faculty also tend to deal with academic misconduct they may uncover informally and in a manner that is perceived by students as fairly lenient (e.g., Schneider 1999, McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield 2001).

### **1.3: OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The study is an attempt to assess:

- i. The respondents undergoing training and/or any other course during their own education on avoiding plagiarism, in text referencing, creating reference list?
- ii. To draw a sketch about the views of the respondents on issues like: their competency in recognising plagiarism, their experience about the frequency of the incidence of plagiarism, steps that they take to recognise plagiarism, strategies that respondents suggest to curb plagiarism.
- iii. Should training be given at entry for all academicians entering any educational institutions irrespective of qualification level?

### **1.4: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

This study tries to accumulate information from the sample academicians who are engaged in college and university teaching about learning environment, training on plagiarism, barriers in learning process and essential supporting climate for the same. To plagiarise is to represent as one's own the intellectual property of another. Plagiarism is using somebody else's ideas or words without properly acknowledging the original source.

Several high-profile scandals involving plagiarism by prominent writers have recently captured the public's attention (McGrath, 2007). Plagiarism has always concerned teachers and administrators, who want students' work to represent their own efforts and to reflect the



outcomes of their learning. However, with the advent of the Internet and easy access to almost limitless written material on every conceivable topic, suspicion of plagiarism has begun to affect teachers at all levels, at times diverting them from the work of developing students' writing, reading, and critical thinking abilities. In instructional settings, plagiarism is a multifaceted and ethically complex problem and it is quite pertinent to study it.

#### **1.5: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:**

Research –designed questionnaires were distributed to 50 academics which embraced 40 randomly selected college teachers of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts and 10 university teachers of Dibrugarh. Educators views regarding their training and skills in the thrust area were investigated and factors that determined successful implementation were probed. Data were gathered through structured questionnaire and interviews with the respondents.

#### **1.6: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:**

The first query raised was on learning environment of the present higher educational institutions, that is, colleges and universities. A mixed response was found from the analysis of the collected data. About 68 percent of the sample academicians were satisfied with the prevailing learning environment of their respective institutions and commented that the administration as well as the friendly working environment always encourages them to work for individual as well as institutional intellectual progress. But the rest counterpart (32%) was not happy with their learning environment, the reasons for the same was found to be many folded. Some of the reasons are- heavy workloads due to insufficient faculties in comparison to number of students, excessive clerical work entrusted by the administration etc.

Inferences from the data analysis in the study indicated that although most academicians (89%) received training on how to make use of in text referencing, making list of references, paraphrasing skills and rejection of plagiarism, they do not studiously train their learners on such skills. The sample academicians who received training (89%) expected that the learners to have learn such skills of their own.

Amongst others, heavy workloads, policing plagiarism as not being part of their specific job description and plagiarism as a matter of concern only at postgraduate learners work were the reasons cited for not paying serious attention to controlling plagiarism.



Among the 89 percent academicians who received training 65 percent are confident in recognising plagiarism. They are aware about frequency of plagiarism in projects prepared by students. But, at the same time the respondents (88%) blamed high workload among other factors as a reason not to police plagiarism, detect it and take adequate formative action.

About 92 percent of the sample academicians were of the view that training at entry level for all irrespective of qualification level was needed since it was difficult to know if they got training previously and whether the training was adequate. They suggest that this type of training should be properly planned and broad based, which should include: define what constitutes plagiarism at the institution for clarity purposes and ensure a common understanding amongst educators and learners, consequences of engaging in plagiarism.

When the reasons for adoption of plagiarism was asked to the sample respondents, there are many calls on time, including peer pressure for an active social life, commitment to promotion and performance activities, family responsibilities and pressure to complete multiple work assignments in short amounts of time. Some (32%) concluded that academicians' overtaxed lives leave them so vulnerable to the temptations of cheating. Many academicians have poor time management and planning skills. Some are just procrastinators, while others do not understand the hours required to develop a good research paper, and they run out of time as the due date looms. Thus, they are most tempted to copy a paper when time is short and they have not yet started the project.

It was a pleasant finding from the data analysis that almost all the sample academicians continuously remind learners about the danger of plagiarism while preparing assignment/project works. The academicians encourage their students for being creative and proud to present one's own original work for assessment.

### **1.7: SUGGESTIONS:**

It is strongly felt during the field investigation and analysis that though the academicians themselves are well aware of plagiarism but they do not feel need to educate the same to their learners, in many cases because of their busy schedule also. So the need is to aware the young and budding learners and researchers about the same. It is suggested that as most of the universities and research institutions are offering pre-research course work for these budding researchers, all the aspects of plagiarism and also the consequences of it must



be included in the syllabus of this course work. So that the new entrants to research are well aware of it.

### 1.8: EPILOGUE:

Knowledge is power and it is acquired by authentic learning. Plagiarism is inhibitive of knowledge empowerment and has been exacerbated with the advent of the Internet. It would be timely if, as part of this important initiative in higher education for youth empowerment, to initiate efforts, spark ideas, share practice and continue to shape the vision for the future by tackling plagiarism and empowering for the knowledge economy.

To conclude, the entire academic world must deal with plagiarism on a consistent institution wise standard response. Define what constitutes plagiarism at that particular institution for clarity purposes and ensure a common understanding amongst educators and learners. Above all, an institutional Plagiarism Policy needs to be formulated by every educational institution which ought to include procedures that are to be followed once plagiarism is recognised.

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